

THE ROLE OF TEACHING INSTITUTIONS TO PREPARE AND PROMOTE SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS

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Abstract

This research intends to analyse how Universities must have an important role in social entrepreneurship promotion and in the regional and social sustainable development itself. In fact, it's our opinion that students must be advised how can they start up their professional careers in social area and how they can be competitive in the professional world. Thus, academic curricula and teaching methodologies must give them the basic tools so they can have entrepreneurial spirit and to develop innovative programmes/organizations as well as, at the same time, to contribute for a more inclusive society.

Keywords - social entrepreneurship, universities, teaching methodologies, inclusive society.

1 INTRODUCTION

“The notion of situated learning now appears to be a transitory concept, a bridge, between a view according to which cognitive processes (and thus learning) are primary and a according to which social practice is the primary, generative phenomenon, and learning is one of these characteristics.”

(Lave and Wenger, 1991)

As an institution, the school falls within a society in constant transformation. Recent decades have put us on the Information Society, in a Globalized World and onto a permanent need of change on teaching and learning methodologies.

Nowadays, teaching in higher schools means being aware of the challenges that future professionals will face in the labour market due to competition, competitiveness and general difficulty relating to employment. In fact, despite the different policies of cooperation and partnership in Europe (EU and non-EU countries), we still have major challenges to which it is urgent to respond efficiently – employability, development of social responsibility and improvement in the third sector (Santos, Silva & Guedes, 2011).

This new reality requires differentiated knowledge, which includes new ways to create, produce and manage new methods of work organization, sources of knowledge and learning styles (Carneiro, 2003). Higher education and bachelor curricula must, therefore, bring together all these concerns and be able to promote entrepreneurial spirit on the future professionals, by showing

technical, professional, social, organizational and cognitive skills towards a competitive and inclusive society. We understand inclusive society as an opportunity of sustainable growth: people's life chances are maximised, because they have access to the services and facilities they need; the needs of specific groups are achieved and people have a sense of belonging to the community by interacting with others and be able to use community resources for the collective well-being.

In other words, the welfare State of the future demands that the citizens must be proactive in sustainable society's development, instead of this role being only assigned to public administration and government. Private initiative can introduce innovative management tools to make third sector a competitive and successful area, without losing its scope of promoting inclusive societies and spread peoples' wellbeing.

That is the reason why higher education must be able to promote social entrepreneurship with the help of innovative tools and different teaching methodologies. The role of high education institutions must pass through the ability of making students believe in a new and successful way of welfare State, based on competence, skills and professional differentiation.

So, we believe that we don't need more organizations working in the third sector. What we need is people with entrepreneurial spirit, with great management skills that are available to take risks and allow these organizations being sustainable in financial, social, economic and organizational areas, even though their main goal keeps to be "having a social mission to answer a social problem" (Martins & Frazão, *in* Azevedo *et. al.*, 2010, p. 128).

Social entrepreneurship must be faced as a way to develop the existing organizations and their human and technical resources, to allow the effective value creation and to potentiate them as a catalyser of social sustainable development.

2 TEACHING AND LEARNING

Higher education institutions have a key role in the social competitiveness challenge, either by offering high-quality training, appropriated to labour market and to the socio-economic environment needs (specific to each region/country), either by the preparation of professionals who can address the real needs of public or private organizations, through the ability to mobilize their scientific/technical knowledge to any situation, at the right time and with discernment (Santos & Bonito, 2010).

In this new teaching and learning paradigm, the individual also takes an increasingly important role and responsibility in managing its own career (Arnold, 1997), but he must be prepared and advised during its bachelor's/academic studies, with teaching methodologies that drag out their ability to be a proactive element on the inclusive society building (Carvalho, 2011).

Qualified people have to be prepared to find a job or to create business/professional opportunities, where they can be entrepreneurial and become a proactive element on the organizational positioning. Generally, people look for organizations that can meet their career motivations and needs, but organizations, otherwise, are looking for workers that are able to bring any competitive advantage. Thus, if the value of work or the importance that work has in individuals' life affects their behaviour on their career choice management, the organization must also have a greater concern in terms of systemic (Feijó, Whitney, Peiro and Taris, 1995; Nabi, 2000), innovative and competitive view.

The construction of knowledge can then be considered as a continuous process, involving moments of abstract and decontextualized knowledge learning that will be framed by other experiences beyond the school's physical space, allowing learning to occur according to the activity, the context or culture. Therefore, learners should become active participants in the educational process. From this proposition it clearly follows that in learning from their own experience, students become, in a sense, their own teachers. The changed role of the learner has, in turn, implications for that of the teacher. Instead of the source of knowledge, teachers become facilitators of the learning process; that is, their role is to create the set of conditions under which students can best learn from their experiences. Furthermore, teachers can fulfill this role only by becoming learners themselves, and a primary source of their learning must be their students. In a simpler way, teachers who learn become better teachers, and learners who teach become better learners.

