From fluctuation and fragility to innovation and sustainability: the role of a member network in UK enterprise education

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Abstract

Enterprise education has been identified as suffering from fluctuating policy, inconsistent funding and faddish practice, thereby limiting the development of a sustainable community of scholar-practitioners. In view of these constraints, this article considers the position of the often-isolated enterprise educators, and focuses on the role networks play in supporting their sustainable professional development and hence the domain itself. A case–based analysis draws on social-constructivist concepts of networks and communities of practice to analyse a UK-based network, Enterprise Educators UK ('EEUK'). It is argued that the member-driven nature of EEUK is unique and important for providing a sustainable forum through which enterprise educators can engage, share practice, find identity, develop ownership of and deliver sustained innovation in enterprise education. Generating a rich picture of the enterprise educator's eco-system, the article makes a methodological contribution to network research by undertaking a longitudinal analysis of a decade of 'Best Practice' events. It extends Community of Practice theory of peripheral participation and identity in professional associations, and derives practical implications for enterprise educator networks. Recommendations are made for future research and dissemination of enterprise educator practice at, between, and beyond events, to further the development of the international enterprise education domain.

Keywords: enterprise educators, best practice, networks, community of practice, Higher Education, Further Education.

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Dr Richard Beresford was Vice Chair of Enterprise Educators UK. He passed away during the writing of this article. He was the primary author at the time and his contribution to the final paper remains core and significant.

Introduction

The important role that education plays in promoting entrepreneurial attitudes and behaviours is well established (e.g. European Commission, 2012; UK Department of Business Innovation and Skills, 2013). National governments have introduced policies to support enterprise education (EC, 2006; Young, 2014). However, despite the dramatic increases in provision over the last two decades, funding remains unevenly distributed (EC, 2012; Rae et al., 2012). As a result, enterprise education struggles to establish institutional embeddedness, attract sufficient internal resources and gain legitimacy across non-business school areas (Henry, 2013; Jones et al., 2014). Given enterprise's economic and social panacea status (Henry et al., 2003; WEF, 2009; Young, 2014) this is a serious concern.

Smith and Paton (2014) describe enterprise education as 'faddish' and transient, linking this to dependency on changing political agendas at all levels, and hence sustainability of provision 'suffering' from 'external interventions, policy fluctuations and spasmodic funding' (Smith and Paton, 2014: 553). Beresford and Beresford (2010) likewise express concern at the 'precarious' nature of UK enterprise education, identifying lack of wide-spread funding within Higher Education for developing enterprise education practice. This article builds on this concern for sustainability and evaluates the role networks play in supporting sustainable professional development of often-isolated enterprise educators. Although the research is located in the UK, the issues, findings and implications are relevant for the broader international sector. The article begins by reviewing the nature and challenges of enterprise and entrepreneurship education and related issues for enterprise educators. It thereby places enterprise and entrepreneurship education within an andragogical rather than pedagogical paradigm where learning is situated, experiential and increasingly student-led, but where the role of the educator remains central in fostering, facilitating and nurturing the learning process (Bird, 2002).

Encouraging, supporting and developing related teaching practice is the focus of the second section of the article which explores how current practice can be developed and sustained through sharing of educator practice. Whilst such 'best practice' has been described pejoratively in analysis of enterprise education (Jones et al., 2014), here 'sharing' and 'co-development' of practice is interpreted as part of a broad forum and mechanism through which disciplinary identity, on-going professional support and innovation can be developed.

Following calls for more practice-based research (Pittaway and Edwards, 2012), the article draws its empirical evidence from a case-based analysis of a decade of enterprise education best practice events run by a single UK membership based network - Enterprise Educators UK (EEUK). It extends earlier research on the role of networks in supporting enterprise and entrepreneurship education (Beresford & Beresford, 2010), by covering an entire decade of best practice events (2005-2015). The article also extends previous research on networks and 'communities of practice', and argues that in the current context of fluctuation, faddishness and fragility, a member-driven network like EEUK offers enterprise educators a liminal space in which to develop their professional identity and practice.

The nature and challenge of enterprise and entrepreneurship

Enterprise and entrepreneurship education is a relatively new phenomenon in higher education (Higgins et al, 2013), but is growing rapidly as a field of inquiry. 'Ghettoisation' within the business area (Beresford and Beresford, 2010: 276) is at odds with a view of enterprise learning as inter-disciplinary and 'an emotional experience', posing a challenge within the 'traditional backdrop' of HE (Gibb, 2011: 152). Whilst this is starting to change, there is broad consensus that traditional pedagogical methods are insufficient to unleash the entrepreneurial spirit in students (Neck et al., 2014), or to equip them for a life of uncertainty and complexity requiring individual initiative (Gibb, 2005). Unlike traditional academic disciplines such as psychology, there is no stable 'canon' of knowledge which represents enterprise and entrepreneurship, nor an established methodology for educating entrepreneurs.

