

SPECIAL ISSUE: “EDUCATING WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE PERSPECTIVES”

Special Issue Introduction



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During the last decade, women’s entrepreneurship has been recognized as an important but untapped source of economic growth across the globe (e.g., Acs, Arenius, Hay & Minniti, 2005; Brush, Carter, Gatewood, Greene, & Hart, 2006; Langowitz & Minniti, 2007); there is a growing interest and body of literature focused on women’s entrepreneurship (e.g., Ahl & Nelson, 2010; DeBruin, Brush, & Welter, 2006; Gupta, Turban, Wasti & Sikdar, 2009; Morris, Miyasaki, Watters, & Coombes, 2006; Reynolds, Bygrave, Autio, et al., 2004). Even in the face of a general societal and market failure to provide equal opportunity for women to become entrepreneurs, women represent a powerful force of opportunistic entrepreneurial capacity, job creation, innovation, and economic development (e.g., Ahl & Nelson, 2010; Heilman & Chen, 2003; Nayyar, Sharma, Kishtwaria, Rana, & Vyas, 2007). Education has been noted as one means to infuse women more concretely into the entrepreneurial experience (e.g., Peterman & Kennedy, 2003; Wilson, Kickul, & Marlino, 2007). Considering the importance of education for women as entrepreneurs, it has recently become evident that the new Age is looking for new forms of education, such as creative education. Creative education and training should help women to raise their creativity, logical thinking and entrepreneurial activity. (Radović-Marković 2012).

Recent work has highlighted the fortification of the entrepreneurial infrastructure in higher education worldwide, leading to a proliferation of entrepreneurship courses and programs (e.g., Dickson & Solomon, 2008; Hytti & O’Gorman, 2004; West, Gatewood, & Shaver, 2009). Researchers suggest these entrepreneurship courses and programs should be based on modern technologies, as this way of learning establishes stronger linkages between education and entrepreneurial activity, saves time and money, and contributes to fast information exchange, more access to the newest knowledge and experiences in this domain (e.g., Capogrossi, 2002; Radović-Marković 2009). In an attempt to establish firm links between entrepreneurship education and outcomes as varied as motivations, entrepreneurial success and economic growth, researchers have shown that education is indeed associated with the motivations and success of women entrepreneurs (e.g., Al-Zubeidi, 2005; Bennett & Dann, 2000; Cooper & Lucas, 2006; Van der Sluis, Van Praag, & Vijverberg, 2008; Zhao, Seibert, & Hills, 2005; see also the Entrepreneurship Education Project www.entrepeduc.org).

Collectively, the five papers in this special issue provide a global commentary on aspects of this important nexus of entrepreneurial and educational phenomena from a woman’s perspective. Framing this special issue around this interplay of entrepreneurship and education allowed us to include papers focusing on the experiences and attitudes from a variety of critical players at this interchange, such as university students (in Spain and Hong Kong) and business owners (in Tanzania and the United States). Our goal was to enrich the intellectual dialogue promoting the focus of the gendered experience in both the entrepreneurship and education realms, specifically commenting on how to enhance the experience of women entrepreneurs by leveraging the power of education.

The first paper focuses on gender differences in agentic traits and entrepreneurial intentions in among Spanish university students. Sanchez and Licciardello found that men report greater intentionality and self-efficacy relating to engaging in entrepreneurial behavior. The authors highlight the greater importance of major area of study and age, suggesting that students should be more thoughtful of their chosen course of study and not be so quick to pursue an education just for the sake of an education, but instead think about obtaining work experience first and then complimenting that later with a more directed educational experience.

Lo, Sun, and Law pursue a similar study investigating determinants of entrepreneurial intentions in a sample of university students in Hong Kong. They find evidence that an entrepreneurship education can enhance entrepreneurial intentions, and that this effect was more profound for male students. The authors suggest this illustrates the importance of women developing mentoring relationships and a support network, and of universities working to create an entrepreneurial culture.

Turning to the impact of education on business owners, Nziku investigates the relationship between various educational factors and entrepreneurial motivation for female entrepreneurs in Tanzania. The author found that government policies and support, and formal education had little influence entrepreneurial motivation for these women. The author suggests this highlights a lack of awareness of the efforts that government and higher education are making to support the development of women entrepreneurs in Tanzania. The author also finds that the kind of technical/vocational training received influence entrepreneurial motivations. This points directly to the importance of increasing development programs in such a society focused on specific skills – such as gardening, weaving, and those of the culinary arts.

The next paper by Williams, Ortiz-Walters and Gavino integrates entrepreneurship, diversity and gender literatures to study ethnic and gender differences in training preferences of entrepreneurs. Specifically, these authors focus on training preferences of Latina entrepreneurs compared to Latino and non-Latina entrepreneurs. They found that Latina entrepreneurs showed less preference for affective/relational-oriented training (i.e., interviewing and motivation) and for cognitive/operational-oriented training (i.e., finance and payroll) than those of similar ethnicity and gender. These results showing that ethnicity and gender do impact the preference for entrepreneurial training and education suggest that it is critical for training programs developed for minority audiences to reflect the social values and cultural norms of the intended audience.

Coleman and Robb focus on the issues of human and social capital faced by women seeking to launch innovative ventures in the United States. The authors discover that women entrepreneurs in the U.S. continue to lag behind their male counterparts in both human and social capital, which they suggest has important implications for the pace of and attitudes toward innovation. They found that women want and need targeted educational opportunities to explore the innovative underpinnings of

entrepreneurship, and thus help close the self-efficacy and capital gap in the innovation and entrepreneurship realm.

The papers in this special issue illustrate the ways in which education positively impacts women as they traverse the path toward and through entrepreneurial activity and behavior. Several papers demonstrate how educational factors help shape the motivational processes leading female university students into possible entrepreneurial careers, while others highlight the importance of human capital development (such as education and training) for existing women entrepreneurs. With societal and technological changes revolutionizing our world, there are increasing opportunities for the women of the world to leverage educational resources on their journey into entrepreneurial careers. We still have much to learn about the unique challenges and contexts they face on this journey, and the unique opportunities to develop the necessary skills and networks to succeed in this journey. We hope that by pointing a spotlight on the nexus of education and entrepreneurship from a woman's perspective, we have illuminated the possibility of this crossroad and encouraged scholars and policy makers alike to continue to fashion and study the road ahead.

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