



## **Progressing Context in Entrepreneurship Education: Reflections from a Delphi Study**

Downloaded from: <https://research.chalmers.se>, 2024-03-20 11:46 UTC

Citation for the original published paper (version of record):

Ramsgaard, M., Thomassen, M., Williams Middleton, K. (2023). Progressing Context in Entrepreneurship Education: Reflections from a Delphi Study. FGF Studies in Small Business and Entrepreneurship: 155-169. [http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-28559-2\\_11](http://dx.doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-28559-2_11)

N.B. When citing this work, cite the original published paper.

# Progressing Context in Entrepreneurship Education: Reflections from a Delphi Study



Michael Breum Ramsgaard, Mette Lindahl Thomassen,  
and Karen Williams Middleton

**Abstract** Stimulating entrepreneurial agency among citizens, companies, and organizations is a central objective of many policymakers, potentially requiring arenas for innovation, networks of advisors, training, infrastructure, and finances, among other things. Nonetheless, central to agency is the individual's own willingness and empowerment to engage. Some aspects of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial action have been argued to be broadly applicable across disciplines, geographies, and cultures, while others are significantly dependent upon a set of variables in which one is embedded. Thus, considering ways in which the contextual complexity of entrepreneurship (and education) is represented in entrepreneurship education is critical. Recent literature establishes that it is important to design for and with context in entrepreneurship education (Thomassen, et al., *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research* 26(5):863–886, 2020), but we lack documented knowledge regarding how this can and potentially should be done. In this chapter, we aim to progress a research agenda by identifying current challenges and future opportunities brought forward by experts in entrepreneurship education research through a Delphi study in order to advance the contextualization of entrepreneurship education.

**Keywords** Context · Learning design · Delphi study · Entrepreneurship education · Contextualization

---

M. B. Ramsgaard  
Research Center for Innovation & Entrepreneurship, VIA University College, Aarhus, Denmark  
e-mail: [mibj@via.dk](mailto:mibj@via.dk)

M. L. Thomassen (✉)  
Department of Engineering, VIA University College, Aarhus, Denmark  
e-mail: [melt@via.dk](mailto:melt@via.dk)

K. Williams Middleton  
Technology Management and Economics, Chalmers University of Technology, Gothenburg, Sweden  
e-mail: [karen.wiliams@chalmers.se](mailto:karen.wiliams@chalmers.se)

## 1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to advance the discussion about context in entrepreneurship education. In dialogue with experts in entrepreneurship education research, we address the following: How contextual complexity is, is not, and should be considered and represented in entrepreneurship education. The chapter summarizes identified current challenges and future opportunities regarding the concept of context in entrepreneurship education in order to advance scholarly discussion of the contextualization of entrepreneurship education and entrepreneurship education research. As part of the Delphi study grounding this work, a recognized expert in entrepreneurship education research made a simple but central statement that illustrates the core issue: “What is *not* context” (Ulla Hytti). And another expert emphasized that context is not only something observed but experienced: “we as researchers and also teachers *do* context” (Bengt Johannisson). Such statements underscore the complexity, comprehensiveness, and underlying tensions when addressing context in entrepreneurship education. Context is everywhere—in time and space—permeating all sorts of organizing and structural frames, and is also co-created through interaction, whether intended or not.

When we consider education, we often consider the space of learning—particularly if we envision education taking place in a classroom. In a European society, a majority of us have some experience of this space—we can envision desks, chairs, and a figurehead often positioned proximally to a board or screen with mechanisms to write/share information. What we perhaps do not consider is what is brought into that space by the individuals situated there and how that influences the learning process. This is an issue not unique to entrepreneurship education, but the term entrepreneurship complicates this issue because each individual may have different perceptions of what entrepreneurship is due to its multidisciplinary foundations (Landström & Benner, 2010), positivistic propagation through policy (Verduijn & Berglund, 2020), and emphasis on heroic stereotypes (Steyaert, 2007). Furthermore, experiential learning, increasingly common in entrepreneurship education, necessitates that students interact with their context, making prominent the role and influence of context on education.

Context is intertwined and embedded in every aspect of doing research (and practice) in entrepreneurship education. It can be dealt with as aspects, parameters, or constituents, as well as seen as an underlying premise that in much of the literature has not been articulated or made explicit. Given all of this, why bother even trying to address something so overarching and broadly reaching? Because all the experts also agreed that context matters (in line with leading research by Welter (Welter, 2011)) and “we as researchers have a responsibility to point out what may be considered as context.” (Bengt Johannisson). So, we asked them (the experts), and we have organized their responses in this chapter with an aim of progressing a research agenda and through this also informing practice. The chapter pushes the frontier of entrepreneurship education research by (1) calling attention to the importance of context in entrepreneurship education research and practice, (2) identifying current

contextual influences on entrepreneurship education, and (3) proposing critical next steps to advance context in entrepreneurship education research and practice.