Calls have been made to draw on philosophical frameworks which acknowledge the practice-based nature of enterprise and enterprise education (Neck et al., 2014). There is a view that enterprise and entrepreneurship education should take place in learning environments of uncertainty and complexity (Gibb, 2011; Neck et al, 2014), encouraging personal development through affective, conative and cognitive learning (Kyro, 2006). These learning environments would provide opportunities for learning 'by doing' and from 'failure', with reflexivity and social co-participation as key enablers. However, given that these are not traditional characteristics of university pedagogy, what are the implications for enterprise educators and sustainable enterprise education?

The enterprise educator

It is not easy (nor necessarily desirable) to define how 'best' to teach entrepreneurship (Klapper and Farber, 2016), nor how to develop educators. Enterprise educators are not short of advice on how to develop approaches to learning and teaching, and they face a wide range of typologies and frameworks. Smith and Paton (2014: 552) suggest that a problematic consequence of this variation in enterprise education is the 'sheer magnitude and diversity and scale of provision', some of which is regarded as 'transient and faddish'.

A consensus is emerging that learning in enterprise and entrepreneurship should be student-led (Jones et al., 2014), especially given the need to cultivate innovative ways-of-thinking (Higgins et al., 2013). Such autonomous learning requires facilitation, and extensive collaboration between educators and learners. Without the support of the educator, students may stagnate in their learning (Loyens et al., 2008).

This facilitative role is not new to education (EC, 2011). However, as argued by Neck et al. (2014), it places substantial pressures on enterprise educators who may be working in isolation in their own organisations, often against institutional and administrative norms. Enterprise educators face the challenge of trying to introduce innovative practices (Pittaway and Edwards, 2012), whilst balancing often contradictory demands – such as institutional and student demand for certitude (Gordon, 2006), inflexible classroom sizes, and rigid workload planning policies. Institutional change might need to precede any pedagogical change (Gendron, 2004), but in the meantime it is arguably a prerequisite of enterprise educators to be entrepreneurial themselves (Beresford, 2010), and to engage as agents of change. Enterprise educators may often (need to) be 'champions' (Beresford and Beresford 2010: 278) but Gibb's (2011: 149) description of enterprise educators as needing to defend the entrepreneurial concept within the idea of the university amongst 'dubious and hostile colleagues' illustrates this potential isolation.

Enterprise educators need opportunities to develop and reflect individually and collectively on practice (Jones et al., 2014), and learn from and with other practitioners experiencing similar challenges. Networks and Communities of Practice potentially offer such opportunities.

Networks and communities of practice

Although emerging from different traditions and strands of academic thinking, there are common elements between networks and communities of practice ('CoPs'). Both emphasise *participation* as a mechanism for developing one's

identity and practice, and both acknowledge that networks and CoPs are varied in their formality, breadth and duration.

Networks and enterprise
The role that networks and networking play in the entrepreneurial process has been acknowledged for some time (e.g. Birley, 1985; Pittaway et al., 2010). For example, research on networks within the more general enterprise context identifies that entrepreneurs are likely to be embedded within social networks (Aldrich and Zimmer, 1986) through which they access a range of resources such as information and support. Networks foster innovation by providing opportunities for members to connect with others outside their organisations and/or contexts (Granovetter, 1973; Burt, 1992). However there is little research exploring the role of networks in relation to enterprise *educators* (Beresford and Beresford, 2010). This is an omission given the general lack of opportunities for enterprise educators to access training and development, and share the good practice developed elsewhere.

Current international enterprise *education* networks appear to be varied and scarce, as indicated by calls for development of these by the UN's Entrepreneurship Policy Framework and Implementation Guide (UNCTAD, 2012) and the Danish government (FOU, 2015). Their scope is also arguably limited: the UN review of international best practice in supporting entrepreneurship educators highlights only *formal* training programmes or one-off events/conferences (UNCTAD, 2012) but overlooks informal networks; the China-UK Entrepreneurship Educators Network is limited to a select number of HE institutions. Within-country networks, such as the Finnish YES (see www.ee-hub.eu) and Macedonia National Centre for Development of Innovation and Entrepreneurial Learning (NCDIEL, 2014), are predominantly government-led, established with time-limited funding and offering formal teacher training programmes. The European Entrepreneurship Education Network (EE-HUB), set up as a consortium with 3 years funding promotes 'best practice' and its membership of 'experts' are recruited 'by invitation' (www.ee-hub.eu). The TE3 project in the UK (supporting collaborative networking between universities developing technology in enterprise education) involved 12 institutions formally funded for 3 years (see Carey et al, 2009).

The extent to which such networks support professional enterprise educator development and sustainability of innovation in practice is not clear. Community of Practice concepts shine new light on this question.

