

DEFINING ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS A 'DOMAIN OF PRACTICE': IMPLICATIONS FOR THEORY AND RESEARCH FOR POLICY AND EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This paper holds in tension two perspectives on the framing of entrepreneurship: one as a discipline and the other as a domain of practice. Cooperative inquiry is the research method used to 'hold' and 'conduct' this inquiry with the purpose to explore the implications of both the different definitional frames of entrepreneurship and the use of a cooperative inquiry research method.

First, we demonstrate the application and implementation of the cooperative inquiry. Second, the implications of the different definitional frames are explored within the contexts of Australian educational policy frameworks and the teaching and learning practice of entrepreneurship. Finally the implications and possibilities of a cooperative inquiry research method are discussed for the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor project.

INTRODUCTION

When Universities become a major contributor to the study of an area of activity, it is common that over time the area of study becomes considered a discipline. Some complex areas of activity however, such as biotechnology, are better considered in a postmodern social construction whereby the area of practice is not framed as cross-disciplinary or even multi-disciplinary but rather post-disciplinary (Oliver, 2000).

This raises the possibility that framing entrepreneurship as a single discipline is both difficult to sustain conceptually and limiting as a frame for practice. Like leadership and strategy, entrepreneurship is a very complex domain of human practice which is global in its occurrence and archetypal as a phenomenon, for which there maybe few or no enduring rules or solutions.

As a multi-layered and multi-dimensional phenomena and again, in common with leadership and strategy, we contend that entrepreneurship attracts popular as well as academic interest, colonisation by consulting firms, multi-disciplinary frames to describe and explain it, multi-cultural interest, and very diverse theories and research methodologies that are poorly integrated both conceptually and in practice.

Fabian (2000) alerts us to the controversy embodied in this sort of debate through her examination of the field of management. Different ways of viewing a field – whether by design or not – tend to impose different structures to deal with such a state of affairs. Within the field of management, debate rages as to the range of useful paradigms (differences of ontology and epistemology) and the range of specific theories generated within those paradigms. Fabian suggests that the way the representatives of the management discipline have responded has been to urge one of three options: a unified paradigm (solidarity); a selected few paradigms (integration); or avoidance of dominant paradigms (segregation). Fabian points out that there are many who see the debate as either calling in to question the whole idea of discipline or rejecting it as unhelpful to practice. Much of this debate is not unlike that which is occurring in the entrepreneurship field as is epitomised by Low (2001) in his claim of entrepreneurship as an adolescent field.

We contend that the sort of splintering suggested in the management literature also reflects the contentious definitional debate in entrepreneurship (Gartner 2001; Hansemark 1998; Lindsay & Hindle

2002; Low & MacMillan 1988; Hill & McGowan 1999) and that this says something about the complexity of entrepreneurship as a phenomenon. We call attention to the fact that complexity defies simple or reductionist framing and further that diversity of research in entrepreneurship are evidently lacking, (Grant and Perren , 2002; Jennings, Perren & Carter 2005).

This paper reports on the potential and possibility for utilising a cooperative inquiry as a research method within the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM) project. It suggests that this form of research may offer much insight into the national perspectives on entrepreneurship and leverage benefit for the international project that, by forming cross-national teams of cooperative inquirers, can unearth culturally and socially embedded differences.

Again Fabian (2000) points out that “we as academics struggle with the awareness that the unknown and disputed are enormously more voluminous than the known . . . , but, pragmatically, we are charged with teaching, advising, and interacting as scholars on what is known or believed (Weick, 1983),” (pp. 350-351). These situational conditions and niggling questions about relevance initiated and provided the grounds for this inquiry. Hence, the three researchers, drawing upon their areas of interest in policy, education and research method, formed a cooperative inquiry group to test the boundaries and implications of framing entrepreneurship in a different manner to the dominant tendency to adopt a disciplinary paradigm. Further, the dynamics of this debate resembled the workplace environment of the co-researchers.

Arguably, one of the core disciplines of any research culture is to hold one or more ideas in opposition to each other, or in creative tension with one another. The means for achieving this vary according to the particular research culture or paradigm being employed, ranging from the testing and critique of an idea through to the challenge of the null hypothesis, or alternatively the holding of the stance of critical subjectivity in qualitative research methodologies. To achieve this tension in our research we exposed and explored the implications for entrepreneurship if it were framed according to a domain of practice as opposed to a discipline with the intent of potentially opening up new ways of theorising and offering new meaning for policy development and education.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Australian public sector policy system is currently being subjected to major reform that opens it to broader environmental influences and constant change (Halligan, 2005). The Australian and New Zealand School of Government has published twelve future research topics for the Australian public sector (Rhodes et al. 2005, pp. 9-10) and it can be noted that policy innovation and its associated challenges are prominent on the agenda and this highlights impending changes in approach to policy-making in Australia.

Entrepreneurship is one area that is subject to policy innovation pressures due to: its relative newness; growing prominence – particularly as represented in Europe (Hart, 2003); and its paradoxical nature. This arises as the creation of new enterprise is increasingly recognised as important to the global economy’s growth and development (Audretsch 1999; Begley & Tan 2001; Bates & Dunham 1993; Kotkin 1993; Van Praag 1999). Moreover, national competitive advantage seems to be ever more reliant upon the skills base of the work-force and the abilities of individuals to engage in innovative and new economic activity (Hytti & O’Gorman 2004). Indeed Atherton (2004) claims with respect to enterprise and entrepreneurship that “[F]ew policy makers now do not see these notions as important dimensions of socioeconomic activity,” (p.123).

While the importance of entrepreneurship at a macro-level is readily identified, new venturing is localised and an individually driven phenomena. Globalisation is causing economic development strategies to become even more local and regional (OECD, 2001). According to Cécora (2000), in a given region it is individuals that offer the most promise for stimulating innovative and entrepreneurial activity. Therefore a region’s economic potential may be predicated upon the quantity and quality of its enterprising individuals and the infrastructure offered by the region to strengthen, support and nurture them. This then raises two distinct paradoxes: first the need for responses to a globally competitive environment that are grounded in local dynamics and second the social benefit of entrepreneurship that resides in the capabilities and capacities of individuals.

Entrepreneurship involves a number of disciplines that have converged and Hart (2003) suggests that economics, geography, management, psychology and sociology are primary areas producing research in the field¹. Similarly, Audretsch (2004) claims that “entrepreneurship does not correspond nicely with any established academic discipline...” and by this he is implicitly suggesting that it therefore must be a distinct and unique discipline in its own right. These two views are central to this inquiry and present a third paradox that says entrepreneurship is represented in many disciplines while simultaneously it is recognised as being distinct and unique. Davidsson (2003) refers to this diversity of interest as the societal phenomenon of entrepreneurship.

