

# To Teach or Try: A Continuum of Approaches to Entrepreneurship Education in Australasia

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## ABSTRACT

This paper reports on a survey of Australasian university entrepreneurship education programs. The survey found a continued interest in entrepreneurship at Australasian universities and that entrepreneurship is typically well supported. In addition, entrepreneurship education in Australasia is very cross-disciplinary in nature with students from engineering, science, arts, agriculture, law, and medicine taking the classes. Two approaches emerged as dominant pedagogies: (1) a traditional process-based approach to teaching; and (2) an experiential approach to coaching the students to “try” some act of entrepreneurship. Topics most frequently taught include (1) foundations of entrepreneurship; (2) business planning; (3) small business management; and (4) entrepreneurial finance. Approaches to teaching varied with lectures, cases, business plans, and guest speakers being typically used. In addition, more trying entrepreneurship—hands on learning—methods such as presentations, role-playing, and consulting are being incorporated as important dimensions of university level entrepreneurship.

*Keywords: Entrepreneurship Education, Australasia*

JEL Codes: L26, A20, A22, R11

## **Introduction**

New, small, and entrepreneurial businesses have value to society beyond job generation, innovation being the most notable and likely the most important. Still the basic issue for policymakers is jobs. Policymakers need jobs; smaller firms produce jobs; so small business remains a central focus for many policymakers (Dennis 2011a: 92).

Globally entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education is becoming a more important mechanism for government policy makers seeking to alleviate economic stagnation and decline and politicians seeking to get elected as noted by Dennis (2011b). While Shane (2009) suggests that entrepreneurship is not a panacea that can transform the economically displaced into self-sustaining tax payers, government policy makers often only see increasing levels of unemployment, declining tax bases, and a diminished level of general prosperity as the *raison d'être* to expand support of entrepreneurial education. It is apparent that, as the global economy changes, entrepreneurship and small businesses will become more important drivers for global economies and, therefore, the importance of entrepreneurship education will continue to grow internationally.

This paper contributes to the evolving discussion on international entrepreneurship education in three ways: (1) it provides a glimpse into what universities in Australasia are doing with respect to teaching entrepreneurship; (2) based upon the survey, open-ended responses, discussions from the presentation of this paper, and a review of the literature, a framework of the continuum of entrepreneurship education teaching modes is offered; and (3) an adapted Deming cycle of balancing “teaching” and “trying” entrepreneurship education is offered as a third point on the continuum of approaches to entrepreneurship education.

## **Entrepreneurship Education**

Entrepreneurship as an academic area of study in the U.S. began post WWII, with the first university level text being published in 1961, first undergraduate concentration in 1972, first

entrepreneurship course outside a business school taught in 1983, and with more than 1,600 institutions of higher education offering entrepreneurship courses by 2003 (Katz, 2003; Klein & Bullock, 2006). For example, recently a blue ribbon Kauffman Foundation Panel on Entrepreneurship Curriculum in Higher Education (2007) found that entrepreneurship education is critical to a modern business curriculum, by stating that:

“First, entrepreneurship is critical to understanding and succeeding in the contemporary global economy. Second, entrepreneurship is already an expanding area of American college learning. Third, entrepreneurship is becoming a basic part of what university themselves do. Fourth, entrepreneurship meets many of the goals of a quality American undergraduate education. To neglect entrepreneurship or relegate it to the educational sidelines makes undergraduate learning orthogonal to the world it is supposed to help students learn to understand.”

Recently, Pittaway and Cope (2007: 485) found that in a large-scale systematic literature review of entrepreneurship education that programs generally had two distinct objectives to (1) to “enhance graduate employability,” and (2) “to encourage graduate enterprise.” The objective of enhancing graduate employability suggests that entrepreneurship education tends to offer students exposure to topics, techniques, and tools that employers consider critical for competing in the future. The objective of encouraging “graduate enterprise” suggests demand for entrepreneurship courses from students interested in starting some form of venture, magnifying the increasingly felt need by policy makers to encourage more start-ups in the hope of stimulating the economy.

