THE YOUNG ENTERPRISE SCHEME IN NEW ZEALAND: DIMENSIONS OF PROGRAMME DELIVERY

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INTRODUCTION

Along with the changing nature of work and the prevailing global value being placed on entrepreneurship, the development of an 'enterprise culture' has become a primary objective for many countries. It has been argued that an enterprise culture depends upon a population of individuals who are 'enterprising', and who have the ability to take action, (as employees or employers), using creative and innovative approaches. Enterprise education operates on the premise that individuals can be taught to be more enterprising, and aims to develop in individuals (particularly the young) a set of skills that will allow them to be both job creators and job seekers – and so contribute to the enterprise culture.

In New Zealand the Enterprise New Zealand Trust (ENZT)[1] is a charitable trust that provides numerous enterprise education courses to students of varying ages, and has the Young Enterprise Scheme (YES) as its flagship programme. The YES was established in the early 1980s and is a programme that gives secondary school students (typically those in Year 12 or 13) the opportunity to start their own businesses during the course of the school year and within the school environment (i.e. it is a 'real-life' experience, not a simulation). Participants form a company (including fulfilling roles as company directors), and develop a product or service which they then market and sell – liquidating the company at the end of the school year.

According to the ENZT, the YES is run in around 40% of New Zealand secondary schools. At some the YES is run as an in-class activity (typically in economics or business studies classes), whilst in others it is provided as an extracurricular option. YES teams are supported by a 'teacher-in-charge' from their school, a regional coordinator from the ENZT, and generally a mentor sourced from the business community. New Zealand is divided into seventeen regions for the purposes of YES administration and there is an ENZT regional coordinator in each, some of whom are volunteers and others who are retained by the ENZT. Part of the regional coordinator's role is to source the business mentors who come from a variety of businesses and industries. The working relationship between the YES team and mentor is negotiated on an individual, 'as needs' basis.

The long history of the YES suggests that enterprise education is well established in New Zealand. However, the ENZT has for many years been the leading organisation in terms of the provision of such programmes. Recently enterprise education has received increasing attention in New Zealand from policymakers and researchers alike, and is being promoted more frequently in schools. This is evidenced in part through the growth in participation levels in enterprise education programmes in general (Lewis & Massey, 2001), and by the increasing awareness of the importance of small and medium enterprises overall (Firm Capability Team, Ministry of Commerce, 2000). This situation created an opportunity for the ENZT to have the YES formally evaluated – and it is part of this evaluation that this paper reports on.

In 2001 the ENZT engaged Massey University to undertake a formal, external evaluation [2]. Previous evaluations had been undertaken internally by the ENZT (Guest & Keating, 1997; Harbidge & Morris, 1998; & Braggins, 2000), but these were mainly small-scale, limited to the consideration of the impact of the scheme in one region, or geared towards making practical recommendations. As a result any data that was obtained pertaining to programme delivery was a by-product rather than a specific intention of the exercise. The primary objective of this evaluation was to describe the benefits of the YES for its participants and to explore its influence on the employability of those taking part. But a separate objective of the study was to identify the factors that contribute

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[1] For more information on the ENZT's activities visit their website at www.enzt.co.nz.

[2] Lewis (2002a) and Lewis (2002b).

to effective delivery of the YES by interviewing the key stakeholder groups in terms of programme delivery. In effect, the ENZT were seeking input into a model of 'best practice' for the delivery of the YES.