These paradoxes we consider create the tendency to adopt, what Fabian (2000) would call a unitary discipline perspective whereby the ‘field’ is narrowed to one that might be considered to contain elements unique to a discipline. Shane (2003) with his general theory of entrepreneurship could be considered a specific example of this approach where ‘opportunity’ becomes the central focus and defining parameter.

Many authors have addressed issues in the higher education system (Bécharde & Grégoire 2005; Chia 1996; Falkäng & Alberti 2000; Gibb 2002; Hindle 2001; Koch 2003; Zhao 2004) and much of this work is trapped within these paradoxes while addressing issues of pedagogy, content, process and outcomes. However this paradoxical view suggests that entrepreneurship education has at least three agenda’s. First, the professional preparation of entrepreneurs; second the education of those that support entrepreneurship; third, addressing the intersections between both communities of entrepreneur and entrepreneurship practitioners that each have a shared vision and passion.

These paradoxes also have important implications for policy. For instance, entrepreneurship that is studied within a discipline will shape specific and deep policy insight although potentially from a very narrow viewpoint. However the domain of entrepreneurship practice has been the focus for many equally valid and worthwhile disciplinary voices. Informed policy-making needs to draw upon both the breadth and depth of knowledge offered from these areas.

The review of the literature surfaced many of the paradoxes we encountered in both the cooperative inquiry and reference group data collection processes.

SUMMARY OF METHOD

To help us explore the breadth of implications of a definitional shift in entrepreneurship, we chose the cooperative inquiry method. Methods of collaborative and cooperative inquiry have been eloquently described by Heron (1981, 1988) and Bray et al (2000). They sit within a paradigm of action research and participatory human inquiry - a paradigm which has several defining features. These include a focus on the dilemmas and problems that characterise human practice and experience; a preference for de-mystifying research and treating it ‘as a form of learning that should be accessible by everyone interested in gaining a better understanding of his or her world’ (Bray et al, 2000, p 3); a concern to work arm-in-arm with others who share the curiosity or need for the inquiry; and an interest in initiating change in thinking and behaviour.

Both Heron (1996) and Reason (2001) have inspired many other researchers with their challenge to inquire deeply – both appreciatively and critically – into our individual and collective assumptions about the way things are and the way they could be; and the intent and the impact of the actions we take and the way we conduct ourselves in research, professional practice and life more generally.

Its protocols include: genuine sustained efforts at working together, even when - especially when - the going gets tough or we find others difficult; a stance that values inquiry as much as advocacy; transparency; open-mindedness; a no blame approach to problem solving; real-time skills in noticing what we are doing as we are doing it; courage to challenge our own fundamental assumptions; and a commitment to regular de-briefing of what is being done, what is being learned and what knowledge is being developed and shared.

¹ He further footnotes that political science is notably absent in the production of entrepreneurship research.

The commitment to co-operative effort is easier to make in principle than to sustain in practice, as we learned right at the outset from our research. Indeed, it deliberately ‘problematizes’ things which might otherwise be taken for granted. For example, in keeping with the spirit of co-operative inquiry, we agreed to keep journals and to share our notes with each other. After doing this a couple of times, we found ourselves wondering whether we were conscious of writing for an audience or whether our notes were as spontaneous as they might otherwise be. There were also times when decisions or concerns raised by one were slightly frustrating for the others.

Project Development and Data Collection Design

A cooperative inquiry can be considered in phases (Heron & Reason 2001) and this approach essentially guided the conduct of this research.

Phase 1 saw the formation of the cooperative inquiry group and was designed to refine and agree the focus and data gathering procedures. The three authors formed members of the cooperative inquiry group and each signed an agreement (refer Appendix A) giving their mutual consent to the taking of notes and tape-recording of conversations they had with each other during the research project. The cooperative inquiry group agreed to meet on at least three occasions to contribute text and references through open discussion and dialogue. Individual note-taking by each member of the cooperative inquiry group was the main means for data collection and each member was to contribute journal notes subsequent to the meetings. As a back-up and reference tool the meetings were recorded. Two meetings were timed to be conducted prior to a separate reference group meeting, (described below) and one post the reference group meeting.

Phase 2 invited a second group known as a reference group to join with the co-researchers to explore the differences incited by considering entrepreneurship as a discipline and a domain of practice. A framing of entrepreneurship as a domain of practice, (refer Appendix B) was circulated as a trigger for the extended inquiry into the implications for research approaches, educational practice, policy development and ways of theorising. This frame was not the subject of critique but rather a background to the notion of a domain of practice and each participant was asked to approach the session with whatever perception they had of both the discipline and domain of practice views.

This group purposefully explored the implications of these definitional tensions raised for educational practices and policy development, (refer Appendix C for the questions put to the group). The participants were researchers and educators from across Swinburne University of Technology and particularly from the Faculty of Business and Enterprise. The reference group participated in a one and a half hour session which involved the use of a computer-based brainstorming tool. Each participant worked at an individual computer screen and responded, via the keyboard, to questions and prompts that appeared on the screen. Although seated in the same room, they were requested not to speak to other participants, but rather to consider themselves in an online environment. A software package called GrouputerNet placed all typed comments on the screen, in the order in which they were queued. The visible group display panel recording the group’s input did not reveal the individual contributor’s name or alias.

The reference group session was initially a 30 minute brainstorming session designed to draw out the reference groups diverse thoughts on the distinctions between a discipline and a domain of practice. This was then followed by a 15 minute individual reflection (using the same technology) by the participants on their experience of using the technology. A third section in the session followed with a further 30 minutes of brainstorming around a set of questions directly linking the definitional stance to teaching, learning, policy formation and research method implications. A final 15 minutes of further reflection by the participants on their experience of using the technology concluded the session. The resulting text was recorded into a group-session document and printed as a report.

In Phase 3, the co-researchers conducted further discussion sessions which were both stimulated by the data of the reference group and by our own continuing struggle with the paradoxes already described. Of particular interest were the implications for research-based policy development for the Global Entrepreneurship Monitor project.

THE APPLICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COOPERATIVE INQUIRY

We decided to take up a co-operative inquiry because we wanted a method that was both sufficiently robust and sufficiently flexible to hold a sophisticated and sustained exploration shared by three people. Its protocols were used to guide and inform our work as we attempted one of the core disciplines of scholarly work: to hold ideas in opposition to, or in creative tension with one another. The following exposes the development of the work and exhibits one way a cooperative research project is applied and implemented in the field of entrepreneurship.