Internationally, the growth of interest in entrepreneurship education is less well documented but is growing rapidly and has been recently investigated through the administration of the 2008 Global

Entrepreneurship Monitor and a recent Babson College global entrepreneurship education consortium (Martinez, Levie, Kelly, Samundsson & Schott, 2010).

Globally, the diversity in entrepreneurship programs, from where they are housed (business schools, economics, general studies, engineering), how they are taught, and what subjects are taught, is great, and Australasia is no exception. Several issues are potentially associated with this variance: (1) no universally adopted operational consensus defines the domains of teaching of small business management and entrepreneurship; (2) the growth of interest in entrepreneurship across the university has resulted in programs using academics with very diverse academic backgrounds; (3) lack of entrepreneurship-specific academic departments or concentrations; and (4) the nature of entrepreneurship itself. This may be due to the recent emergence of entrepreneurship as a stand-alone boundary-spanning discipline that, at its core, involves innovation, risk management, and proactive, bold business behavior (see Shane & Venkataraman, 2000).

### **Entrepreneurship Education in Australia**

Entrepreneurship education in Australasia has been linked largely with its development in the U.S. and through the global expansion of the International Council for Small Business (ICSB) and its regional affiliate the Small Enterprise Association of Australia and New Zealand (SEAANZ). As with, or in other business disciplines, many of the more common textbooks are adapted from the dominant U.S. texts and adapted by local co-authors to the Australasian context (cf. the Frederick, O'Connor and Kuratko (2013) Asia-Pacific edition of Kuratko's popular entrepreneurship text). Likewise, entrepreneurship specific academic conferences have become more embedded in Australasia. For example, the joint Babson/Swinburn Australian Graduate School of Entrepreneurship annual conference (now transformed into the Queensland University of Technology's Australian Entrepreneurship Centre's Australian Centre for Entrepreneurship Research Exchange annual entrepreneurship research conference) created an emerging and growing Australasian perspective of entrepreneurship scholarship

and education, embracing Kuratko's (2005: 580) position that "it is becoming clear that entrepreneurship, or certain facets of it, can be taught. Business educators have evolved beyond the myth that entrepreneurs are born, not made."

Starting in the late 1970's, the University of New England was one of the first universities in Australasia with an academic interest in entrepreneurship (Saeed, 1996). Gillin (1991) found that by the early 1990s 53 courses were offered by 17 Australian universities, typically in either business or engineering degree programs; with two universities offering degree programs specifically in entrepreneurship—Swinburn Institute of Technology and the University of New England. Swinburn Institute of Technology, under Gillin's leadership, emerged as the clear leader in Australasian entrepreneurship education during the 1980s and 1990s with an entrepreneurship specific degree program and the creation of the Babson co-sponsored Australian Graduate School of Entrepreneurship (AGSE) research program and conference, attracting international recognition (Saeed, 1996). The AGSE conference, undergraduate and MBA programs, and the Swinburn's role as a general advocate for entrepreneurship policy in Australia created a focal point for entrepreneurship in Australasia, similar to what Babson did in the United States for entrepreneurship education (Saeed, 1996). Since then university level entrepreneurship education has enjoyed modest growth across Australia, with increasing numbers of universities offering both courses and degree programs.

Reforms in the higher education system in Australia, including a provision to grant in-state fees for all Commonwealth residents and significant pressures for the universities to obtain extra-mural funding have resulted in a much freer market for higher education, which has impacted the demand for entrepreneurship education. Rohan and Boker (2011) and Boker (2012) suggest that Australian universities are operating in a very dynamic context that includes (1) a new hyper-intense competition for domestic and international students; (2) changes in the domestic economic context; and (3)

tremendous economic pressures to survive - with only a very few Australian universities currently judged both economically and strategically viable.

The focus of this project is on exploring the teaching–learning component of Australasian (including New Zealand and others) entrepreneurship programs. The primary questions are: (1) how is entrepreneurship positioned in Australasian business schools and universities; (2) what is the curriculum; and (3) what are the pedagogies implemented. It is hoped that this discussion will help stimulate additional research and provide guidance on developing more effective and efficient entrepreneurship programs internationally.

