

Chapter 12

Perspectives on Women's Entrepreneurial Learning and the Evolution of Female Entrepreneurship Research

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the chapter is to increase the knowledge regarding the methods and styles of learning used by women entrepreneurs in general, and in South East Wales and Malaysia in particular. The research question is What methods and styles of learning do women entrepreneurs employ in their businesses, in general, and specifically in SE Wales and Malaysia? The chapter is a theoretical study with a small empirical extension with two samples of women and men entrepreneurs in the South East Wales. The findings of this chapter support the constructive perspective on learning, adult and social learning, demonstrating the role of social interaction for women entrepreneurs' learning and experiential learning. Through a gender perspective with accent on andragogy, and by designing a model of women entrepreneurial learning, the study shapes a new direction within the research field of women entrepreneurship and constitutes an original contribution to knowledge.

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INTRODUCTION

Women entrepreneurs are important actors for national economies (Brush, 2000; Minniti, 2010). This chapter explored models of learning, methods and styles of learning employed by women entrepreneurs in order to assure enterprise creation, survival and growth (Tomos & Deacon, 2015a; Tomos, 2017). Although, there are various models of learning, this research focused on models of learning specific to women entrepreneurs, as a particular category of adult learners. The chapter considered *entrepreneurial learning* as a dynamic process, in which women entrepreneurs accumulate knowledge, skills and capabilities required for business survival and growth. In order to be able to discuss about entrepreneurial learning, the authors needed to introduce the concept of *entrepreneurship education*, its meaning and significance. The main components of any *educational process* are learners and the learning process itself, which automatically implies that, *entrepreneurship education*, incorporates also two elements: women entrepreneurs as adult learners, and the process of entrepreneurial learning. In this chapter the authors focused specifically on the process of entrepreneurial learning for women entrepreneurs. According to Matlay and Carey (2007), entrepreneurship education is the solution to social and economic crises and is regarded as the main discipline for business schools in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). According to other authors, entrepreneurship education embeds in itself elements of pedagogy, besides incorporating aspects such as: employability skills, small business management, enterprise creation and self-employment (Pittaway & Cope, 2007).

Fayolle (2013) approached entrepreneurship education from two different standpoints: philosophical and didactical. Thus, from a philosophical perspective, entrepreneurship education has both meaning and significance related to the context of entrepreneurship (Fayolle, 2013). From the didactical viewpoint, entrepreneurship education is a discipline designed with content, methods, pedagogies, objectives and assessments, addressing a particular audience: entrepreneurs (Fayolle, 2013). By contrary, other authors, differentiated between entrepreneurship education and enterprise education (Jones & Iredale, 2010). They argued that enterprise education is a form of pedagogy whose outcomes differ across the disciplines and educational phases (secondary, colleges and HEIs) (Jones & Iredale 2010). Finally, Henry et al. (2005) expressed a doubt regarding the capability of entrepreneurship to be taught. Furthermore, they questioned the fact of entrepreneurs being 'born or made', and consequently denied the need of studying entrepreneurship.

In contrast with the above pedagogic perspectives upon entrepreneurship education, including entrepreneurial learning, *andragogic perspective* suggests that women entrepreneurs are adult learners with previous experiences, and own styles and methods of learning. According to Knowles (1980) education is viewed as the transmission of knowledge and regarded as a lifelong learning process. Within the andragogic model of learning, the focus is not on the teacher and the teaching process, but instead, is centred on women entrepreneurs as learners, with their experiences, motivation and learning needs and within specific contexts (Knowles, 1980). According to Leonard-Barton (1994) the entrepreneurial learning process empowers women entrepreneurs. Thus, the rapid changes in economy, technology, science, politics and environment, makes knowledge obsolete and leads to a perpetuity of learning for women entrepreneurs, in order to be able to cope with the speed of information and knowledge transmission (Knowles, 1980).

The authors of this chapter emphasised methods and styles of learning, and the need of a *model of adult learning* adapted to women entrepreneurs, as a specific group of adult learners. It is also essential,

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