## 2 Method

The chapter builds on prior research regarding context in entrepreneurship education (Thomassen et al., 2020) and is based upon insights from a Delphi-inspired study of recognized experts in entrepreneurship education research. The Delphi method is widely used and accepted as an interactive forecasting method (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963). Recent applications have been used to expose the dark sides of entrepreneurship education (Bandera et al., 2020) and to forecast entrepreneurship in the future (van Gelderen et al., 2021). Our Delphi study consists of two stages. In Stage 1, experts respond to eight open reflection questions via an online survey. The answers to the survey form the foundation for Stage 2, focus groups. Focus groups are particularly suited for obtaining several perspectives on a topic while also gaining insights into shared understandings (Gibbs, 1997). We included focus groups to the Delphi design in order to reduce potential interpretation bias of survey responses and to accommodate the complexity of perspective when studying context. The focus groups draw upon and engage dialogue among experts in order to build from individual perspectives and then stimulate interactive discussion to connect and contrast experts' own thoughts. We argue that the inclusion of focus group dialogue is important to grasp the specificity of meaning and interpretation presented by experts.

### 2.1 *Selecting Experts for the Delphi Study*

We choose to take a European focus in our study to both consider the diverse yet somewhat integrated educational traditions of this region that are often overshadowed by a North American perspective on entrepreneurship, illustrated through common examples such as Silicon Valley, Steve Jobs, and Google. Taking a European perspective also serves to bind contextual complexities to a particular scope. To establish a qualified expert group, we invited all the surviving European Entrepreneurship Education Award recipients (11 between 2012 and 2021), representing Croatia, Denmark, the United Kingdom, Finland, France, Ireland, and Sweden. Three of the award recipients were unavailable to participate in the study. Given the potential geographical bias, we then requested recommendations from the initial expert group of prominent entrepreneurship education researchers from non-represented countries in Europe. The resulting group includes nine experts: Per Blenker, Alain Fayolle, Colette Henry, Ulla Hytti, Bengt Johannisson, Helle Neergaard, David Rae, Slavica Singer, and Roger Sørheim.

## **2.2 Stage 1: Survey**

The survey included eight open-ended questions (see as follows) to which respondents could provide text-based responses, collected online using Survey Exact. Questions were designed by the authors building on previous research (Thomassen et al., 2020), taking into consideration a survey response time of approximately 10–15 min per question.

1. From your perspective, what constitutes context in entrepreneurship education?
2. What are the most commonly addressed contextual elements in entrepreneurship education?
3. What are the least commonly addressed contextual elements in entrepreneurship education?
4. Are there contextual elements that are taken for granted and therefore not addressed in entrepreneurship education?
5. What are the three main benefits of contextualization in/of entrepreneurship education?
6. What are the three main challenges of contextualization in/of entrepreneurship education?
7. As educators, what is the critical next step in addressing context in entrepreneurship education?
8. As researchers, what is the critical next step in addressing context in entrepreneurship education?

The survey responses were compiled and analyzed to identify themes, consensus and discords, and variance in interpretation. One set of answers was received after the deadline and was not included in the initial analysis that formed the basis of the focus group discussion but was included in the presentation of survey results. Complete anonymized survey responses were provided to the focus groups, as well as a compilation of responses, grouping various questions and identifying potential themes for discussion. The survey results had an important role in framing Stage 2 with the intention of building on and speaking to responses to be mindful of progressing the conversation about context.

## **2.3 Stage 2: Focus Group**

The focus groups were conducted online via recorded zoom meetings. Seven of the nine experts participated in this step as two experts were unavailable. The experts were divided into two groups based on availability and gender representation. Each focus group lasted two hours, divided into four sessions covering a set of questions from the questionnaire, with complementary reflection questions. An agenda was formulated to ensure identified themes and questions were covered while still leaving room to follow the dialog and shared with the focus group in addition to

material from the survey. The author group decided on role distribution well in advance, as moderation of focus groups is significant (Gibbs, 1997). For the first focus group, one moderator ensured that all questions were covered and each expert was given a voice, while two observers took notes during the process and asked clarifying questions. For the second focus group, one moderator and one observer followed the same procedures.