Phase 1 – Initiating the Cooperative Inquiry Group

Although the group had moved reasonably quickly to an ‘in principle’ agreement to form a co-operative inquiry group, in the following days we spent some time discussing what that would mean for us.

An extract from Nita’s reflective diary note summarises a conversation between Allan and Nita which highlights some of the key issues:

Allan was concerned that a key word was collective and that we couldn’t really get far without her (Trish). As we explored it, we got to the point of thinking that maybe a distinguishing feature of this kind of inquiry is that it follows the messiness of real life rather than being as organised and choreographed as a planned project. It’s a method that parallels real world policy-making – and living – with all its discontinuity, messiness, absence.

We wondered whether ‘holding’ of this kind of inquiry means committing to a quality of conversation: for example, making sure that we keep each other in the loop, being prepared to be aware of what we are doing, doing journal work after each session.

We also talked about the cycles of the work and the fact that we will be in different spaces.... (NC 7-10-2005)

This conversation reveals one of the paradoxes of co-operative inquiry. While on the one hand it accommodates ‘real life’ – our real lives, in this case – its flexibility brings with it a requirement for great discipline. The protocols of the research call for transparency; a ‘meta-awareness’ of what the participants are doing, thinking and assuming, individually and collectively; and calls for courtesy and respect for one another’s perspectives and needs. It also demands a willingness to not simply ‘reflect’ on things but to bump into things and as a result, be forced to ‘look again’.

This can be demanding and at times, inconvenient. Things cannot be taken for granted and familiar things can become problematic in surprising ways. Another exchange between Nita and Allan, this time via email, illustrates this point:

Allan to Nita: ‘Surely the (ethics) process and procedure is not meant to stop us being human and having a conversation?.....How can this possibly not be okay?....I’m trusting that you are testing the waters somewhat with the methodology and procedure and therefore I’m being very open with my line of thinking, so I’m not intending to be offensive.....How do cooperative inquiry groups generally determine issues of process and procedure when there is divided opinion? (AOC 9-10-2005).

The way we answered the question was by not getting hooked into argument but asking for and receiving space to inquire into the issue that concerned us both. That required, as a minimum, good manners but also the leavening of humour provided by Trish (‘what’s with angry Allan?!’) and implicit recognition that this was one of the first real tests of our commitment to work together in a particular way.

At a very early stage in the process we also discussed the roles each of us would take, acknowledging that three minds, occupying different life worlds, might bring three quite different perspectives to bear on each interaction, event or data set. As events played out, we agreed that each of us would hold a particular perspective for the group: one the perspective of teaching and learning, one the perspective of policy development and one the perspective of methodology. That did not preclude any one of us from pursuing any other line of inquiry or note taking or literature review, but meant that we each

took responsibility for holding one of the key threads in the inquiry and bringing together the data relating to it.

Already we found ourselves asking how the protocols we were developing and testing for our own immediate research purpose might play out in the classroom or in the debating and development of policy. Could those dialogues take the form of cooperative inquiry? With what implications?

Phase 2 – Working with the Reference Group Data Set

Subsequent to our initial cooperative inquiry group sessions we invited the reference group together to assemble their ideas and conceptualisations on some of the issues. Through the computer-based ‘brainstorming’ session, we invited the participants to engage with both the idea of entrepreneurship as discipline and the idea of entrepreneurship as domain of practice. We were interested to track if they made different associations with each of them. Through the brainstorm itself, the two ideas were deliberately held in tension by the structure of the questions asked. But they were also held in tension by the spontaneous inquiry of the participants themselves.

We found that at the outset, the group of people who participated in our computer ‘brainstorm’ seemed to have some trouble in defining the concept of discipline. Interestingly enough, their dialogue began with the question: ‘What is a discipline?’ A major theme we constructed directly from their text was one of difficulty, right from the outset, in defining a discipline per se and even wondering whether it mattered very much as an idea. About forty per cent of their remarks were focused upon the idea of what a discipline is and or does and about the same percentage of the text was expressed as a question rather than a statement about the nature of a discipline and its connection with entrepreneurship.

When thinking about its meaning in relation to entrepreneurship, another clear and consistent theme in their text was the difficulty in making a useful connection: ‘Defining entrepreneurship is hard enough – defining it as a discipline is challenging’; ‘If a discipline is a coherent body of knowledge, is Entrepreneurship like that? What is the body of knowledge that constitutes Entrepreneurship? Don’t think it exists’.

Even without a clear definition of the term, the group’s dialogue did move into an exploration of the implications of defining entrepreneurship as a discipline and the connections made by the group on a whole were negative. As mentioned earlier, the notion of discipline seemed restrictive and limiting and not of much practical value. However there were some comments about boundaries and boundedness that triggered a very significant conversation for the cooperative inquiry group, as we ourselves debated the advantages as well as the disadvantages of either framing entrepreneurship as a discipline or, at the very least, taking a disciplined approach to entrepreneurship (Sull, 2004).

Phase 3 – The Cooperative Inquiry Group Dialogue

As we engaged with the tensions arising from both our own framing of the ‘discipline’ versus ‘domain of practice’ contrast, and from Fabian’s (2000) framing of the controversies raging in the management discipline, it struck us that practitioners can and do resolve these tensions in their own way.

They can adopt a position of indifference (‘the debates are irrelevant’) or puzzlement (‘it’s just too hard’) therefore leaving them to practice in whatever way is informed by their practical experience of entrepreneurship. Others, interested in bringing scholarship to bear on their practice, can identify with a single or unified paradigm (Fabian’s ‘solidarity’ perspective). There might be others who try to work with a few paradigms that they are able to integrate in some way, for example, by drawing on different paradigms depending on the level of analysis they are interested in, such as system-wide or organisational or individual entrepreneurship (Fabian’s integrated perspective).

They might also avoid a dominant paradigm altogether (Fabian’s segregation perspective). It occurred to us that this position is consistent with the stance of ‘bricolage’: the activity of improvisation or ‘making do’ with whatever is to hand (Levi-Strauss, 1967) that has been taken up by some researchers (for example, Denzen and Lincoln, 1994).

