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REVISITING THE COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENTAL TRAJECTORY OF ENTREPRENEURSHIP: THE ROLE OF CRITICAL DEVELOPMENTAL EXPERIENCES

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Principal Topic
Critical developmental experiences drive meaningful changes in the deep knowledge structures of individuals toward a more expert entrepreneurial direction (Krueger 2009, 2010). This is an opportunity to advance our understanding of how one might “grow up entrepreneurial”.

We advance this research across multiple new data sets to validate this impact. However, these newer data sets also offer us the opportunity to assess how this exposure influences deeper beliefs (Krueger 2007). Is prior entrepreneurial exposure reflected in characteristics that suggest significant differences in deeper cognitive structures such as scripts and maps? Drawing on the insights of Ron Mitchell (e.g., Mitchell, Mitchell & Mitchell 2010) it would useful to ask if such exposure leads individuals toward a more expert script (e.g., Ericsson 2008; Gladwell 2009). On the other hand, Kets de Vries reminds us that the impact can also be dysfunctionally negative.

Method
Recent advances in neuroscience as applied to entrepreneurship offer us tools for assessing differences in deep cognitive structures (e.g. Krueger & Welpe 2008; Krueger & Day 2010) such as perceived barriers to action and self-efficacy. We assess the impact of barriers using multiple large multi-country studies of entrepreneurial intentions each with an item eliciting respondents’ perceived “single biggest barrier” to launching, along with measures of self-efficacy, a proxy for cues to an expert entrepreneurial script., plus role identity and especially exposure to constructivistic entrepreneurship education.

Implications
We have fallen woefully short in efforts to better understand how individuals learn to think entrepreneurially. Why is that the problem-based, constructivistic models of education used to train entrepreneurs are so effective? When are they most effective? This model induces cognitive change at a deep level. But what are the specific “lessons” that specific experiential activities appear to induce?

We are long overdue to begin exploring how experiential ‘lessons’ lead to more expert entrepreneurial thinking. We are equally overdue in exploring what specific experiences create specific lessons. In particular, we can now identify the impact of experiential learning in an increasingly fine-grained manner. This study takes a first step toward addressing these gaps.

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