The focus group recordings were transcribed for analysis. We then analyzed the text identifying key insights relating to earlier identified themes, illustrative quotes, and themes not present in the survey.

### **3 A Dialog with Experts**

In the following sections, our dialog with and between the experts is presented. First, the condensed survey answers are presented, and then key insights from the focus group dialogues are presented relative to three overarching categories: language, time, and place.

#### ***3.1 Findings from the Survey***

The first question in the survey asked experts to consider what constitutes context. The responses from the survey illustrated three main categorizations: a set of responses that considered context in regard to education and in regard to entrepreneurship in parallel; a set of responses that prioritized the context of education (at multiple levels), then considered through an entrepreneurial lens; and a set of responses that addressed a broader set of factors roughly associated to entrepreneurship, then considering learning associated to this phenomenon.

Questions two, three, and four, addressing common, uncommon (see Table 1), and assumed contextual elements, were compiled, with some themes emerging. However, it is important to note that in general, details and elaboration on the influence of elements are often lacking in the written responses. Commonly addressed contextual elements include the general (entrepreneurship and education) setting, how the venture is articulated, and the classroom setting. Less commonly addressed (if at all) context elements include culture, additional perspectives of value creation, educator influence, and variation in learning methods. In relation to what is taken for granted the assumptions of entrepreneurship described as new venture creation, from a business perspective is predominant. Moreover, assumptions about power, control, wealth distribution and influence, including the potential corrupt relationship between these, are also experienced as taken for granted. Often, the role of social media in (re)-construction of reality is accepted by default, given that it is

**Table 1** Common and uncommon contextual elements in entrepreneurship education

	Common	Uncommon
General	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Geography</li> <li>– Discipline</li> <li>– Institution</li> <li>– Regulatory framework</li> <li>– Institution and faculty</li> <li>– Environment</li> <li>– Economy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Culture</li> <li>– Socially shared beliefs</li> <li>– Mutability of contextual factors</li> <li>– Interrelation of factors (e.g., discipline, occupational choice)</li> </ul>
Venture specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Market demand/gaps</li> <li>– Finance and investment</li> <li>– Business models</li> <li>– Competitors</li> <li>– Industry structure</li> <li>– Resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Social value (creation)</li> <li>– Environmental value (creation)</li> <li>– Cultural value (creation)</li> <li>– Common good</li> </ul>
Learning specific	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Pedagogy</li> <li>– Didactics</li> <li>– Curricula</li> <li>– Type of students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Educator background and prior experience</li> <li>– Educator perspective</li> <li>– Didactics (ignored)</li> <li>– Learning methods (curricular, extra-curricular or mix)</li> <li>– Policies for education</li> </ul>

not purposefully addressed. Moreover, the role of the educator and their own individual perception of entrepreneurship is rarely considered or made explicit. Furthermore, the assumption that all students will benefit from entrepreneurship education is a positive bias. Positive bias can contribute to a logic that entrepreneurship education can be delivered as one package for all students. Finally, the notion that formal education is the most “legitimate” arena for learning is also taken for granted with no regard to the stringency of classroom design. Experts brought forward different sides and perspectives regarding the learning arena—mentioning independent (private) organizations driving extracurricular entrepreneurial activity, and practice being argued as more relevant and informative than education and theory in this setting. Based on the focus group discussion, some contextual elements, e.g., didactics, are considered as both common and uncommon. This speaks to the need for additional specificity of what is meant by such elements, e.g. didactics. The experts drew attention to the issue that there are some aspects of pedagogy that are more standard to the practice of teaching and then, given this, context is considered in relation to what is generally accepted as part of the role, but then there are more specific methodologies that relate to entrepreneurship education (linking to the phenomenon of entrepreneurship) that has pushed other methods and perhaps also requires a mix of methods.

There was limited discussion on how a standardization/franchising of entrepreneurship education could be harmful (and in contrast to how entrepreneurship education could be useful). Moreover, responses emphasized influences from more macro-level elements, such as wealth distribution, policy, power/corruption, and the influence of social media. Finally, responses highlighted a general positive bias of entrepreneurship education being good for everyone and possible to apply in one form across different educational disciplines.