As noted earlier, we observed a relative difficulty experienced by our participant group in making an immediate, strong, shared or consistently helpful connection between ‘discipline’ and ‘entrepreneurship’, in the context of our admittedly small and contained brainstorm. We could have been forgiven for thinking that this was a group of individuals wrestling with the issue for the first time. That is unlikely to be the case, given their status as researchers, educators and doctoral candidates. We then concluded that, at the very least, there was no set of common understandings of entrepreneurship as a discipline (expressed either in terms of superficial language or deeply shared paradigms) that this group was drawing upon.

We wondered whether this group of entrepreneurs, scholars and educators was more likely to be operating from a stance of what Fabian (2000) has called ‘segregation’: a range of very different paradigms. This would be consistent with the group’s general preference for the idea of entrepreneurship as ‘domain of practice’ and the attractive freedom to choose one’s own approach that they generally associated with that.

This led us to speculate, in turn, whether entrepreneurs are more likely to be drawn to the ‘bricolage’ approach. Located by Baker and Aldrich (2000) within the larger context of improvisation theory, this is a stance that values resourcefulness, inventiveness, alertness to opportunity and what is available, persistence and the capacity to link means with end in unusual ways. These are all qualities or behaviours that could be reasonably associated with entrepreneurship and it intrigued us to consider whether they would carry into practice, into research and the linkages between them.

This is an idea we would like to explore further – and one which certainly lends itself to further inquiry. As Sull (2004) has observed, a commitment to *disciplined entrepreneurship* involves protocols for rigour in practice, and we would argue that these protocols can be formed and informed by the lessons of experience, the guidance of theory and the features of the deeper paradigms which can inform both theory and practice.

However, we need to put this proposition in the context of other possibilities, including the possibility that other colleagues would seek to strengthen the claim to discipline status by narrowing the focus of both teaching and research. Indeed, it is clear from the example of Shane (2003) that the narrowing of the very definition of entrepreneurship has been one way in which some of the most influential writers and researchers have sought to identify a unique status or location for this activity which would assist its claims to being an academic discipline.

At the outset of this research project we had intended to generally explore the implications of the definitional shifts we have outlined above on policy, education and entrepreneurship research. As the richness and depth of the cooperative inquiry method revealed itself we found ourselves overwhelmed with data and possible directions. In the interests of parsimony and containment we found ourselves having to limit the scope of our discussions and direct our attentions more generally toward educational policy frameworks and its relationship to teaching and learning practice as we have encountered it in our roles at Swinburne University of Technology. This paper then has essentially become the first of a suite of papers that will evolve as we continue the inquiry and develop our joint thinking. We present in this paper a brief summary of particular findings in two areas; education policy and teaching and learning.

Bringing Educational Policy into Focus

The cooperative inquiry method itself provided a key influence as the implications for policy were being extracted. This evolved from a recurring theme in our cooperative inquiry group dialogue – ‘concept migration’ – that referred to the way that many of our discussions on policy (and education) were sparked or migrated from the discussion on the method and the domain of entrepreneurship practice definition. To illustrate this point the notion of policy-making being a very human practice migrated from our discussion on the cooperative inquiry method and this is represented in Nita’s journal notes that state:

“... maybe a distinguishing characteristic of this kind of inquiry is that it follows the messiness of real life ... It’s a method that parallels real world policy-making – and living – with all its discontinuity, messiness, absence”, (NC 7-10-2005)

And, similarly, Allan’s notes that read:

“The meeting with Nita today tended to focus on the methodological issues with respect to a cooperative inquiry and its parallels in policy and education. The essence for me was taking the artificial act of research into the human realm of life”, (AOC 7-10-2005).

This highlighted the need to keep in mind that policy-makers are human, generally facing the same frustrations and life demands as the rest of the world and that policy-making happens within this environment. The method also raised the need for rigour to be encapsulated within that ‘human’ frame. That is, policy-making may occur in the absence of some voice or voices in the process or perhaps with embedded misunderstandings or misinterpretations, both of which we encountered over the course of the project. However the cooperative inquiry method encourages and to some extent forces the re-visiting of concepts to view them from many angles. We observed that generally human experience does not necessarily adopt such rigour and another pertinent recurring theme in our dialogue was ‘quality of conversation’ whereby our efforts were particularly and mindfully tuned to maintaining the inquiry and not just holding a dialogue.

Demonstrating this attention to inquiry there are consistent references to the notion of ‘tension’ in the journal notes from each member of the cooperative inquiry group. From the outset we were holding the concept of a ‘domain of practice’ as a central focus but equally and at every step of the way we were contrasting the concept with the notion of entrepreneurship as a discipline. This tension was also held within the conduct of the reference group meeting and from the policy perspective the two frames seemed to direct considerable difference in the way policy-making may be approached.

On the question of whether a ‘domain of practice’ view altered the economic and social value of entrepreneurship, it immediately drew two different kinds of responses from the reference group. The first a negative comment “I don’t think it does, sorry” and the other more positive “It makes it accessible to all”. Much of this tension may be grounded in a lack of agreed and accepted definition of what a discipline is versus that of a domain of practice but never-the-less the breadth of what entrepreneurship could be is evidenced in these two diametrically opposed views.

Interestingly as the brainstorming in the reference group progressed a distinction between the two definitions began to emerge. For instance on the domain of practice view the comment “it empowers everyone” was reinforced by another that said “I think that disciplines don’t empower, they seek to separate the power from others (in practice)”. Further, the value of entrepreneurship as a domain of practice was described at the extremes from the individual through to the social as represented in the following: “It might drive the value of it down to [the] individual with [re]spect to how the[y] engage with economic and social activity” and another that said “[I]t is all embracing in a way that a discipline is not – it can achieve links and webs and mazes that are inclusive rather than stratifying contributors and recipients, it can move toward recipients being part of the system of innovation, implementation and contribution”.

The individual and social contexts were also a central point of discussion in the cooperative inquiry group. One point that emerged from our deliberations related to identity and the impact of the different definitions on the identities of those engaged in the domain of entrepreneurship practice. This was best captured by Trish’s comment “it is a group identity process but I’m linking this to the group searching for an identity and actually being able to reflect the identity in the curriculum.” The identity factor was further attributed to professional practice reflected by Nita “... unless you belong to a profession that for political or other reasons wants to keep [agreement] in the fact that it is a discipline ... psychology is a very good example of a profession that wants to hold a [robust] discipline frame because it [partly] suffers as a poor relation to medicine when it comes to government funding...”. The holding of an identity through announcement of a discipline is then something that has importance on the political stage for credibility, funding, legitimacy and community standing.