Communities of practice and innovation

Wenger (1998) argues that a Community of Practice (CoP) is not just a community of interest but can also be seen as a group of practitioners discussing, learning, and sharing resources, experiences, ideas and tools. The focus within a CoP is on shared 'practice' rather than on being a member of a formally constituted 'community'. CoPs have - like networks - been associated with innovation (Brown and Duguid, 1996), and places where workers 'problem-solve', develop 'non-canonical' or 'context-independent' practice, and represent 'rule-makers' rather than 'rule followers' (Solomon, 2007). CoP concepts arguably shed light on the life of professional enterprise educators: practitioners engaging in non-traditional pedagogy and often working against institutional norms, innovating and developing practice.

Carey et al (2009) associated collaborative working between enterprise educators in the 'TE3' project to positive features of CoP, including individual sense of community, knowledge transfer, creativity and extended networks. Conclusions in that study regarding institutional impact and sustainability beyond the project were less definitive.

Professional Identity

A key element in CoP is that it constitutes a physical or symbolic space where members can develop their personal professional identity and a sense of 'belonging' (Wenger 1998), realised through participation in common, shared, often co-developed problem-solving and practice. Lave and Wenger's (1991) notion of 'peripheral participation' conceptualises 'new-comers' interacting with 'old-timers' and becoming members through practice. For enterprise educators who may feel isolated and at the 'margins' (e.g. of well-established education communities within their sector or institutions), a community of practice in the form of a professional network may offer important support: a liminal space for development of identity as an enterprise educator as well as for innovation in practice.

Peripheral participation and 'associations'

Wenger's suggestion that CoP might be called a 'learning network' is useful: the strength of such communities is when they span different organisations. Thus 'associations' (or professional networks) might be an example of CoP where 'peer-to-peer learning is complementary'. However members may be 'often restless and their allegiance fragile' (Wenger, 2006).

For our context, the idea that someone can have 'multiple roles' (James, 2007), be a member of multiple communities of practice, and therefore understanding that there are probably overlapping and nested communities of practice (Tight, 2004) offers a useful perspective on the reality of enterprise educators: practitioners from different disciplines, roles and institution (HE, FE etc.) engaging in the practice of enterprise education, may embody a meaningful community of practice. Further, the notion of peripheral participation highlights the value of partial membership and porous community boundaries. This perspective challenges the view that diversity in - and transience of - stakeholder and practice in enterprise education is problematic (Smith and Paton, 2014).

Sustainability in innovation

Perhaps linked to the issue of fragile membership, innovation through CoP is deemed to arise from the informal, evolving nature of the shared, co-developed practice: 'through their constant adapting to changing membership and changing circumstances, evolving CoP are significant sites of innovating' (Brown and Duguid, 1996: 60). Indeed sustainability in innovation of practice in enterprise education may be typified or even enhanced by fluctuating and evolving practice and membership.

The relationship between CoP and entrepreneurship has received limited attention to date (Warren, 2004; Cope, 2005; Theodorakopoulos, 2015). When viewed through a CoP lens, current expert-led networks offering top-down support through formal training programmes, are arguably more likely to result in transactional engagement and reductivist rather than co-created practice.

Drawing on notions of CoP, the next section evaluates the role that one well-established UK network plays in the professional development and support of enterprise educators and enterprise education practice.

Enterprise Educators UK

Enterprise Educators UK (EEUK) is the UK's national membership network for enterprise and entrepreneurship educators working in higher and further education. The 100+ members are organisations rather than individuals and almost all are Higher Education or Further Education institutions. EEUK is a not-for-profit company led by a board of directors voted into office by representatives of the membership organisations.

EEUK exists to support educators who develop and deliver enterprise and entrepreneurship education within the curriculum or through extra-curricular

activities. Support is provided through activities that enable members to share practice, thereby learning from each other. One of the key offers is an annual programme of Best Practice Events, hosted by members themselves. Other support comes in a variety of forms and highlights EEUK's breadth of engagement in wider agenda: EEUK lobbies the UK Government and contributes to Government committees in order to influence policy; it raises awareness of its members' activities and impact; it awards funds for small enterprise research projects; it celebrates and rewards individual educators achievements through the annual National Enterprise Educator Awards (with the National Centre for Entrepreneurship in Education); it runs a substantial annual conference (also with NCEE), known as the International Entrepreneurship Educators Conference. EEUK facilitates a vibrant network of educators who meet at Best Practice Events, at the conference, and through social media such as Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook.

Outlining the evolution of EEUK is important for understanding this network's membership, structure and practice. EEUK's origins lie in the Science Enterprise Challenge ('SEC') initiative funded originally in 1999 and then again in 2001 by the UK Department for Trade and Industry. The aim of the SEC was to establish a network of university-based centres of excellence in the development of commercialisation and entrepreneurship skills in the field of science and technology.

By 2001 there were 13 SECs, each leading a consortia of regional universities. In total, through a 'hub and spoke' model, 52 universities were involved in regional networks. The potential value of a national network was identified and the UK Science Enterprise Centres (UKSEC) was created by the 13 centre directors, with each centre contributing fees to enable UKSEC to operate. A full time Knowledge Manager was appointed for whom a key task was to initiate a programme of Best Practice Events. The events were run in partnership with, and hosted by each SEC in turn. This approach to partnership delivery enables UKSEC to secure enough in-kind support to increase the scale of its activity beyond what would have been possible with its own limited resources.