In this sense, the learning process, according to nowadays demands, must necessarily be seen as a collaborative process of sharing and interaction, where all players feel really motivated to participate: in higher education, teacher has to hand on his knowledge through interactive methodologies and be able to interact simultaneously with different shapes and speeds of learning. Student, in return, must be motivated to accept the theoretical and conceptual knowledge to be able to solve and manage any situation (theoretical or real, in academic or professional context).

All this interaction between teacher and student is seen as a team work, where the empowerment is a constant reality, and where all members share values and principles in an ethic and good governance basis, promoting best practices and citizenship deepening itself (Santos & Bonito, 2010).

3 TEACHING METHODOLOGIES PROMOTING ENTREPRENEURSHIP

Higher education contributes, in our perspective, to promote inclusive society through the promotion of general entrepreneurship spirit in students. In fact, citizens will be more proactive in society if they believe in their qualifications potential and if they can clearly identify its role for social development. Thus, curricula must show its ability to enhance the main scientific and technical competences required by their students to be competitive in the future. In other words, it's obvious

that future professionals have to show their ability of being constantly proactive and entrepreneurial, even though they aren't the organization owners. Only this way can lead us to Europe's competitiveness regarding the rest of the world.

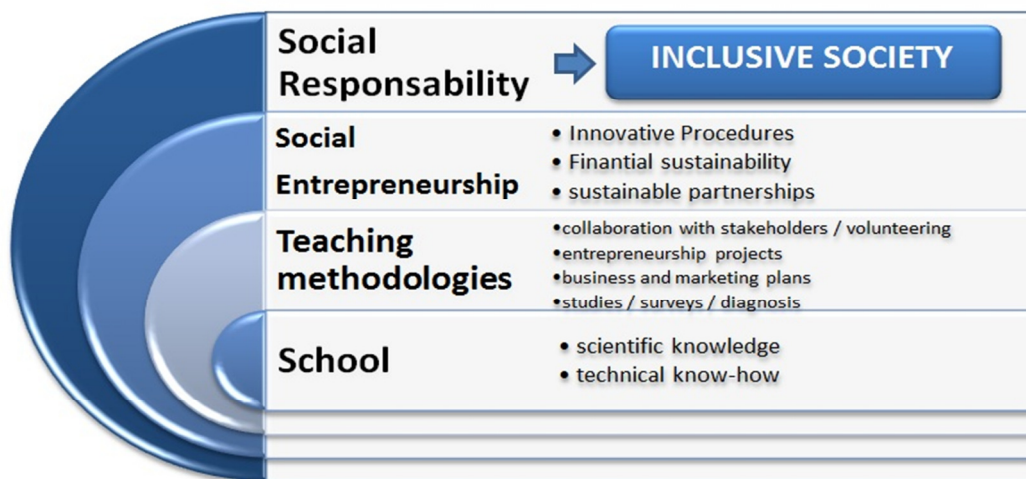


Illustration 1 - education for social entrepreneurship/responsibility

According to the above illustration, high education schools have to provide and ensure that students are prepared to intervene as experts in a specific area, gathering the scientific and academic knowledge with the technical know-how to determine the right solution for each situation. This role of schools can be facilitated by some teaching methodologies.

The first of them we want to emphasize is the collaborative learning. The ability to show students their proactive role in their learning process (and consequently on their professional future) is central to the success of collaborative learning – with this methodology, students become aware of their responsibility in shaping their own training path, trying to maximize the resources at their disposal and becoming active of their knowledge and developing a greater capacity of critical thinking. Moreover, with the promotion of that awareness and proactive posture, the students will be even more interested in getting involved in their surrounding community, developing tasks and projects that promote the region itself.

Moreover, collaborative learning also implies the active participation of the stakeholders in all education process: future employers, public administration, company managers, and experts of different scientific areas, among others. It is important that school brings all these partners so they can feel involved in the future professionals' training, giving their example, telling their real needs (so these needs can be used in the curricula organization) and assessing tasks that students can develop as volunteers in those entities.

Besides the collaborative education, we believe in the importance of three more methodologies: volunteering work, development of entrepreneurial projects (where students learn how to do

competitive and innovative projects) and the participation of students as academic researchers in their field of academic studies.

The possibility of doing entrepreneurship projects to conclude their bachelor is another way of helping and preparing students to the labour market. In our Superior School, students can choose in the last semester the development of an entrepreneurship project, which includes a business plan, a marketing plan, a market study and the organization of a business idea that can be implemented. All this work is permanently accompanied by different teachers of different academic areas. This final Project allows students to relate the acquired knowledge in school with professional know-how, as well as it shows the relation between the contents of the several curricular units.