This identity struggle is encountered in the academic structuring of entrepreneurship. The US Academy of Management (2003) for instance describes entrepreneurship as a specific domain dealing with the creation and management of new businesses, small business and family business along with issues associated with the entrepreneur. This description at first takes the ‘domain’ view that appears to anticipate the expansive nature of entrepreneurship where it engages the social and economic environmental factors as inputs and produces social and economic consequences. However it then proceeds to narrow this conceptualisation down to the *creation* and *management* issues of business in three contexts – new, small and family – and tags on issues with the entrepreneur. It seems that while acknowledging the broad position

it is the narrow perspective that overrides it and perhaps this is because encompassing the whole would risk being trapped outside of the policy and funding mechanisms that sustains an academic's very existence.

An OECD (2004) report argues "the need for policymakers to take into account the 'package' of business environment factors, and the need for policy to be adapted to specific contexts, trade-offs being inevitable and there being no 'one-size-fits-all' formula" (p. 5). This view of entrepreneurship policy seems to support the notion of a domain of practice; that policy-making from a variety of portfolios influences entrepreneurship, in different ways and is reflected in many contexts.

However the same report is framed in such a way that it ignores its own advice and takes a very particular, and we would argue, narrow view. It states:

"The vocation of this report is neither to address the definitional issues nor to cover the broad span of entrepreneurial activity in the economy. Rather the report focuses on a segment of the entrepreneurship spectrum – *the pre-start-up, start-up, and to an extent, the early-post start-up phases of entrepreneurial activity*", (OECD 2004, p. 5).

This dual positioning of the report in policy-making circles articulates clearly the difficulty with framing entrepreneurship as a disciplinary field and acts to evidence the confusion in the definitional debate.

Therefore, we propose that there are two worlds each co-located under the entrepreneurship domain of practice; one that expresses the social dynamic of entrepreneurship practice – where individuals indulge in the discipline of starting and growing businesses – and the other that takes on the study of entrepreneurship where the dynamics of scholarly practice take centre stage and adopts by necessity a disciplinary frame to delineate resource channels. In the words of Allan making the distinction between these two spheres or domains:

"The difference in domains [scholarly and social] is the purpose, source and use of resources and the purpose, source and use of knowledge/information.

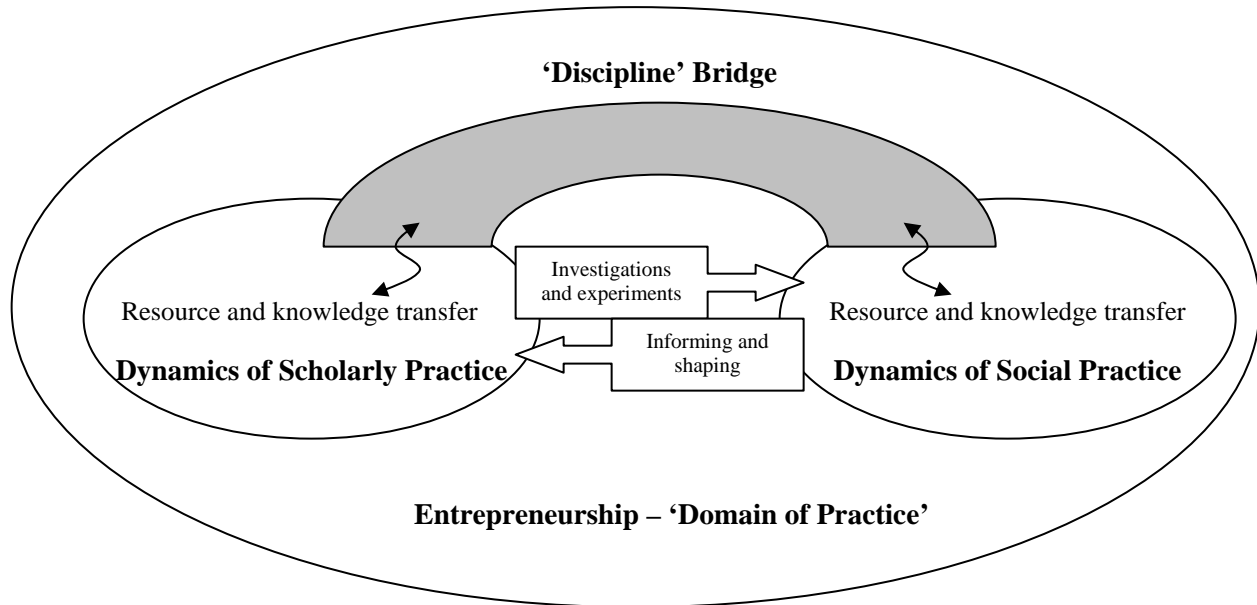
Put really crudely, an entrepreneur doesn't give two hoots about an academic publication in their social space of doing entrepreneurship however they will care if the knowledge that is disseminated to them helps, improves or in some way makes a difference to their role in the social space. The metrics between the two domains are different but each domain is dependent on the other. With different metrics the justification of resources is also different, the two domains operate and justify their existence differently", (AOC 22/11/2005)

This poses an interesting dilemma as we move into a world of post-modernism. An article by Ogbar (2000) following the postmodern, deconstructionist and critical theory traditions proposes that "the concept of entrepreneurship is discriminatory, gender-biased, ethnocentrically determined and ideologically controlled, sustaining not only prevailing societal biases, but serving as a tapestry for unexamined and contradictory assumptions and knowledge about the reality of entrepreneurs", (p. 605). The research agenda that is suggested by Ogbar's positioning does not allow adherence to the disciplinary focus of new venture creation that is often grounded upon the foundations of notable and authoritative authors such as Schumpeter, ([1934] 1961). Further, policy is oft considered and critiqued from this viewpoint – see for instance Hart (2003). Schumpeter's account of entrepreneurship introduces a bias that says it is a positive influence on economic development and therefore policy inherently reinforces this belief system. If scholars depart from this perspective they are likely to be marginalized from the 'discipline', perhaps starved of funding opportunities and find themselves in places of learning that do not attract the attention of the general community. However this circumstance is counterproductive to scholarly practice whereby the work of a social scientist is to maintain social constructs in tension – testing their validity, examining their implications, and exploring the meaning in different contexts.

Figure 1 places the scholarly and social dynamics within the domain of entrepreneurship practice. Traditionally it would appear that the 'discipline' status has served as bridge between the two parallel dynamic worlds of the scholar and practitioner each dependent on the other in the exchange of ideas and knowledge. The resource base for each has also been dependent upon the existence of a structured discipline each serving the other whereby the discipline status attracts teaching revenue and research funds.