The benefits and challenges of context in entrepreneurship education (questions five and six) were mainly addressed relative to teaching practice and the legitimacy of entrepreneurship education. Benefits included the capacity of entrepreneurship education students/learners to be change agents. In this lies a focus on learners' acculturation and utility of sensitization of learners' awareness of context. The ability to adjust education to the level, discipline, or profession of the student was stated as another benefit of contextualization. Contextualization was articulated as having the potential to improve knowledge transfer from research to practice, including enabling differentiation from management, and rather perceiving entrepreneurship as practice (action orientation). Finally, responses emphasized the benefits of raising awareness of interconnectivity of contexts and contextual elements, including design, impact, and the uncertain nature of entrepreneurship.

Challenges for contextualizing entrepreneurship education are shaped by the way in which research design captures the influence of contextual elements. The lack of measures and frameworks that allow for comparison is influenced by contextual elements such as the difficulty of controlling the educational environment, limits of time and space within the curriculum, multiple perspectives within the educational system while also lack of means for interconnectivity, and "good enough" assessment levels instead of strict "grades."

Challenges also often mirror benefits, and this was exemplified in the discussions regarding the role of the student. Educators set fast on perceiving students as recipients of information was positioned as presenting challenges in addressing context. If seen as change agents, students were instead resources with the ability to design and influence the learning process. Also, the role of education, in being free or alternatively obligated to communicate context, creates the challenge of deciding which context element to consider also in distinguishing between what is general and what is distinct. The lack of measures, frameworks, freedom, and/or guidelines also complicates how legitimate different practices are seen to be, with concerns including relevance, cost and resource dependency, managing uncertainty, and setting boundaries.

Questions seven and eight addressed critical next steps in education and research to advance contextual awareness in entrepreneurship and are summarized in Table 2.



**Table 2** Critical next steps to advance context in entrepreneurship education

	In education/as educators	In research/as researchers
Perspective and understanding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Distance from “best practice” and “one size fits all” approaches</li> <li>– Increased emphasis on practice and practical ethical knowledge</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– The concept of the entrepreneurial situation (expanding beyond business start-up view)</li> <li>– The progression of learning relative to contextual influence</li> </ul>
Design and assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Create tools, frameworks, etc., to help with relevance</li> <li>– Use of teacher teams</li> <li>– Argue for freedom of design in education Challenge dictated directives</li> <li>– Access resources to enable and engage in research</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– New methodologies for studying entrepreneurship as practice</li> <li>– Measure efficiency, efficacy, and effectiveness of entrepreneurship education</li> <li>– Systematic analysis of contextualizing entrepreneurship education, encouraging pluralistic perspectives</li> </ul>
Outcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Raise awareness</li> <li>– Emphasize selection</li> <li>– Recognize context as shaper of meaning/obligation of including context</li> <li>– Recognize connection/contribution to a multitude of stakeholders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Feed research findings back into teaching</li> <li>– Emphasize universities’ role in forming responsible and engaged citizens, including entrepreneurship conceived beyond just business start-up</li> <li>– Consider how we can and should scope context in entrepreneurship education</li> </ul>

Survey responses advocate for educators to repel from the one-size-fits-all approach to entrepreneurship education and embrace pluralistic perspectives. Responses argue for a need to rethink the design of entrepreneurship education and for educators to recognize the responsibility of addressing context in entrepreneurship education.

### 3.2 *Findings from the Focus Groups*

Like the survey responses, the focus groups generated a multitude of issues considered by the experts as important to consider when addressing context in entrepreneurship education. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to highlight all of these. We have chosen to organize findings from the dialogues into three overarching themes: language, time, and place. In regard to language, we do not mean a national language or dialect, but rather a language used that may distinguish discipline (for example, business) and the distinctive meaning of a term situated in that discipline but also reflect social and cultural understanding. In regard to time, we consider not only past and present (both of the individual, but also from a historical perspective, shaping culture), as well as future—as imagined by the individual, but also as conceptualized through policy, politics, and society. In regard to place, we mean to include discussions addressing the learning space, at multiple levels, be it the classroom,

the institution, or the region and country, all of which carry with them various norms and requirements.

### 3.3 *Language*

In order to discuss context in entrepreneurship education, one needs to first consider, and make explicit, the perspective of/on entrepreneurship; and also the perspective of/on education. For entrepreneurship, this meant not only a definitional discussion of entrepreneurship, but also relative to the traditions from which that definition was premised—e.g., an economic vs. a managerial one—and then to consider how that has influenced where entrepreneurship education has been situated—e.g., in business schools and to some extent as a management discipline, but then with the objective to be broadly spread or applied (to or through other disciplines), often without necessarily explicitly clarifying the initial grounding. And then at times met with resistance because, for example, a perceived economic emphasis is not consistent with the educational objectives of, for example, nursing or the arts. Most of the experts agreed that the “business” veil of entrepreneurship (education) was problematic.