Entrepreneurship is often taught in Australasia by academics formally trained in economics, finance, accounting, psychology, management, marketing, and sociology, or other disciplines. Likewise, the Australasian region is politically, culturally, and economically diverse that is often reflected by institutional differences. In addition, university based entrepreneurship programs in Australasia are often driven by the context of the university and region that they serve, sources of funding, individual faculty/staff capabilities and interests, and the preferences of donors and administration champions.

Typically, universities tend to focus (either strategically or by default) on areas within the general domain of entrepreneurship such as (1) small business management; (2) family business; (3) social entrepreneurship; (4) high tech entrepreneurship; or (5) corporate entrepreneurship. In addition, new areas in the study and applications of entrepreneurship are emerging such as (1) health care entrepreneurship; (2) public sector entrepreneurship; (3) social entrepreneurship (Litzky, Godshalk, & Walton-Bongers, 2009), (4) indigenous entrepreneurship (Woods, 2011); and (5) gender based entrepreneurship.

Teaching styles also vary from highly formal theory-based lectures and readings, a “teaching” approach, to a very participative hands-on projects and consulting-based approaches that engage the student to “try” entrepreneurship. Some of the better-known programs try to blend these approaches

together. For example, Neck and Greene (2011) report on Babson College's work in entrepreneurship education and note that students are forced to first "try entrepreneurship" by starting a business and then "learn about entrepreneurship" through traditional "teaching" after exiting the business—allowing the students to better appreciate the entrepreneurial event and to understand the necessity of understanding basic business concepts, tools, and techniques such as accounting, finance, marketing, and strategic planning.

### **Methods**

Solomon and colleagues (see Solomon, 1997; Solomon & Fernald, 1991; Solomon, Weaver, & Fernald, 1994; Solomon, Duffy, & Tarabishy, 2002) and Solomon (2007) have done extensive studies of entrepreneurship education in the U.S. Solomon's (2007) recent study is used as the foundation for the present study's survey instrument. A census of the Australian Centre for Entrepreneurship (ACE) conference database of entrepreneurship educators in Australasia was conducted during November of 2011. The ACE conference database was a judgment sample of Australasian academics actively involved in entrepreneurship teaching and research who attend the annual conference or who have expressed an interest to become part of the Australasian entrepreneurship academic community. A short 10-question survey was developed for Survey Monkey and linked to an e-mail request. Two administrations of the e-mail requests were made. Forty-four responses were completed out of 115 requests, resulting in a 38 percent response rate. Table 1 summarizes the items used in survey.

**Table 1. SURVEY ITEMS**

Item	Selected open-ended responses
Student interest at my university is growing?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. I think a few students are sincerely interested in entrepreneurship. Entrepreneurial motivation is a criterion for attending entrepreneurship courses.</li> <li>2. Hard to tell; numbers enrolling are relatively stable.</li> <li>3. Too early to define, started teaching entrepreneurship last year</li> </ol>
The number of entrepreneurship majors at my university is increasing?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. We do not have an entrepreneurship major.</li> <li>2. We have one major.</li> </ol>
Entrepreneurship classes are taken only by business students?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All</li> <li>2. The university offers a practical entrepreneurship program during the winter break for students from all discipline.</li> </ol>
Entrepreneurship classes are taken by?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agriculture</li> <li>2. Business</li> <li>3. Law</li> <li>4. Language</li> <li>5. Media</li> <li>6. Psychology</li> </ol>
The entrepreneurship discipline at our university is in?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Entrepreneurship Development Centre</li> <li>2. Social sciences</li> <li>3. Education</li> <li>4. Post degree</li> </ol>
Entrepreneurship classes are typically taught by business professionals?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Other professionals in team teaching</li> <li>2. Only guest lectures</li> </ol>
Entrepreneurship classes are typically taught by doctoral qualified business faculty?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Teaching team</li> <li>2. Mostly</li> </ol>
We have the following class coverage for?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. International entrepreneurship</li> <li>2. Idea evaluation</li> <li>3. Creativity</li> <li>4. Innovation</li> <li>5. Ethics</li> <li>6. Commercialization</li> <li>7. New venture development</li> <li>8. Growth</li> </ol>
At our university we use the following educational methods in entrepreneurship?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. All blended learning</li> <li>2. Role plays</li> <li>3. Pitches</li> <li>4. Reflection-based approaches to enable self discovery</li> </ol>
Entrepreneurship is well supported at my university?	N.A.