The current policy environment in Australia seems to reinforce the continuation of this traditional teaching and research model of mass education, standardized learning/teaching and disciplinary research.

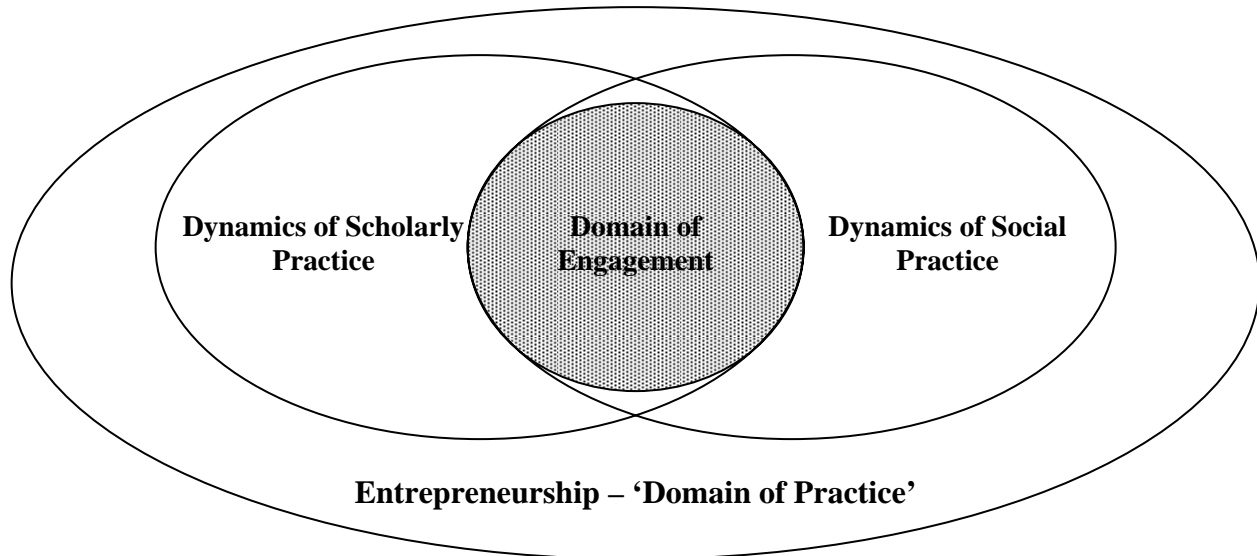
Figure 1: Relating ‘Discipline’ to ‘Domain of Practice’



A different perspective on policy-making would by contrast allow the adoption of different viewpoints; celebrate pioneering work and the discovery of deep insight that might challenge the existing paradigmatic thinking. In a postmodern world the very social construction that sustains the scholarly and social dynamics would come under scrutiny and ask: is this appropriate and what are the implications of working in this way? To create the postmodern world of post-disciplinary status it also requires a postmodern view on policy-making that enables the emergence of new ways of relating. This research has raised those questions and we suggest that entrepreneurship is trapped into today’s focus of disciplinary study with its resources and survival dependent upon maintenance of the status quo. Entrepreneurship itself is a social construction, is flexible and capable of being responsive to interpretation, malleable in its form and subject to multiple perspectives from a plethora of voices. Therefore it would seem right to allow different social constructions to share a place in the scholarly debate and subject the dominant ‘disciplinary’ thinking to examination in a rigorous fashion in accordance with social science principles (Goss, 2005).

However, there is no escaping the fact that entrepreneurship exists within the social sphere and it can not be suggested that the scholarly practice can be divorced from its social heritage and linkage. What our work does raise is a question on how scholarly practice can be maintained while remaining outside of the influence of deterministic structures. Figure 2 proposes a different model of exchange between the scholar and social dynamics and suggests that a domain of practice alters the relationship between the two spaces and calls for new policies that will keep pace with progress in the social science fields.

Figure 2: Postmodern Construction of Scholarly and Social Dynamics



The Teaching and Learning Focus

Swinburne University of Technology takes seriously an aspirational belief that all sectors of the academy and wider community can be enriched by entrepreneurial thinking. We have mapped the goal of behaving entrepreneurially into the graduate attributes we expect our students to achieve, with our facilitation. This position is consistent with the Stevenson and Jarillo (1990) summary of entrepreneurship as the pursuit of opportunity, rather than the size of a business or its stage in the life cycle.

Looked at from the converse position, what is it in terms of knowledge that other ‘disciplines’ may find attractive to appropriate from entrepreneurship studies? If entrepreneurship were a discipline would we not see great combinations and re-combinations of disciplines, moving towards a new discipline – in affect, a collision of knowledges. Again, if we look at the promotion of entrepreneurship in the university sector and treat this as the appropriation of activities, bits of knowledge, tools, skill-sets, attitudes and ways of being – then it seems no hard task to aspire to being ‘entrepreneurial’, because from this position there is no effrontery to a discipline; no taking over a knowledge base with stealth; no silent creep toward owning more of the work the discipline staked as its own.

Arising strongly from the review of the line-by-line text analysis of the reference group data were two themes related to education. The first theme was ‘educational tolerance’. Educational tolerance incorporates reference to the educational institution, the educators themselves and the students. Educational tolerance is vital for the growth and development of knowledge and good levels of educational tolerance are necessary for the teaching-learning framework to be robust.

If the level of educational tolerance is poor, in that the dominant frameworks for informing curricula are protected from challenge, then the likelihood is that what is provided as entrepreneurship education will be impoverished. Commensurate with the role of the education provider in conveying educational tolerance is the desire to engage students’ to be educationally tolerant – that is to value the hall-marks of a robust curriculum which include relevance to the wider world, an understanding of the economic and social principles in which their ambitions are located, developing critical thinking skills and developing the ability to incorporate and apply knowledge.

The second theme which arose from the data review was assigned the title of ‘bounded-unbounded’. This theme represents the inherent and recurring tension which was so apparent in the data related to exploring entrepreneurship as a domain of practice and/or as a discipline. The use of words in the data represented a bounded view of discipline in that it was considered to be limiting and constraining and

inconsistent with entrepreneurship. Whereas when the reference group responded to the question about entrepreneurship as a domain of practice, they expressed a sense of energy, movement and freedom.

Practitioners in entrepreneurship are forewarned both in academic studies (Busenitz & Barney, 1997; Ucbasaran, Westhead & Wright, 2001; Zahra, Neubaum and Hagrassy, 2002) and through popular sources, about the vicissitudes of uncertainty. This advice centres on the dilemmas of engaging with the market-place, issues related to financing of endeavours, competition and competing with others to name a few major contenders for the uncertainty award.