For example, one stated, “business schools usually focus their image of entrepreneurship on business issues, and in my mind that is a restriction . . . entrepreneurship is a much broader human activity than just being concerned with business” (Bengt Johannisson), and another stressed that as a research community, we need to “break this strong connection with that business and entrepreneurship education. In particular in the compulsory education” (Ulla Hytti). These perspectives draw attention not just to the perceived problem of entrepreneurship being too narrowly aligned with business, but also that there is a need to consider when the selected form of education is delivered in the educational progress of the learner—in compulsory education, higher education, etc.

A number of the experts emphasized the importance of language, including the misunderstanding that can come from interpretations building upon the contextual ground, particularly when not consciously connected to what is presented as context in the “classroom.” One expert expressed this: We “have to think about what is our vocabulary in the various context that we move around in” (Helle Neergaard). They discussed how entrepreneurship education is often connected to a predominant discipline, which then may or may not be explicitly presented. This is problematic given that knowledge is situated in the language it is presented in, which influences how it is understood (Steyaert, 2007). For example, just the description of the intended/expected role as a result of the education—entrepreneur, self-employed, entrepreneurial, enterprising, etc.—can both reach through or alienate the individual in the education, as well as carry with it associated meaning.

Somehow somebody has been able to ideologically construct sort of this idea of new ventures, start-ups and growth firms as the only sort of future context of entrepreneurship education. (Per Blenker)

Some of us consider entrepreneurship as practice. And then in order to ... demonstrate our responsibility for educating students, practical components in the training program or educational program should be included too, if not just make students aware (of) that kind (of) language that we use to tell what entrepreneurship is has to be positioned against how entrepreneurship is being done in practice. (Bengt Johannisson)

Getting research that actually show how we could do this kind of translation into different contexts. How we can be useful, and how we can develop things to get kind of co-creation, and not necessarily just research-pieces but also kind of “how-to-pieces” that we could share. (Roger Sørheim)

The dialogues of both focus groups emphasized the need for translation between and across disciplines to which entrepreneurship education is applied, as well as the distinction of what is considered more distinctive to entrepreneurship education as its own discipline. This is necessary to call attention to which contextual elements should be prioritized given the focused discipline, with its specific language and terminology.

### 3.4 Time

Experts made a point that context is carried through time by the interacting participants in a space, in a dialogue. Students in entrepreneurship education carry with them history and historical associations, as well as imagined and expected futures. The educational process and design also change over time, emphasizing the dynamism of the process.

The system is already sort of structured in time, you start at kindergarten, you go in to primary school, you go to secondary school, ... We don't do the same in kindergarten as in a PhD-course in entrepreneurship. ... typically we don't have specialization in the beginning of the system, and we have a lot of specialization in the end of the system. (Per Blenker)

Interestingly, there are different arguments for where in time to focus on entrepreneurship education.

I think the timeline is important, but we should view it as a timeline, in that everything in the context arises from the past. Whether it is as Per said, the educational system, the institutions, what we have done with the environment. All of that is historical and we are experiencing it now. (David Rae)

On the one hand, it is important to know the past to understand the present. However, a future focus was also advocated for: “context is also the future” (Slavica Singer). But it was discussed that entrepreneurs cannot change present trajectories and create new futures if they are bound by the past. Related to this, dialogues included discussion of the arc of the education for the student in regard to their process through the education. Both the learner and the educator need to be conscious of the progression of the student within or across disciplines, institutions, cultures, etc.

You start to reflect “We are doing this the wrong way” and you are starting to become more context-sensitive. And we are actually starting to lose the learners if you are not taking the context in to account. (Roger Sørheim)

Similarly, the teacher should be cognizant of their own arc across their “career” as an educator; in delivering the education, there is a learning that progresses and renews what is addressed in the classroom. This evolution in the classroom may occur at one rate, whereas the evolution of the university as a whole may be slower to adapt, considering to what extent the “entry level” of the learning should remain more static.

### 3.5 *Place*

A final organizing theme addressed how being situated in educational structures and regimes can signal or influence how context is considered. And also that these structures/regimes are only one of the situated learning spaces that students are positioned; the learning they are part of (perhaps particularly in action- and experience-oriented entrepreneurship education) spans beyond the classroom and into the life situation the student experiences around them.