By 2004 the enterprise landscape was changing, and UKSEC adapted in order to continue to be effective and valued. SEC funding ended in that year. That, and the importance of enterprise and entrepreneurship skills in disciplines other than science, influenced a change of focus. Universities extended their enterprise and entrepreneurship education into new discipline areas and beyond the curriculum into activities such as student enterprise clubs and societies.

UKSEC, with its links through consortia membership to many of the newer and less research-intensive universities, responded to the shift in focus by including Best Practice events that had no science and technology focus. These events proved popular amongst institutions with no prior links with the SEC consortia. At the same time UKSEC was facing a sustainability challenge: the SECs had been sufficiently funded and could afford relatively high fees, but HEIF2 funding was, at an institutional level, less generous, and was split over a broad range of enterprise and knowledge transfer activities. UKSEC became a membership-based organisation with institutional level membership enabling all staff of a member institution to access membership benefits and discounts.

In 2005 every HEI in the UK became eligible to join and, between 2005 and 2007, the membership grew from 13 Science Enterprise Centres to over 90 individual universities representing approximately 600 enterprise and entrepreneurship educators and practitioners. In 2007 associate membership was offered to Further Education (FE) colleges. When UKSEC became Enterprise Educators UK (EEUK), FE colleges were offered full and equal membership in 2011. The associate model also envisaged the possibility for an international dimension to the network.

In summary, from origins in 13 Science Enterprise Centres in 1999, EEUK has grown to a membership of 100+ institutions (HE and FE) in 2015. Through membership and partnership strategies that have been a key feature of UKSEC/EEUK, the network has achieved sustainability and continues to provide a Best Practice Event series as a staple and important element of the membership offer. The next section introduces and justifies the methodology adopted for the current study.

Methodology

The study draws on a case based method focusing on a single organisational network – Enterprise Educators UK. In doing so it builds on an earlier study of this network (Beresford and Beresford, 2010) but extends analysis to cover an entire decade of UKSEC/EEUK activity.

Case method has been deemed especially appropriate when exploring new entrepreneurial topics or novel examples, particularly in instances where existing theory seems inadequate (e.g. Bagnoli and Megali, 2011). Focused 'on understanding the dynamics present within single settings' (Eisenhardt, 1989: 534), context forms an integral part of the study (Yin, 2009). Our case study aim is to enable better understanding of the dynamics present within the single

setting of a network within the complex and uncertain context of UK enterprise education.

Documentary evidence is drawn from data on 65 Best Practice Events between October 2005 and June 2015. The data set comprises the information collected at application and registration for each event by one of the authors of the article working for EEUK. As such, it provides a complete data-set representing the event-related activity of the EEUK membership of over 100 organisations and even greater number of individuals. Whilst this approach provides only base-line data such as delegate name, institution and event, the historical data enables longitudinal analysis of trends over time. This perspective has been neglected in entrepreneurship studies, which instead tends to focus on individual-level perspectives and experiences.

Data includes:

- Number of events over the period
- Event attendance by number of individual participants over the period
- Event attendance by number of institutions over the period
- Event host by institution
- Event theme

Using event data is novel, since network research tends to focus rather on individuals. The article analyses engagement in - and the focus of - 65 enterprise education 'best practice' events delivered through EEUK, drawing on social-constructivist concepts of networks and communities of practice including: engagement, exchanging and sharing; co-development of practice; the dynamic of peripheral participation; sustainability in innovation through on-going development and evolution in practice, ideas and members. Missing data in relation to these themes is also considered.

The next section presents data on these events.

Findings

Key findings

Data is presented and analysed for the entire 10 year period and in two 5-year time periods allowing for trends in terms of average attendance and themes to be compared.

Key analysis as shown by Table 1 is as follows:

- Over the decade 65 best practice events have been organised by (or in partnership with) EEUK (and in its predecessor UKSEC);
- A total of 2,054 delegates have attended these events;
- 45 institutions (excluding non UK HEIs) have hosted an event representing institutions in England, Scotland and Wales. One institution (Sheffield) has hosted 6 events;
- A wide range of topics and themes have been explored ranging from university incubation to social enterprise and from student assessment to student finance.

Table 1: Best Practice Events October 2005- June 2015

Event engagement

Where there is consistent data it is possible to look at event popularity and reach. Individual events have attracted between 10 to over 90 individual delegates and over 50 different institutions. Events are becoming more popular in terms of the number of delegates attending, albeit that event *reach* (number of different institutions represented at any particular event) is slightly lower. In the first 5 year period (2005-2010), an average of 30 delegates attended a best practice event drawing delegates from on average 22 different institutions. In the second 5 year period (2010-2015), the average number of delegates attending an event was 36 drawing delegates from on average 20 different institutions.