Each of these is an external factor which we seek to understand and interpret and then explain to students of entrepreneurship. To manage uncertainty students need to appreciate how they deal with uncertainty in themselves; there is little point in practising entrepreneurship without appreciating how you take up the role of entrepreneur and if indeed you can. But we do little to promote this understanding. The field of individual and organisation psychodynamics embraces the study of uncertainty but little of this work appears in the entrepreneurship literature or curricula. It is an area deserving of further study and research in order to explore the relationship between a well established area of study with particular understanding and its application in the field of entrepreneurship.

IMPLICATIONS FOR GEM RESEARCH

The necessity of policy research work is driven by societal demands. The community today is far more educated and capable of initiating response to the needs of the community and making demands on government to support these needs than was the case 30 years ago. This suggests that the policy research agenda of governments needs to respond to the community demands rather than the demands of politicians. Bardouille (2000) goes so far as to claim that the “state has become a benefactor, of sorts, to the market,” (p. 82).

The GEM project, and the entrepreneurship policy direction it has taken, appears to have been driven not by societal demand but rather by the academic community in search of relevancy to the public policy debate². Granted, entrepreneurship is reported to be an important dimension to economic development due to its propensity to create jobs and raise living standards, (Audretsch 1999; Bates & Dunham 1993; Begley & Tan 2001; Birch 1987; Hart 2003; Parker 2004; Kotkin 1993; Van Praag 1999); however the policy and research questions arising from this phenomenon are not necessarily those of a global agenda but those of a national agenda. That is not to say that nations can not learn from national comparisons and indeed the role of a GEM can usefully contribute to this enhanced learning. The more interesting questions that arise in a political agenda are those that flow from the constituents of a nation – and especially so from a nation with a more developed economy facing the question of where to from here? To this any GEM national team must have its ear firmly and clearly receptive to the entrepreneurship needs of its own nation.

From an international perspective, it is not how well does one nation do as compared to another in the field of entrepreneurship that is of direct importance, (assuming that the question of what entrepreneurship is can be reconciled), but rather how is entrepreneurship affected by international pressures in a given nation in terms of export markets, threats or opportunities from imported products and foreign business entities, capital flows, people mobility and international variations in education, labour and resource costs. These points may have significant influence on a nations’ ability to utilise entrepreneurship as a socio-economic development lever. Questions then arise about how a nation’s entrepreneurship policy responds to these pressures. Perhaps then the role of a global entrepreneurship monitor is not one of monitoring the rate of business start-up and growth but rather a monitor of the international factors that influence a nation’s rate of business start-up and growth.

Qualitative research methods have been more frequently used as evaluative frameworks for policy either alongside quantitative evaluation or as a stand-alone method, (Curran & Storey, 2000). However, qualitative research methods, and more generally variation in culture of inquiry, can serve as a useful means to building theory and policy by delving more deeply into that which resides beneath the high level

² The GEM project was initiated through the discussions of two academics each from one of the foundation institutions; London Business School, UK and Babson College, USA.

monitoring activities of entrepreneurship. The expert interviews conducted by the GEM teams are predominantly used to indicate which policy framework conditions support or impede entrepreneurship. Beyond or behind this classification sits a store of data in the interview transcripts that perhaps suggests much more in terms of a nation's interest in entrepreneurship. A focus on difference rather than consensus – or the thematic analysis – when approaching the data may deliver new directions that have been previously unexplored. Analysis from the viewpoint of clusters across industries, policy framework expertise, regions, types of ventures, size of ventures, extent and/or type of entrepreneurship participation, gender or any number of other perspectives may reveal new insight into the issues and national psyche for entrepreneurship. In essence approaching the qualitative data from a new and different perspective may reveal policy research directions not previously explored and offers the opportunity to hear and amplify the voice of a nation to achieve the ultimate aim of informing policy.

The benefits of a global consortium in entrepreneurship research must not be underestimated however. To add to this enhanced field of inquiry at the national level the capacity to form a cooperative inquiry group to coordinate international comparisons using the same techniques across multiple nations can greatly assist in understanding differences that are just not available to an isolated and solitary research team operating from within one cultural environment. Contrasting findings across nations adds to scientific rigour as mediating variables can be assessed or isolated. Take for example an inquiry that clusters together the respondent data from all those representing the education and training framework condition in a nation and interrogates the data to establish the nature of entrepreneurship education that dominates each education sectors agenda. Variance across nations given differences in economic and social development, technology infrastructure or other factors may reveal issues that are just not obvious to one nation conducting an isolated study in only one cultural setting. The global nature of the research team can vastly increase the rate of progress and advance of knowledge that would otherwise rely upon the much slower cycles of publications, conferences and randomly distributed informal networks.

FURTHER RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

In establishing our cooperative inquiry we were particularly keen to avoid 'either/or' thinking and we set out with the purpose to explore the nature and value of ideas through paradoxical thinking. We wanted our inquiry to be both critical and appreciative and to encourage us, through reflexive iteration of both texts and direct conversation, to avoid sometimes unhelpful reductionist thinking. This is a variation of Bleakley's (1999) framing of reflexive activity: a text created from our ideas/words becomes sufficiently detached from us to be both 'us' and 'not us'. It is not only *reflective*, like a mirror in which we see ourselves as we are, but is *reflexive*: something which bounces back at us, which we can trip over, bump into, recoil from and which can mark us, 'strike' us, even change us if we let it, as Cunliffe (2002) observes in her description of reflexive dialogical practice in the context of management learning.

Throughout the research we found ourselves absorbed with holding many ideas in tension – allowing them to collide and recede from one another. We have not been able to unpack them all in this paper and that has been a source of significant frustration in writing. However, these concepts provide us with further areas of investigation and a 'short list' of these possibilities looks like this:

- The notion of discipline and the notion of field of practice as a way of 'locating' entrepreneurship.
- Discipline as entailing the elements of both constraint (in holding to the constraints of a discipline's protocols) and freedom (to use the protocols to engage helpfully with new and complex data, situations and ideas).
- A questioning of the usefulness of the strict disciplinary thinking in a post-disciplinary age.
- Ideas about what is unique to the concept of entrepreneurship and what is shared with many other fields of practice and scholarship.
- Ideas about entrepreneur as individual (and therefore attempting to understand the dynamics of the individual) and entrepreneurship (an activity which occurs and can only be understood in a social context).