In fact, we believe that preparing students to work as a team, developing critical thinking and be able to face new and complex situations and solve problems are the major challenges of education, but the consolidation of these skills will ensure, not only the incentive to research and the development of metacognitive processes in students (project), but it also will promote their ability to face the professional world and real situations (voluntary work) where they can apply their acquired knowledge with a greater social responsibility and acknowledgement of the region/community.

We use volunteering as another teaching methodology. It is an experience for students in real learning environments for limited periods, in which they are in professional/social spaces, consolidating scientific knowledge and testing hypotheses, reflecting on the actions taken, which allows all stakeholders an effective and continuous capacity to evaluate the results obtained in training (collaborative and traditional education) and in the voluntary service.

In addition, it also implies a planned and focused intervention, not only in terms of results, but also respecting different steps to be undertaken by volunteers. In other words, the volunteers do not replace, nor should replace the performing tasks receivers, but should engage themselves in activities that contribute to the development of the community. The volunteer must, above all, create organizational synergies.

Volunteering has gained an increasing importance in the last years and it was recognized by the European Union as a great socioeconomic value to the regions, contributing to the deepening of citizenship and social responsibility. According to the document of the Committee for Regional Development (2007), about the contribution of volunteering to economic and social cohesion of the EU, volunteering is understood as a free activity, voluntarily undertaken, consciously, that brings benefit to others and is open to all.

In addition to the Volunteering Project, according to the training areas of the School, we believe that the community intervention must be reinforced by other measures that combine training to strengthen the competitiveness of human beings, also achieved through a proactive approach to an active citizenship and volunteering.

Volunteering cannot be seen simply as an activity of goodwill, primarily focused on social life in the community, not even as an isolated and / or alienated from our professional skills. In our view, this tool is still under-exploited and has the ability to combine social inclusion and sustainable competitive growth of each community and region. Most of the challenges of contemporary society are global and therefore require concerted responses based on broad systemic visions. In the European case, this possibility becomes even more viable for all the available mechanisms for consultation, cooperation and sharing of best practices.

At long last, volunteering is still a potential tool of the parameters of excellence in the training / higher education:

Finally, the last methodology we would like to illustrate as it contributes for the promotion of social entrepreneurship is the participation of students in the elaboration of scientific surveys, studies and social diagnosis, always guided by teachers. Higher education needs to ally permanently their teachers' scientific research capacity, trying to update their knowledge, finding new ways of doing things and understanding continuously how the society changes. In this sense, making students an active participant in research is another tool that potentiates their training, because in the end they can understand more clearly the society where they belong and identify more easily the main weaknesses and how they can be solved or minimized.

With all these methodologies, students can be more prepared:

- to decide in which area they want to work and how they want to work (employer or employee, in a public or private organization);
- to identify social needs in any society, targeting the business possibilities and defining a competitive implementation strategy;
- to analyze the financial sustainability of any project they want to implement, identifying the best region to do it;
- to help the organization they work for to improve the ability to get better resources;
- to understand the market changes and to maximize their ability to use them as a differentiating factor facing competitors;
- to develop assertive communication plans, targeting the most important publics;
- to accept to be a proactive citizen, helping the social development of each community;
- to implement the social responsibility in every organization, as primary and essential element of competitiveness.

CONCLUSIONS

By the available indicators we analysed, we believe that the methodologies we presented: collaborative learning connected with volunteering, entrepreneurship projects, research projects and other conventional methods, can enhance the period of attendance in higher education institutions by students, enabling integrated training of each individual. To bet on a proximity-based

teaching skills development (specific and transversal) is to focus on future professionals' qualifications and efficiency. To ally the certified qualification (see Rey et al., 2005) to human resource awareness and social responsibility also enables the reinforcement of citizenship itself. To ally higher education to the world of work is definitely to bet on increasing competitiveness, sustainable development and wealth creation of the regions.

With the application of this new teaching/learning paradigm, students, as future qualified professionals, will be more prepared to be entrepreneurial in their lives and at their work by defining innovative procedures to maximize all available resources. As an example, some students that left our School in the last academic year (2009-2010 – students of the Post Graduate certificate in Third Sector Management) have already put their projects into action. Two students created a company of social help for senior people and two other projects were bought by the City Hall of Lamego to be implemented in the social area. Besides, students are also better prepared to identify the financial sustainability of business ideas and to look for partnerships possibilities that can bring more stability and visibility to their projects.



Illustration 2 - expected results of the new teaching paradigm

If higher education institutions could promote professionals better prepared for business competition, in the future they would bet on their responsibility in society development and try to be a proactive citizen for an effective inclusive society. One inclusive society can only be real in democratic countries if citizens have real opportunities to compete and develop a spirit of excellence and quality.

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