Detailed analysis of the delegate list (not shown in table 1) provides further baseline information on the depth and breadth of delegate engagement with best practice events. Delegates came from all but 8 of the UK's 126 universities. Events have attracted delegates from FE colleges (eligible for membership since 2007), albeit small by comparison with HE. Events have also attracted delegates from non UK HEIs and other stakeholders including: National Association of College and University Entrepreneurs (NACUE); National Endowment for Science Technology and Arts (NESTA); Institute of Directors (IoD); Small Firms Enterprise Development Initiative (SFEDI); UnLtd. Data shows that 58% of

delegates have attended a single event with 8% attending two and 1% five or more.

Event themes

Changes in event theme provide insight into shifts in enterprise and entrepreneurship education in the UK over the course of the decade. This analysis shows that a consistent theme is a commitment to exploring ways to embed enterprise beyond business and across the wider curriculum (e.g. see event dates 02/07; 04/11; 03/13; 03/14; 02/15). Another consistent theme across the decade is a focus on ways to measure impact of enterprise and entrepreneurship education (e.g. see event dates 03/07; 04/10; 05/13; 10/14; 04/15). Both embedding of enterprise in the wider curriculum and measurement of impact are significant challenges to sustainability. Further, longitudinal analysis allows us to chart notable changes and as such can be seen to occur in the later period where there is a greater focus on technological enhancement of enterprise education (e.g. see event dates 03/10; 01/10; 01/12; 12/12; 04/13; 06/14). Further still we see developments in later events which show new exploration of the issue of employability of both students and staff (e.g. see event dates 12/11; 01/12; 01/14; 04/15; 06/15).

Discussion

Our analysis suggests that EEUK is far more than a 'training' organisation. It is better viewed as a member-driven network forming part of the UK eco-system of enterprise educators and development of their practice. Viewed through network and communities of practice concepts, analysis of event engagement and event topics over the decade show that EEUK plays a positive role in educator personal development, identity validation, development and innovation in practice and ultimately sustainability through educator ownership of the domain. These points are developed in the following sections.

Event Engagement: participation, personal development and identity validation

The evidence suggests that EEUK best practice events play a significant role in supporting development of UK enterprise educators and entrepreneurship education. EEUK functions as a networked forum, and event popularity is increasing steadily, indicating consistent demand.

The slight decrease in institutional reach between the periods 2005-2010 and 2010-2015 can be explained by the role that UKSEC played in the earlier period (with each individual SEC, acting as a hub institution leading a regional

consortium that acted as a mini network), and also by the more generous funding SEC received which included travel expenses.

More than half of delegates attended just a single event. Low 'repeat' attendance might seem disappointing. However, from a CoP perspective, the *range* rather than depth of attendance 'reach' can be more positively interpreted as demonstrating an active *extended* network as suggested by notions of 'multiple', 'overlapping' or 'nested' CoP (Tight, 2004). Granovetter's (1972) conceptualisation of the importance of weak ties also supports a more positive view. Whilst the current study is limited to evaluating event data of attendance and theme, this data provides indicators of an 'extended periphery' of participation and further evidence of porous boundaries. Two examples are the attendance by delegates from NACUE, IoD, SFEDI and NESTA, and the overlap for two events with the activity and members of the TE3 project. Further research is important to explore anecdotal data from EEUK suggesting that interactions from people having attended the events are (subsequently) happening inter and across institutions. The above establishes EEUK as a forum which draws educators *into* a network which has a wider and porous boundary, enabling a continuation of exchange and shared practice which no longer depends on continued event attendance. This is suggestive of on-going practice development.

Disciplinary and institutional analysis of the data further supports a positive interpretation. Whilst the network's original focus on commercialisation and entrepreneurship skills in the field of science and technology has shifted over time, table 1 shows that this has not led to a reversion to a business school-centric focus, maintaining instead a commitment to institutional embeddedness, and helping the domain to gain legitimacy amongst practitioners across non-business school areas (Henry, 2013; Jones et al., 2014). The fact that practitioners from non-business academic areas are choosing to engage with EEUK is an important indicator of the porous nature of the CoP and that these events provide an important role in validating the identity of enterprise educators.

Of the 2054 delegates attending an EEUK best practice event, a significant minority came from a wide range of other non HEI stakeholders. This arguably meets UNCTAD calls for sharing across educational systems. Business and policy entities have also attended (e.g. NESTA, IoD). Co-creation is evident in table 1 but perhaps more could be done in this regard, for example between educators and learners.

As part of enterprise educator practice, an emergent CoP is suggested by the volume and growth in event participation and importantly by the sharing, problem-solving and discussion-based activities which take place at these events. This insight is supported by noting the member-driven rather than top-down prescribed nature of the events themselves, indicated by the increasing range of different institutions choosing to play host to these events. Event theme is discussed in the next section but important to note here is the popularity (attendance numbers) at technology-related and specifically TE3 events (16/07/08; 03/07/07). The TE3 project itself embodying CoP concepts of collaborative cross-institutional working, and this supports the notion of an extended community of practitioners.