DELIVERING ENTERPRISE EDUCATION

Compared to the amount of literature that deals with definitional or conceptual aspects of enterprise education, a relatively small proportion of the literature is devoted to examining existing models of enterprise education, and devising new or better practices. But, the key components of the 'enterprise education model' according to Gibb (1997, cited in Gorman, Hanlon & King, 1997) include a project task management structure, an awareness of the value of learning under conditions of uncertainty, and an enterprising teaching mode. Gibb suggests that a combination of these elements stimulates enterprising behaviour and the development of associated skills and attributes. Kourilsky and Carlson (1996) emphasised that a crucial part of an enterprise education programme is actual decision making which requires learners to bear the consequences of their decisions. Kourilsky (1995) also stressed that students must personally experience the search for a market opportunity and the generation of a new business idea (as occurs in the YES does). They must also personally experience the challenge of securing resources over which they have no control, in a context of uncertainty (i.e. they have no idea whether their idea will be successful). The other risk that is seen as crucial is of a more personal nature, namely that students must understand what it is like to invest their own resources, time and even reputation in a venture that has no guarantee of success. In Australia, Breen (1999) formulated a 'best practice model' for delivering enterprise education that stipulated that initiatives should be based on a broad definition of enterprise education, use role models, have community and business links, involve hands on activities, involve the teacher as a facilitator, and have students learning under conditions of uncertainty.

Other contributions to the best practice literature include the suggestion that programmes aiming to effectively assist in the development of enterprise need to be predominantly learner driven. It is also argued that for those developing enterprise (and potential entrepreneurs) education means primarily working on attitudes, and McLuhan's (1964, cited in Filion, 1994) famous argument (that the 'medium is the message') emphasises the importance of the learning methods in relation to the content. [3] This is the basis of the argument that student-centred learning should form the basis of any enterprise education programme, emphasising that the student needs to be the active agent, with such programmes explicitly promoting transference. Kearney (1996) described this 'transference capacity' as the ability of students to transfer skills they learnt in enterprise education programmes to other settings or contexts.

However, the emphasis on student-centred learning, and the strong 'ownership' of the enterprise education learning experience by the student poses a problem for many teachers who have been trained in more traditionally didactic methods. Johnson (1988) suggested that whilst many teachers might be attracted to the prospect of being involved in enterprise education, it often means a commitment that involves the development of new skills, and broadening their conception of enterprise education, and possibly expanding their conception of their role of the teacher (to that of guide and partner in the learning process (Cotton, 1991)). Considerable staff development is often needed to develop teachers' perceptions of enterprise education, and help them to translate their abilities into appropriate classroom pedagogy (i.e. teaching methods that are consistent with enterprise education models) (Iredale, 1993).

This is a critical issue, as some research found that those teachers with no previous enterprise education experience were of the opinion that enterprise education was concerned primarily with profit making, large organisations and the production of entrepreneurs (Iredale, 1993). Often teachers involved in the same programme or in the same school may also perceive the concept of enterprise in different ways (Caird and Johnson, 1988 cited in Caird, 1990). This may complicate the achievement of programme objectives and the effectiveness of programme delivery. Methods of programme delivery may also vary as content and process will vary according to the student

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[3] These points raise the issue of the impact of pedagogical theory on the delivery of enterprise education: However, assessing such an impact was beyond the scope of the evaluation.

group (Hynes, 1996).[4]

Similarly, evaluative work in Australia (Keys Young, 1999) found that there were significant variations in the way people used and understood the term enterprise education. There was no consistency in understanding being applied within, or across, the education and business sectors and many people were uncertain of its meaning. The findings emphasise that in terms of defining enterprise education there is essentially a dichotomy, with some defining enterprise education in a very broad sense (i.e. the development of enterprising attitudes and skills in students) whilst others adhered to the narrower conceptualisation which sees enterprise education as a means of preparing students for self employment or work in a small business. The definitions of many respondents in the Keys Young (1999) evaluation fell between these two extremes. The lack of a consistent definition was significant because the attitudes to enterprise education of respondents influenced programme delivery, and their judgments of what it had achieved to date, because these things largely depend upon their understanding of the concept.

Like any underdeveloped field of inquiry the literature in the area of enterprise education best practice raises many more questions than it provides answers. Does enterprise education delivery depend on the school context in which it is delivered? Is it the content or the processes that make an enterprise education programme successful? What influence does the learning environment have on programme delivery? And therefore, which type of school delivers enterprise education programmes most effectively? As the amount of empirical research in the area increases, and more programme evaluations are carried out, researchers may be in a better position to address such questions.

