RECENT DISSERTATIONS

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The location of innovation education in Icelandic compulsory schools

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Abstract

Innovation and entrepreneurial education (IEE) is a curricular area where learners apply creativity and knowledge to meet needs or solve problems they identify. It involves inventing objects and processes to improve social life and aims to develop critical and creative thinking in design, technology, marketing and enterprise. The formal aim of this study is to examine examples of IEE in compulsory schools in Iceland and locate them within the pedagogic discourse, extracting an understanding of the nature of IEE and the conditions it thrives in. The research focused on the work of teachers to identify what supports them and their schools in offering and developing IEE. Some legal, curricular and political frameworks and tendencies and social structures were identified and analyzed for the influences they have on relocating the innovation discourse into schools as the curriculum area 'innovation education'.

The research builds primarily on qualitative case studies of IEE in three compulsory schools in Iceland. Observations were undertaken, interviews with teachers, principals and learners conducted and school curricula and other texts analyzed. Interviews were also taken with seven teachers from other schools. Official documents and papers were consulted. Data gathering started in autumn 2006 and finished in spring 2009. Criteria based on Bernstein's concepts of classification and framing were developed for analyzing interaction in IEE. Teachers are bound by subject organization of school knowledge and need support to master the balance of freedom and structure that IEE requires in integrating knowledge and crossing boundaries of different kinds, such as between school and society, among school subjects, and between school knowledge and everyday knowledge. *Emancipatory pedagogy* was identified as most supportive in IEE.

An analytical tool was developed to identify the preferred social ecology of an educational innovation by amalgating the theories of Bronfenbrenner as well as Rogan and Grayson. This tool was used to identify the 'location' of teachers, schools and their surrounding systems in the development within the *preferred ecology of IEE*. Several related factors were used to analyze the development of IEE: the personal and professional views of teachers, organization and attitudes within schools, views in society and conditions and culture in the country. These factors influence each other and support or hinder development. Views in society towards IEE could be more supportive and the development of IEE within schools could be enhanced by a combination of capacity development and outside support. The knowledge gained in this research can infuse discussions on the area of innovation and technology education, and also in education in general. The findings can be used to promote discussion in the public sphere, for instance, among parents, policy makers and teachers and last but not least, could have an impact on the experience and development of learners. If creativity, holistic thinking and sustainability coupled with responsible innovation is wanted and needed for the present and the future then changes are needed in education that build on the development of a supportive social ecology.

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