Event theme: ownership of the domain and sustained development and innovation in practice

Event theme is determined by active member participation, which means that events are demand-led, whilst also ensuring that EEUK remains both focused and relevant. The demand-led nature of event themes typifies CoP behaviour: practitioners developing the focus of events (event practice) rather than being prescribed to (by institutional managers or funding bodies). Active practitioner commitment and participation in this process also demonstrates one of the ways that practitioners are assuming responsibility for the leadership of the domain.

Event theme data provides evidence of some of the practical ways that educators themselves are looking to address their challenges. The time period 2010-2015 shows a much greater focus on the use of technology and simulations, which expose learners to greater levels of risk and uncertainty but within supportive environments (Rolfe, 2010). Whilst simulations may not provide 'real' entrepreneurial learning opportunities (Beresford and Michels 2015), they are evidence of practitioners looking to develop their practice – here facilitating greater levels of learner autonomy (van Geldred, 2010) and possibly, given the economies offered by technology, doing more with less (Henry, 2013).

Event theme serves to maintain innovation in terms of the diversity of practices which characterise enterprise education, while also uniting the domain (Jones et al., 2014) within a community of practice. Notable is the limited number of events which focus on business planning. Equally notable is the number of events which focus on employability, both student and staff. These two observations possibly highlight how UK enterprise educators adopt the broad focus on entrepreneurialism within a wide range of employment contexts, and to a degree, challenge evaluations that identify business planning as the

predominant assessment practice in the UK and US (Pittaway and Edwards, 2012). A continued interest in impact measurement suggests that any conservatism in approach to assessment is not due to any unwillingness or lack of interest amongst educators to engage with more innovative practices. Shifts in EEUK event theme - towards incorporating technology and employability - demonstrates the adapting, developing, innovating features associated with CoP as 'enacting organisations' having the 'capability of reconceiving its environment and its identity' (Brown and Duguid, 1996: 175). This, and changing membership over the decade from science-based academia to include FE and non-education parties also demonstrates sustainability.

Conclusion

The article explored the key role that member-driven networks play in facilitating the sustainable professional development of enterprise educators in the UK, through a critical review of best practice events organised by a national network, *Enterprise Educators UK,* between 2005 and 2015. We have argued that the diversity of practitioners and their practice is being positively leveraged through a member-driven network, which acts as an oasis in the precarious context of faddish practice and funding uncertainty. We further argue that innovation and sustainability in enterprise and entrepreneurship education can come through a member-driven practice-orientated network which assumes responsibility for leadership of the domain. Evidence presented shows that in the UK, EEUK have and continue to play a leading role in this regard, providing opportunities for on-going professional development and a forum through which diverse practitioners can and do find identity validation which shapes the nature and direction of enterprise and entrepreneurship education over time.

Innovation and sustainability

Conceptually, the article supports and extends current notions of Communities of Practice as linked to innovation. The data on EEUK event themes over the decade presents a picture of an evolving, innovative enterprise education sector. As such, it supports the positive aspects of a CoP as comprising a group of practitioners problem-solving, sharing information and skills, evolving, adapting and innovating practice. Event themes show members developing practice in cross-disciplinarity, technology and employability. They also show continued commitment to personal development and institutional embeddedness which links positively to sustainability. The present study paves the way for important future exploration of the innovative practices and institutional embedding by members engaging in the events.

Supporting professional identity and ownership

The link between CoP and professional identity is underlined: case evidence showing sustained popularity of best practice events supports the role of EEUK in engaging enterprise educators. Increasing 'reach' in terms of attendees over the decade shows the value perceived by 'isolated' educators of the role of such a member-driven network in their professional development. The member-driven nature of events in terms of hosting and topic, and commitment to themes of professional development and embeddedness demonstrates ownership of the domain. It also highlights the challenges experienced by the enterprise educator practitioner who finds identity by participating in the EEUK events.

A new extended periphery for enterprise educators

The case analysis of events and member engagement extends notions of 'periphery', 'overlapping' CoP and 'associations'. Lack of attendance at a second event does not necessarily mean 'fragility' in membership: peer sharing and development of practice inter- and across- institutions, and *beyond and after* the events occurred. Fuller exploration and evidencing of the nature of this in future studies will be important. Evolving member diversity (cross-disciplinary, including HE and FE) does not mean fluctuation or faddishness. Indeed attendance by delegates who are not educators (e.g. Iod, NESTA etc) and larger attendance at TE3-related events suggest not only positive overlapping communities but evidences that EEUK events are responding to and influencing the changing discourse and practice in the wider enterprise education sector. EEUK appears to offer a new understanding of participation and a new form of periphery which seems to support enterprise educators taking ownership of the domain and innovation in enterprise education practice.