RESULTS FROM THE EVALUATION

This paper reports on the results from the evaluation that relate to the objective of identifying the factors that key stakeholder groups feel contribute to effective delivery of the YES. Several groups were selected as being appropriate to include in this component of the evaluation, they included ENZT regional co-ordinators, ENZT staff, and ENZT trustees. Within these stakeholder groups purposive and theoretical sampling were the central techniques used to select interviewees (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Patton, 1990). This ensured maximum variation, and the chance to obtain the broadest range of information.

In total 22 interviews were carried out, with two ENZT trustees, two ENZT staff members, 16 regional coordinators (all but one), and two teachers. Half (11) of these interviews were carried out in person and eight by phone. The remaining three interviewees elected to respond in writing. The potential difficulties inherent in using different interview methods were seen as less of an issue than missing the opportunity to collect valuable data.

Interviewees were asked to describe 'effectiveness' (in terms of YES delivery) in relation to a) a regional coordinator, b) a YES teacher and c) a YES mentor. Typically respondents described the type of skills, attitudes and behaviours that they thought would make each individual most successful in their role. Therefore the focus in the results is on the skills and knowledge needed for 'good practice', rather than what constitutes best practice (or ideals) in terms of actually 'doing the job'. In the following sections the findings are summarised and discussed. The material is organised according to the three stakeholder groups who have already been identified: regional co-ordinators, teachers, and mentors.

YES Regional Co-ordinators

Some basic information was obtained about the regional coordinators who were interviewed: The average length of service of the 16 coordinators interviewed was three and a half years. The longest duration of service was eight years (by two coordinators), while three had only become involved in the last year. Four of the coordinators treated the role as a job (e.g. they were employed by the ENZT or a Chamber of Commerce that was involved with

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[4] Considerable work on manuals for staff development in terms of enterprise education has been carried out by the Enterprise Education Unit of Durham University Business School (Cotton, 1991).

YES) while the remainder were involved voluntarily. The regions for which coordinators were responsible varied geographically and in YES participation levels. The numbers of schools, teams and students that coordinators were responsible for ranged from three to 45 schools, four to 55 teams, and 25 to 550 students.

Whilst regional coordinators receive specific guidance from the ENZT on how best to fulfill their roles[5] the evaluation revealed a number of gaps in perception relating to their role between the ENZT and the regional coordinators themselves. One of these 'gaps' was the opinion that whilst the ENZT does not dispute the validity and importance of the role of regional coordinators it sees the role as being predominantly administrative in nature. In reality regional coordinators see their role as mainly involving liaison, motivation and relationship building. The emphasis among responses on the need for communication and 'people skills' reinforced this.

Interviewees also placed strong emphasis on the need for a regional coordinator to come from a business background – stronger than the need for a mentor to, which was an important result in terms of the prescribed functions of each role. More typical was the recommendation that a regional coordinator should come from an education background, though an equal number felt this was not a prerequisite characteristic. It would appear that 'business skills' were seen as being more advantageous than knowledge or experience in the education sector. It could be surmised that this is because of the nature of the job the coordinator has to do, rather than the content of the programme they are helping to deliver. The comment by one interviewee, that regional coordinators need to be 'enterprising' rather then just 'managerial', shows that regional coordinators feel they can contribute to the future of the scheme and its evolution, rather than just delivering the current product.

Whether an interviewee perceived the role of regional coordinator as essentially voluntary or as an 'employee' of the ENZT (which some interviewees actually were), appeared to influence the focus of their responses. Those who perceived themselves as volunteers in essence described the need for passion, enthusiasm, a positive attitude and a willingness to offer beyond what was expected of them, whilst those who saw themselves as employees focused more on the professional skills required.

The majority of interviewees stressed that with the present level of resources, and the fact the ENZT itself is centrally administered from Wellington, the local coordinator role is essential. The value of the regional coordinators in building relationships within the regions contributes to regional diversity in terms of programme delivery and 'outcomes'.