## Findings

Thirty-nine respondents (89%) indicated that student interest in entrepreneurship is growing at their universities; while twenty-nine respondents (66%) noted that the number of entrepreneurship majors at their universities is increasing. In addition, thirty-one respondents (70%) agreed with or strongly agreed with the statement that entrepreneurship is well supported in their universities. Four respondents commented that there was not a major or course concentration in entrepreneurship at their universities. In addition, one respondent felt that since his/her program was less than one-year old, it was simply too early to be able to respond. These findings are consistent with studies in other regions that suggest continual interest in entrepreneurship (Solomon 2007). In addition, these findings suggest that the Australasia region is becoming more interested in entrepreneurship as the world's economic and political environment evolves in the 21st Century.

Another interesting finding is that, at most universities (82% of responses), entrepreneurship classes are taken not only by business students but non-business majors as well. Two respondents indicated that, at their universities, those students in any major took entrepreneurship classes. This indicates the cross-disciplinary and functional nature of entrepreneurship education. Students majoring in engineering, science, the arts, agriculture, law, and medicine took classes in entrepreneurship; however, 91 percent of the respondents indicated entrepreneurship was based in the business school and largely taught by doctoral qualified business faculty (73%) sometimes with guest lectures by business professionals and entrepreneurs.

The topical coverage in entrepreneurship courses is consistent with previous studies (see Solomon 2007) with four topics mentioned by a majority of the respondents: (1) foundations of entrepreneurship; (2) business planning; (3) small business management; and (4) entrepreneurial finance. The coverage of foundations of entrepreneurship, business planning, and small business management topics by a majority of the respondents suggests that these are core to what is coincided

currently to be a suitable and useful undergraduate entrepreneurship curriculum by Australasian universities. Other topics that respondents mentioned include (1) corporate entrepreneurship, (2) entrepreneurial marketing and selling; (3) commercialization; (4) ethics; (5) R&D management; (6) family business; and (7) small business consulting. Table 2 summarizes these findings.

**Table 2. COURSES OFFERED**

<b>Topic</b>	<b>Percentage of universities offering (%)</b>
Foundations of entrepreneurship	82
Business planning	80
Small business management	68
Entrepreneurial finance	52
Corporate entrepreneurship	50
Entrepreneurial marketing and selling	50
Entrepreneurship and ethics	43
Commercialization	43
R&D management	34
Family business	27
Small business consulting	25

The findings revealed a wide range of teaching/learning methods dominated by (1) lectures; (2) cases; (3) business plans; (4) textbooks; and (5) guest speakers. Experience- based teaching methods mentioned included (1) interviews with entrepreneurs; (2) actual business start-ups; (3) SME consulting projects; and (4) internships with an SME. In addition, written responses to educational methods used included: (1) role playing; (2) presentations and pitches; and (3) reflection based approaches to enable self-discovery. Table 3 summarizes these approaches to entrepreneurship education.

**Table 3. TEACHING/LEARNING METHODS**

Teaching method	Percentage of universities (%)
Lectures	89
Cases	82
Business plans	80
Textbooks	77
Guest speakers	75
Readings	73
Research projects	59
Videos	52
Interviews	45
Actual business start-ups	43
Live cases	39
Business simulations	39
Field trips	34
Business games	27
Small business consulting	23
SME internships	21