Policy and practice

On the limited basis of one network activity - the organisation of practice events - EEUK, as a member-driven and constantly adapting network is central to the enterprise educator community of practice and therefore to any attempts to sustain enterprise and entrepreneurship education in the UK. The enduring, organic, member-driven and practice-based nature of the EEUK network is identified as important and unique in comparison to other enterprise education networks identified as more top down, dependent on funding, at times 'exclusive' in membership criteria and offering formal training programmes or one-off events/conferences. For innovation and sustainability, implications arise

for the nature of enterprise network constitutions, membership criteria and focus.

Given a distinction between co-creation and top-down practice development, allowing practitioner members to shape network activities seems important. Brown and Duguid (1996) assert leadership of an innovating CoP should 'detect and support' practice not 'create and design' it.

Institutional membership which allows individuals from all roles/levels to engage facilitates breadth of inclusivity. Increasing 'reach' in terms of types of delegate attending EEUK events alongside EEUK's ever broadening and inclusive membership criteria (regarding type of institution, discipline and role), provide positive implications for potential domain-wide reach.

Embracing students and international networks would leverage more fully the notion of co-creation and overlapping and nested communities of practice. EEUK's affiliate model was designed in 2012 to enable this.

Overall, this research support's EEUK's current strategic focus on diversity of member recruitment, and the aim of doing more to understand the nature of their roles and practice.

Research and future focus

Events have proved a valuable new type of data source and this itself a pointer for future research. Case evidence from EEUK in terms of event popularity and themes highlight areas of specific future investigation.

The continued commitment in EEUK's event themes to personal development and institutional embeddedness, highlights the challenge experienced by the enterprise educator practitioner who finds identity by participating in the EEUK events. Two caveats with future implications are suggested below.

Firstly, data suggests more could be done to engage practitioners in FE – or at least leveraging opportunities for practice by FE colleagues to be incorporated into the evolution of practice in the sector. This would more fully realise the opportunities provided by overlapping CoP and calls for networks across different education levels (UNCTAD, 2012; FOU, 2015). Secondly, the degree to which best practice events support institutional embeddedness would be supported by fuller interrogation of delegate data (not possible at this time), identifying delegates by subject, discipline, or institutional role. Specifically, in relation to sustainability and professional development, future EEUK research

into members' role and practice beyond event attendance and topics would provide greater certainty to any subsequent claims.

If members are engaging in practice, there is value in their practice being shared to contribute to the evolution of the (community of) practice. The potential to make any peer sharing and development of practice taking place inter and across institutions, more explicitly part of enterprise educator personal development supports EEUK's current move to support more research into and by members and dissemination of this (including publication). Such research would also contribute further to CoP and network theory.

In conclusion, our research suggests the importance for on-going enterprise educator professional development and innovation of: member-driven networks which are broad and inclusive in terms of membership criteria; networks which facilitate co-development of practice through/by the network members themselves; greater understanding of member practice and participation beyond formal network events. These insights contribute to shaping the nature of the enterprise educator community of practice network and its role in on-going support of sustainability and innovation of enterprise education.

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Table 1: Best Practice Events October 2005 – June 2015

Date	Event Theme	Venue/Host	No. of participants	No. participant institutions
24/06/15	Developing the entrepreneurial potential of Post Graduate and Early Career Researchers	University of Southampton	37	17
11/06/15	Use of technology for ent-ed (MOOCs, flipping classroom, social media etc.)	Edinburgh Napier University	35	16
20/05/15	Effecting cultural change: Towards enterprising institutions	University of Sheffield	33	19
30/04/15	Stepping back to go forward: Listening to alumni voices	University of Wales Trinity Saint David	23	12
15/04/15	Use of technology for ent-ed (MOOCs, flipping classroom, social media etc.)	Kingston University	38	22
12/02/15	Embedding enterprise education within non-business curriculum areas	London South Bank University	54	30
20/01/15	Co-creating enterprise education with entrepreneurs and enterprising organisations: A holy grail?	Anglia Ruskin University	29	17
21/11/14	Funding of student and graduate ventures including crowdfunding	University of Sunderland	23	16
29/10/14	International comparisons for measuring the impact of enterprise and entrepreneurship education	University College London	42	31
12/06/14	Insight and inspiration roadshow	London Met. University	34	27

Date	Event Theme	Venue/Host	No. of participants	No. participant institutions
03/06/14	Supporting student and graduates entrepreneurs: business incubation in the university context (with UKBI)	Nottingham Trent University	69	44
14/05/14	Supporting self-made careers (with AGCAS)	University of Bristol	46	35
08/05/14	Entrepreneurial learning journeys, innovative partnerships: altogether brilliant	Glyndwr University	27	11
26/03/14	The Embedded Enterprise Exchange: examples from across the subject spectrum	Cardiff University	50	23
04/02/14	Sustaining Innovation & Enterprise in HE: The future coexistence of knowledge transfer, knowledge management & enterprise Education (with the IKT)	York St. John University	43	22
22/01/14	Digital Storytelling for Enterprise Educators	Birmingham City University	27	15
04/12/13	Social Innovation: How Social Enterprise and Innovation can Drive Social Change	University of South Wales	45	19
27/11/13	Venture Funds for University Entrepreneurs	University College London	42	30
11/06/13	Working with Others: Taking Enterprise Learning outside the University through Local Partnership Building	Northumbria University	38	13
04/06/13	Third mission? University-External Relationship Doctoral Day	University of Huddersfield	No data – ISBE event that EEUK partnered on	

