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THE ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET: NEW ENDS, NEW MEANS, NEW SELVES (SUMMARY)

Susan S. Harmeling
Howard University, USA, sharmeling@howard.edu

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SUMMARY

THE ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET: NEW ENDS, NEW MEANS, NEW SELVES

Susan S. Harmeling, Howard University, USA

Principal Topic

The research project described in this paper is an inductive field study of The National Foundation for Teaching Entrepreneurship (“NFTE”), an entrepreneurship education program in inner-city high schools in the United States. The rationale for studying this organization was simple, and twofold. First, since there appears to be quite fervent interest in developing and fostering entrepreneurship in economically challenged environments (Busenitz, et. al, 2000, Peredo and Chrisman, 2006, Spicer, McDermott and Kogut, 2000), then perhaps it would be best to study entrepreneurship education programs not in traditional settings but rather in those more barren environments themselves.

Second, this research enterprise allowed us to examine an important theoretical issue as well. The very premise of entrepreneurship education—namely that you can teach entrepreneurial behavior and this will in turn have a positive effect on society— is itself controversial. This project sheds light on that controversy, with theoretical support from Baumol (1990) and Gerschenkron (1962).

Method

This is a qualitative field study during which I interviewed and observed scores of stakeholders involved in the NFTE program. I integrate a case study approach and a grounded theory approach, drawing on the language associated with the case study to help delimit the social units on which I focus for data gathering, and drawing on grounded theory to provide the analytic logic and to describe the analytic process, the coding techniques, etc.

Results and Implications

This project explores the following two questions; first, can an entrepreneurial mindset or entrepreneurial behavior be taught? and second, what does the process of entrepreneurship education look like in a non-traditional setting? The findings resulted in a model of how students processed what they were learning and how the entrepreneurial mindset may be imparted through entrepreneurship education. Specifically, students iteratively absorbed the mindset of entrepreneurship as they discovered new ends, new means and “new selves” or new entrepreneurial identities. This model finds support in the writings of American pragmatist philosophers, most notably John Dewey and his Experience and Education (1938). It has the potential to inform not only important theoretical dilemmas, for example, questions around human agency left unanswered by institutional entrepreneurship, but also policy questions as well. Specifically, entrepreneurship education as laid out in this project has the potential to reach those students being left behind by an increasingly ineffective American public school system (Gross, 1999).

CONTACT: Susan S. Harmeling; sharmeling@howard.edu; (T): 202-361-2177; Howard University, Washington, DC 20016.