Aspects of regional diversity were typically described positively. However, a number of interviewees did feel that there is too much regional individuality. One interviewee saw this diversity as hampering the ENZT's ability to run and market the YES effectively. The current regional approach to YES facilitation was described by the same interviewee as being similar to a franchise approach to business, but without the "benchmarks or bases of comparison".

YES teachers

Interviewees argued strongly that there were certain groups or individuals whose contributions to providing a 'YES experience' directly contributed to its success. Interviewees saw teachers as the primary influence on whether the YES was successfully delivered. This finding parallels prior investigation into the YES by Braggins (2000) and work by Peterman (2000) on Young Achievement Australia.[6] The strength of the influence could logically result from the fact that teachers have the most 'contact' with students and typically have established relationships with those students (giving them the capacity to provide individualised assistance). In turn the amount of tangible and intangible support a teacher receives from their school can often affect the level of

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[5] Whilst the ENZT disseminates guidelines for teachers, mentors and regional coordinators, assessing these was beyond the scope of this evaluation. Future research may examine the guidelines distributed to those involved in YES delivery and their effectiveness in relation to the opinions expressed in the evaluation.

[6] Young Achievement Australia (YAA) is a non-profit organisation that teaches young people business skills whilst they are still at school. Supported by some 600 companies YAA provides business education programmes to over 14,000 students each year (Rolland, 2000).

influence they have.

The environment that the YES exists in within a school comprises both the physical and learning conditions that exist internally, and the greater general environment, which can impact on career choices in a positive or negative manner (Hynes, 1996). Therefore, teachers have the primary role of determining the characteristics of 'the learning environment'. This environment needs to be conducive to the delivery of an enterprise experience that will have the maximum impact (i.e. be student-centred). Clearly the different schools that participate in the YES have characteristics that ensure that the learning environments of students will not be the same. However, certain action from teachers can ensure a certain consistency of experience for students.

A number of interviewees thought an important part of the role is ensuring the YES is a 'student centred' experience and that teachers should let the students take the responsibility and the risk. In Cotton's (1991) vocabulary this is maintaining the role of guide and partner in the learning process rather than instructor. Enthusiasm and the ability to motivate students were also described as crucial for YES teachers for obvious reasons. The attitudes of teachers are important because they are the person in the YES delivery process who has the most contact with the students. Therefore, they have the ability to shape students' perceptions by their actions (i.e. in essence they too are role models).

A prominent opinion held by interviewees was that teachers who facilitate the YES do not have to be a teacher involved in either the commerce department (i.e. they don't have to be teachers of economics, accounting or business studies). Anecdotal evidence would suggest that the majority of teachers involved in YES delivery in New Zealand are teachers of those subjects. Some further investigation into this may be of merit to establish whether this trend is influenced by programme content or context most.

A 'team teaching' approach to YES facilitation may be effective, particularly if the teachers came from different subject areas. Interviewee opinions implied that a greater range of skills may contribute better to building an enterprise experience than an 'expert' who may feel they can take a more dominant role in the experience. This idea of two teachers working together echoes work by Keys Young (1999) in Australia that found that the awareness and attitudes of teachers were enhanced when they drew on the skills and resources of the whole school.

Whether teachers are delivering YES in the spirit of a narrow (business skills only) or broad (personal and enterprise skills development) fashion was a concern evident in the responses of interviewees. Many felt that teachers were delivering the YES with a narrow focus on profit making and winning. The goals of students should be taken into account by teachers according to interviewees. This would represent a truly student centred approach to scheme delivery and be consistent with the broad approach to enterprise education delivery.

According to interviewees, without a teacher or principal who is receptive to the concept of enterprise education, many of the activities of the ENZT and its regional coordinators can be ineffective, no matter how much effort is expended. In an Australian context Keys Young (1999) described a similar concern - that the attitudinal barriers occurring in schools can forestall the efforts of enterprise education proponents. This is of even greater concern if a demand from the students is going unrecognized, or unanswered, because school bureaucracies are blocking the take-up or provision of enterprise education opportunities. Whilst regional coordinator interviewees did not describe ideological differences as the reason schools were not becoming involved in the YES, several felt that principals and teachers saw the YES as primarily a money making exercise, rather than a lesson in exercising economic choice or an opportunity for personal development.