**The Continuum of Entrepreneurship Education: To Teach Or Try**

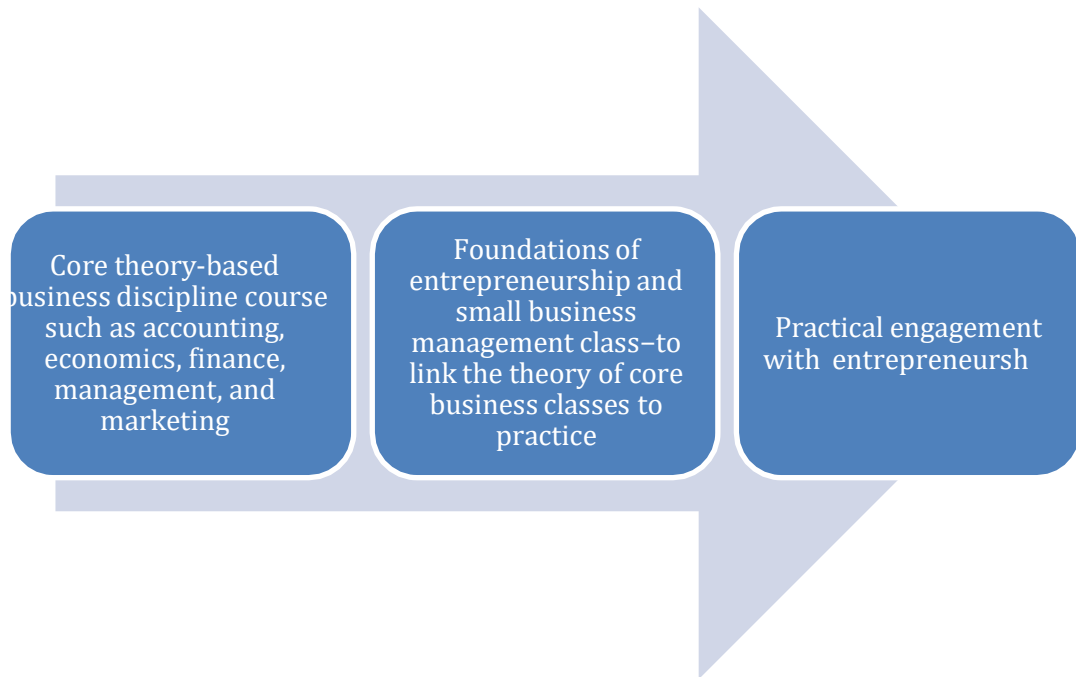
Two general approaches to entrepreneurship education seemed to emerge from the data with many programs blending the two together. One approach is the traditional teaching lecture, textbook, and test perspective of pedagogy. The instructor lectures on the topics, reinforcing the material from the textbook, and tests are used to assess the students’ learning. The other end of the continuum is a very active hands-on approach that focuses on what Jones (2011) describes as the 4Cs of entrepreneurship education where students (1) conceive, (2) create, (3) capture, and (4) critique value in engaging and reflective activities or “trying entrepreneurship.” Likewise, assessment of student learning is often more subjective.

**Teaching about Entrepreneurship**

The findings suggest that “teaching about entrepreneurship” was the most prevalent approach to entrepreneurship education in Australasia, with programs typically building on a “foundations of entrepreneurship” and business planning classes. This model offers a mechanism to provide the basic

theories and concepts of entrepreneurship to a large number of students in an efficient and efficient manner. It is typically taught in a business school and requires core business foundation prerequisites such as principles of accounting, finance, marketing, management, and business law to provide the basic concepts and theories used in business. This approach to entrepreneurship education provides a solid foundation for both undergraduate students who may ultimately start their own businesses, and also for those who may have an interest working in existing organizations. Without some type of small business consulting course this approach may lack the essential real-world experience dimensions of entrepreneurship education. This approach typically requires doctoral qualified academics and a traditional coursework structure. Figure 1 illustrates this approach to entrepreneurship education.