- The educational challenge of meeting the immediate needs of individuals whose focus is ‘me’ and ‘right now’, and the scholarly aspiration to locate entrepreneurship in its own history and philosophy and to realise that it can only be understood through deep regard for the context which tolerates, ignores or supports it.
- The many different disciplines which inform entrepreneurship as practice and scholarship.
- The notion of co-operative inquiry itself as both artistry and science
- Holding to the protocols of both appreciative and critical inquiry
- The idea of *bricolage* as one of the ‘moods’ or cycles or modes of co-operative inquiry – whatever comes to hand, resourcefulness, improvisation – contrasted with the discipline of the inquiry implied by critical subjectivity (Zuber-Skerritt, 1992).
- Entrepreneurship itself as both *bricolage* (freedom to play and do whatever is necessary) and disciplined thought and activity, moving in and through cycles.
- Disciplinary and post-disciplinary knowledge: the merging of knowledge and the creation and exploration of new ‘white spaces’: what is known creating more unknowns.
- New knowledge created from positions of both knowing and not-knowing.

We are aware that some of these themes have been barely or not at all touched upon in this paper but wish to report them as an indicator of the range and depth of the inquiry undertaken and the future inquiries planned. In that sense, our process has been rich and engaging in its own right, complete and satisfying while being a sampler of what might be.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has attempted to demonstrate the journey of a cooperative inquiry method and exhibit the way in which it develops. The value of the method lies in its richness and intensity although it comes at a cost of testing relationships and substantial commitment to both the colleagues and the process. Both the value and the cost are tied to the scholarly endeavour for a rigorous and robust method of inquiry.

The reflections we have presented here are only those that we were able to contain within the confines of one paper and fall short of our original endeavour. The positive from this – indeed one of the strengths of a good cooperative inquiry – is the number of new directions that arise that are captured and continue to stimulate our thinking and research activities.

Our main findings from the imposed tension between an entrepreneurship discipline and a domain of practice suggest that the two concepts are burdened with particular dynamics created by social constructions. The challenge this presents in the educational policy context is creating new and innovative ways of relating the scholarly and social practice dynamics. Indeed, having isolated a specific area from the explorative inquiry this question in and of itself could well be the subject of the next phase of the cooperative inquiry.

From the perspective of teaching we found many parallels with research and entrepreneur practice that are represented by the term *bricolage*. This term raises the prospect of both working with what is at hand but at the same time doing – either research or ‘entrepreneurial’ – with the dedication and discipline of a well grounded practice.

The inclusiveness of the entrepreneurship ‘domain of practice’ perspective, whether framed by our own definition or some other mental construction, found favour in our inquiry and generally to the reference group participants. It provided a freedom and coherence that seemed true to the nature of entrepreneurship in practice. However this post-disciplinary conception raises significant challenges to governments forging education policy and we consider that the issues raised by our domain of practice proposition suggests a need for further scholarly inquiry to find new ways of providing resources and achieving knowledge transfer in the education system. The GEM project is a unique vehicle within which new explorations can be conducted to fervently examine the social constructions that support the disciplinary notion of entrepreneurship and propose new solutions for modern governments.

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APPENDIX A

Co-operative Inquirer's Agreement

The undersigned hereby acknowledge the formation of a Cooperative Inquiry Group, (CIG) consisting of Professor Nita Cherry, Associate Professor Patricia Buckley, and Allan O'Connor for the purpose of conducting research on the implications of a 'Domain of Practice' definition of entrepreneurship on education and policy-making in Australia. It is intended that this group produces a paper from the research "*Defining entrepreneurship as a 'domain of practice': Implications for theory and research for policy and education*" to be presented at the AGSE Regional Frontiers conference in February 2006 or an alternative publication outlet as mutually agreed.

Members of the CIG commit to open and transparent contribution throughout the inquiry process and procedure and declare that all data produced through the designated dialogue sessions will be available for analysis and reporting in the final paper, unless specifically agreed otherwise with all members, and while maintaining anonymity in any resulting publication. Data collection methods will incorporate tape recording and note-taking.

CIG Members

Professor Nita Cherry

Signature _____ Date _____

Associate Professor Patricia Buckley

Signature _____ Date _____

Allan O'Connor

Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX B

ENTREPRENEURSHIP: A DOMAIN OF PRACTICE DEFINITION

Allan O'Connor

Nita Cherry

with Patricia Buckley

Framing entrepreneurship as a single discipline is both difficult to sustain conceptually and unhelpful for informing practice. Like leadership and strategy, entrepreneurship is a very complex domain of human practice which is global in its occurrence and archetypical as a phenomenon, for which there are no enduring rules or solutions.

As a multi-layered and multi-dimensional phenomenon, and again in common with leadership and strategy, it attracts popular as well as academic interest, colonisation by consulting firms, multi-disciplinary frames to describe and explain it, multi-cultural interest, and very diverse theories and research methodologies that are poorly integrated both in practice and conceptually.

Framing it as a domain of practice, rather treating it as a single discipline may encourage us to use a rich and broader range of ways in which to develop theory about it, research it, teach it and develop policy about it.

In that spirit, we'd like to offer a definition of entrepreneurship as a 'domain of practice' that is inclusive enough to take in the following notions:

- the creation of significant value/capital of many kinds:
 - economic value (including freedom from poverty as well as the accumulation of wealth)
 - empowerment (control over life and work choices for individuals and communities; one of the reasons many women become entrepreneurial is so they don't have to work for someone else)
 - social capital, which includes empowerment but also takes up other dimensions like the creation of individual and collective capability and confidence and social fabric (which includes trust, includes connection, acceptance and inclusion)
- in ways that involve many dimensions of innovation and creativity
- in accelerated periods of time
- in many contexts.

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONS POSED TO REFERENCE GROUP

1. Describe your favourite colour in as many ways as you can. (This is a practice question).
2. What does entrepreneurship mean for you if it is defined as a Discipline?
3. What does entrepreneurship mean for you if it is defined as a Domain of Practice?
4. Describe the 'Grouputer' experience for you so far. EXAMPLES: Describe whether it has been easy or difficult and why? Describe how it has affected the quality or quantity of your input?
5. Describe how the Domain of Practice definitional approach may influence your teaching of entrepreneurship practices?
6. What are the main elements of learning in a Domain of Practice definition that are distinct from the Discipline definitional approach?
7. How would practitioners of entrepreneurship defined through a Domain of Practice be assisted by government policy?
8. How, if at all, does the Domain of Practice definition alter the economic and social value of entrepreneurship?
9. Please comment on the 'Grouputer' data collection method as a research tool.
10. In what ways, if at all, could you use this method in your research?