YES mentors

Many of the points made by interviewees regarding the effectiveness of mentors are similar to those made about teachers. This suggests that many of the aspects of the roles of teacher and mentor complement each other and that both exist to support and offer advice rather than instruct - they are partners in the enterprise education experience with the students. The traditional hierarchy of authority that exists in a classroom does not appear to contribute to the delivery of an effective enterprise education experience. However, to what degree mentors and teachers take

this on board is debatable. It would seem mentors ('business partners') too often cast themselves in the role of teacher or instructor (Hayward, 1986 cited in Peterman, 2000).

Interviewee responses were divided relatively evenly between describing attitudes that were not related to the business experience of the mentor, and skills that were directly business related - enthusiasm and passion were seen as superseding the need for a business background. Mentors were seen to have the best chance of being effective if they had empathy for working with young people. This suggests that the type of people who become involved in this kind of mentoring should do so of their own volition, rather than through any obligation.

Whilst a business background was seen as important some re-evaluation of the role of mentors may be appropriate. Are mentors motivators or are they 'business consultants'? The term mentor implies ongoing support that is not always of a technical nature. Given that both the teacher and regional coordinator support the team, one of the primary roles of a mentor under the scheme is to provide technical or business knowledge. (I.e. more of a 'business consultant' than mentor). If the ENZT was more clearly able to define what teams wanted a mentor's role to be (by a process of consultation) it may be in a position to offer alternatives that cross geographical boundaries and reduce the stress relating to mentors that many regional coordinators seem to experience. For example in France a national public enterprise education programme (Graines d'Entrepreneurs/'Seeds of entrepreneurship') for junior high school students receives no formal technical support. Instead students are given an address book of professionals available for counselling when they require it (i.e. involvement is optional and based on needs) (OECD, 2001).

Conclusions

At a micro, or programme specific, level the evaluation revealed that stakeholders felt teachers were the primary influence on how successfully the YES was delivered. The role of regional coordinators was also felt to be crucial. There was a strong level of consensus about the skills and knowledge needed to be successful as a mentor, teacher or regional coordinator involved with YES, and these all relate closely to the broad objectives of the YES. Whilst consensus existed at the 'skill level' of discussion there was more diversity in the responses relating to 'roles' or 'functions', which suggests an area for future research.

Synergy must exist between objectives and resources for any enterprise education delivery to be effective. The YES thrives on the freedom it affords delivery agents (teachers, mentors and regional coordinators) to modify some aspects of programme delivery (i.e. not programme content) appropriately for their school and/or region (e.g. the timing of some events). The factors inherent in a region (not only socio-economic and geographical differences) logically influence the delivery process and more work should be undertaken to quantify the influence such variances enact.

Enterprise education is culturally and contextually bound; therefore it could be argued that the generalisability of these results is negligible. However, they do contribute to the body of knowledge at a macro, or more generic level, and will contribute to a better understanding of 'best practice' and its implications (e.g. the potential transferability of practice to other contexts). This evaluation has categorically demonstrated that 'best practice' is a term that lacks applicability to enterprise education in a New Zealand context. Instead good practice, as described by interviewees in this evaluation, is far more desirable as it allows for differentiation in delivery. Contributing to this desirability for good rather than best practice, is the perceived rigidity of a 'best practice model', which has meant in some instances theoretical 'ideals' are not translated into practice because delivery agents have a strong awareness of the uniqueness of their own context.

Realistically, the evaluation revealed that good practice also has the potential to be far more self-reinforcing than best practice in the context of the YES. Instead of aspiring to an 'ideal', delivery agents can develop good practice and take responsibility for its dissemination. Therefore, the evaluation has demonstrated that 'good practice' and local initiative has more impact on successful enterprise education delivery in the case of the YES in New Zealand, than aspiring to a predetermined 'best practice' model.

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