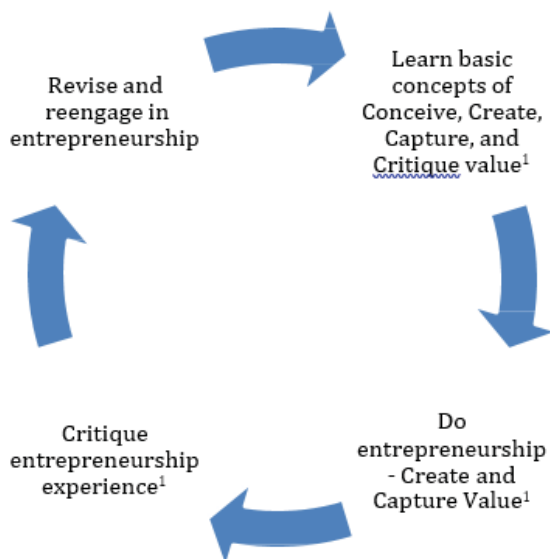
**Figure 1. TO TEACH ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A DISCIPLINE-CENTRIC MODEL**



### Trying Entrepreneurship

This is an active learning approach to entrepreneurship—often allowing nascent entrepreneurs an opportunity to decide if they do have a real interest in proactively taking the risk to use innovation to exploit opportunities. In addition, this active learning approach typically would not have core business classes as prerequisites—allowing students from across the university to take the classes. Fundamental to this type of experience is a modified Deming cycle (cf. Costin, 1994) of learn, do, reflect, and revise; however, the lack of a strong foundation in basic business capabilities such as accounting, finance, marketing, and management tends to constrain the students’ range of employment opportunities and may hinder their development as entrepreneurs. Jones (2011) has created a philosophy of teaching entrepreneurship based on Heath’s (1964) “reasonable adventurer” that is both highly engaging, requiring the students to try entrepreneurship, and highly reflective, requiring the students to leverage the entrepreneurial activities into learning and knowledge. Figure 2 illustrates this model that augments a Deming cycle with Jones (2011) 4Cs approach to entrepreneurship education.

**Figure 2. TO “TRY” ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A LEARNER-CENTRIC MODEL**



1: Adapted from Jones (2011)

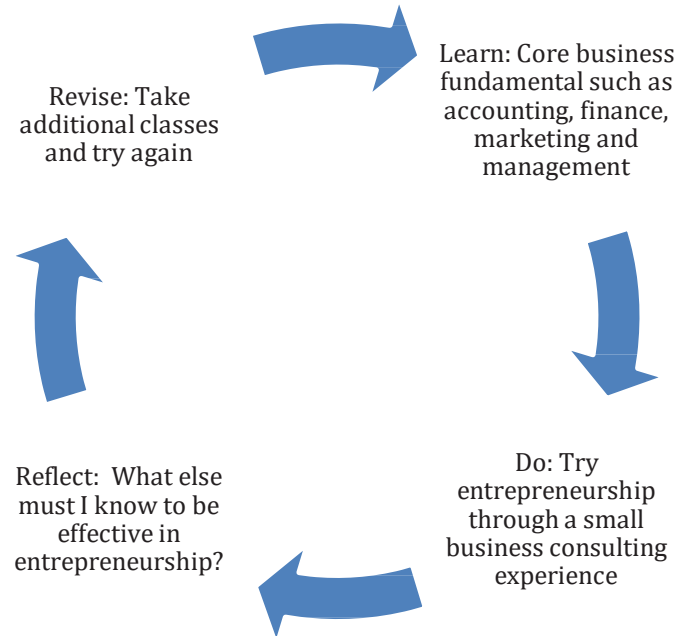
### **The Cycle Of Teaching And Trying Entrepreneurship**

The findings suggest not only two alternative approaches to effective entrepreneurship education in Australasian universities, but a third option - that of a blended approach that uses the best of both teaching and trying. Students are taught core business and entrepreneurship fundamentals and then “try” entrepreneurship by applying their knowledge of business principle in consulting with small businesses on real problems, or by becoming involved in starting a new enterprise. These experiences help reinforce the “taught” knowledge and allow the students the opportunity to reflect on what they need to know and take additional classes to reinforce their skill and knowledge deficiencies, for example, a marketing student taking international business to enhance their understanding of the process of exporting.