Date	Event Theme	Venue/Host	No. of participants	No. participant institutions
04/06/13	Best Practice for Commercialisation of Student Ideas Workshop	London – location organised by Find Invest Grow	No Data – FIG event that EEUK partnered on	
14/05/13	Enterprise Education Symposium: Local, national and international reflections on strategy, practice and impact	Glasgow Caledonian University	No data – GCU's own event EEUK we partnered on	
23/04/13	The role of business competitions, challenges and simulations for nurturing graduate entrepreneurs	Canterbury Christ Church University	52	26
08/04/13	"Future Fit" Graduates – Survival Skills	Bath Spa University	36	23
21/03/13	Enterprise Education for Postgraduates – Developing Enterprising Researchers	University of Manchester	33	25
14/02/13	Assessment of learning in curricular and extra-curricular enterprise and entrepreneurship education	Southampton Solent University	35	20
05/12/12	"Future Fit" Graduates – Are we preparing our students for what employers are really looking for	University of Hull	36	22
30/10/12	Crossing the bridge: the application of creative thinking and action to entrepreneurial education	University of Edinburgh	33	21
26/10/12	Social Media and Enterprise Education	University of Surrey	38	25
31/05/12	Postgraduate enterprise education	Loughborough University	23	18
09/02/12	Sustainable graduate ventures	Teesside University	24	11

Date	Event Theme	Venue/Host	No. of participants	No. participant institutions
25/01/12	Sustainable graduate ventures	University of Coventry	18	9
08/12/11	e-learning for interdisciplinary Ent Ed	University of Sheffield	26	11
01/06/11	Enterprise conference	Glyndwr University	No data – Glyndwr event that EEUK partnered on	
18/05/11	Creative Enterprise	Birmingham City University	63	38
11/04/11	Fostering the spirit of enterprise through cross-campus practitioner-led courses	University of Cambridge	27	15
19/05/10	Postgraduate Enterprise	University of Birmingham	11	10
14/04/10	Tracking Enterprising Students	University of Sheffield	14	12
31/03/10	Oven Ready Students	University of Central Lancashire	9	8
23/02/10	Enterprise for Education – promoting benefits to academic staff	University of Wolverhampton	59	
23/3/10	Social enterprise	Southampton Solent University	95	53
9/12/09	Incubation and Incubators in universities	Nottingham Trent University	28	23
18/2/09	Techniques to engage students – case studies on successful pedagogies and promotions of enterprise programmes	Liverpool University	17	12

Date	Event Theme	Venue/Host	No. of participants	No. participant institutions
22/1/09	Embedding enterprise	Queens University Belfast	20	13
25/11/08	Assessment revisited: assessment of student learning of enterprise and entrepreneurship in context	University of Sheffield	12	12
16/07/08	TE3 Open Day	Birmingham City University	52	40
18/06/08	Engaging students with enterprise education initiatives – use of branding and identity (a repeat of the Feb RCA event)	Leeds Metropolitan University	26	20
11/06/08	Assessment of Student Learning for Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Modules and Courses	Salford University	31	12
22/05/08	Entrepreneurial Learning Research Event	Open University	21	16
08/04/08	Business Plan competitions – purpose and practice	Durham University	28	25
12/03/08	Creative Enterprise Conference	Birmingham City University	70	40
01/02/08	Make it theirs - using branding to make enterprise education relevant to students	Royal College of Art	51	40
27/11/07	Science, Technology and Enterprise	Sheffield University	26	11
03/07/07	TE3 open day	Staffordshire University	80	
17/04/07	Transforming enterprise education- real practice	Leeds Metropolitan Enterprise zone	46	19

Date	Event Theme	Venue/Host	No. of participants	No. participant institutions
27/03/07	What do students get from entrepreneurship modules - 3 day workshop	Cambridge University	25	21
28/02/07	Enterprise Education for Arts and Humanities students	Loughborough University	15	10
13/11/06	North America/UK exchange	Manchester Science Enterprise centre	38	12
05/09/06	The EHGI programme on assessment	Cambridge University	21	16
08/06/06	Social Enterprise - Philanthropy or common sense	Warwick University	36	No data
16/05/06	Enterprise in context	Oxford University	No delegate info	
03/04/06	Joint Cambridge, MIT and UKSEC - 2 day event	Cambridge University	28	21
23/03/06	The organisation of frequent events	London Business School	No delegate info	
31/01/06	North American/UK exchange	Boston	16	15
14/10/05	White Rose Enterprise Learning Conference	Sheffield University	No delegate info	
Total			**782**	