In addition, work by Sarasvathy (2001) and Morrish, Miles, and Deacon (2010) suggest that entrepreneurial initiatives are entrepreneur-centric as well as customer-centric that the entrepreneur cannot be removed from the process of entrepreneurship. Likewise, Neck and Greene (2011) advocate an entrepreneurship as method (see Sarasvathy & Venkataraman, 2011) cycle approach to blending a teaching and trying approach in which students are exposed to creative experimentation and engagement as well as core business skills, techniques, and tools that allow an entrepreneur to create value. Neck and Greene’s (2011) work suggests that it may be both effective and efficient to combine these two, often competing, approaches to teaching/learning entrepreneurship in an undergraduate curriculum to expose students to the potential of entrepreneurship while allowing them also to experience the joy of organizational creation. For example, techniques, such as business planning, can become an even more effective learning aide when used to “engage in entrepreneurship” (see Honig, 2004). Figure 3 offers a cycle of “teaching about” entrepreneurship and a more active learning model of facilitating students of “trying entrepreneurship” adapting a Deming cycle (cf. Costin, 1994) of: (1) learning core business fundamentals: (2) trying entrepreneurship through small business consulting or

another entrepreneurial experience; (3) reflecting on what could have been done and known to enhance the outcomes of the experience; and (4) revising skills, obtaining additional resources and try again. This approach to teaching and trying forces students to cycle through both “learning” and “doing” to ultimately gain an appreciation of the process of entrepreneurship.

**Figure 3. *THE CYCLE OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION***



### **Discussions And Limitations**

The most significant finding is that entrepreneurship and small business management programs are becoming a more important component of the portfolio of programs in many Australasian business schools. In addition, the findings suggest that many programs are neither totally teaching about nor totally trying in entrepreneurship but are often combining the fundamentals of core business classes, extended by lectures with a variety of experiences that expose students to entrepreneurship and help build entrepreneurial skills such as creativity, risk management, and pro-action; allowing students to ultimately conceive, create, capture, and critique value. The variation in classes, content and approach to teaching within the sample is very diverse however, and likely reflects the nature of the sample, and the economic, social and institutional context of Australasian universities.

The present study has three very significant limitations. The first is that the findings are not generalizable due to the non-random nature of the judgment sample. In addition, the respondents may not actually be aware of all of the teaching programs that pertain to entrepreneurship at their universities, for example, when entrepreneurship is integrated into a health or science based university discipline. The third is potentially more important, that of omitting questions pertaining to specialty areas of entrepreneurship such as health care, social, indigenous, and gender based entrepreneurship. These emerging topics are fruitful areas for additional research.

The two major implications for policy makers throughout Australasia are (1) that entrepreneurship education is an important discipline in a university's business programs; and (2) that, as Pittaway and Cope (2007) note, entrepreneurship education has the potential to enhance career opportunities for university graduates and to stimulate entrepreneurial initiatives in the economy. Career options are developed by exposing students to entrepreneurial processes that are useful in any organizational context from small businesses to large corporations to non-profits including (1) how to recognize and create economically attractive opportunities; (2) how to decide which opportunities to



pursue; and (3) how to craft strategy and tactics to effectively and efficiently proactively exploit these risky opportunities using innovation. Likewise, university entrepreneurship education can enhance the skills and perceived level of mastery of business skills for nascent entrepreneurs, providing them then the specific form of self-efficacy that may ultimately result in a business start-up (Kasouf, Morrish, & Miles, 2013).

The authors hope that this study stimulates additional work in the area of international entrepreneurship education, both in terms of effective and efficient content and pedagogy. The cycle of teaching and trying entrepreneurship offers a third alternative to entrepreneurship education that may be the effective and useful in some universities. However, there is the need for additional research in this area to better understand how students experiencing entrepreneurship can reinforce and enhance their learning. For example, the use of an experimental design where at the same institution students are randomly assigned to the three alternative approaches to entrepreneurship education could be very helpful in developing a richer understanding of what are effective processes in entrepreneurship education. In addition, the authors suggest that some of the emerging nations in Australasia may offer a very interesting institutional context to study the impact of university-level entrepreneurship education on business start-up activity and social development. As civil societies, both developed and emerging, evolve during these difficult economic times, entrepreneurship may offer some potential options to advance both the economic prosperity of a nation and the wellbeing of its people.

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