[Learners] may take no conscious account [of] the economic situation, the political situation, the ecological situation and whatever it may be. They may be blissfully unaware of that. So, the educational aspect is in part enabling them to understand and appreciate, and be critically aware and be appreciatively aware of what that context is. (David Rae)

If we want to facilitate learning process, then we should understand in which context actually the learner lives in, and how he or she translates what they are getting from us, in order to deal with issues by which they are surrounded in their living context. (Slavica Singer)

These two quotes from experts also help to illustrate a tension—that the students potentially come into the classroom burdened in one sense with their “life situation” and at the same time mentally free from associating what is being provided in the education to the geo-political environment of which they are citizens.

Educators are both given room in their classroom to make decisions about what to prioritize, and at the same time, there are clear guidelines and objectives that are designated by university management and beyond. “One of the huge problems that we have is that the way that we teach entrepreneurship is partly dictated by what politicians define as entrepreneurship” (Helle Neergaard). Policies in part are to guide the development of a future workforce, but some of the experts pointed out that a limited awareness of the dominance of a particular language may lead to a marginalized proposed future behavior for those being educated:

. . . what future we are training for, and in that sense this dominance leading to an absence of other forms of entrepreneurial behavior and an absence of relevance and legitimacy and other forms of entrepreneurial behavior, which could also be present as alternative future context for entrepreneurship is extremely important. There is plenty of educators struggling with this, but there is also very strong political agendas. (Per Blenker)

In discussing the place of learning, the experts also brought forward discussion about digitalization—as both an equalizer and also a polarizer of access to knowledge, but also as something that fundamentally changes how education is/can be delivered and experienced.

... the digital context of being, of learning, of venturing, of being entrepreneurial of education [...] we take it for granted. Again, it's not static, it's not equal, we have probably all had this experience of Zoom or Teams or these different platforms, and people are struggling with actions from a different country, and actually being very very marginal, being very peripheral ... (David Rae)

The dialogues of place also illustrate tensions around the intentions of entrepreneurship education—as being providing future opportunities, but perhaps inappropriately defined or marginalized by individuals various steps separate from the place of learning. And that the “classroom” is supposed to be a neutral “equalizing” space, but in attempts to adapt to certain elements influencing society (digitalization), can create barriers that exclude (lack of digital infrastructure, stable energy sources or required tools, etc.). “If you don't have internet connection or if you don't have laptop, then you are not equal situation with others to access education” (Slavica Singer).

simply by being aware of the context ... That can give them agency, it can give them the power to work with it, to work with those resources and with that space. [...] Within that, a benefit I think is, I know this is a bit of a cliché, but providing that safe space, the learning space being safe space for learning for experimentation, for innovation, that failure is okay, failure is a part of the process of learning and creativity and innovation, because it is finding out what works, but also socially who you can work with and how you work. So, that to me is a benefit which is maybe a processual benefit of that process. (David Rae)

## 4 Advancing Contextualization in Entrepreneurship Education

This chapter brings awareness to the role of context in entrepreneurship education research and practice. The purpose is to improve educational designs by tailoring them with context sensitivity and bridging the knowledge gap of contextual influence in entrepreneurship education research and practice. Fundamental insights from the Delphi study illustrated the importance of raising awareness and looking at the intent and design of entrepreneurship education across disciplines, institutional boundaries, and through the entire progression of the educational process of both the student/learner and teacher/educator. One of the experts described the underlying importance of context in (entrepreneurship) education as follows: “in learning through context, they [students] are learning to be in the context as actors for their practice” (David Rae).

The discussion becomes larger than entrepreneurship education, in regard to how it is done, but also expands to discuss why it is done from a societal perspective, and that there may be a lack of critical reflection of the intended role of entrepreneurship,

and entrepreneurially capable individuals, in society: “what we are trying to do is somehow arguing against the dominance of the structural, economic elements and trying to introduce other sorts of systems of contextualization that has to do with culture, civil, society and sociological elements our struggles and so” (Per Blenker).

And experts recognized their own need to, from time to time, broaden their perspective in order to articulate necessary changes. For example, one stated how he had to respond to his university leadership, counteracting a “one-size-fits-all” desire of entrepreneurship education: “We have to offer different thing for different types/student groups with different types of learning outcomes” (Roger Sørheim). This echoes the leadership and responsibility other experts emphasized, while specifying that entrepreneurship education researchers need to take in dialogue with their institutions to help ensure that context is recognized and carefully considered when designing and delivering entrepreneurship education.

## ***4.1 Some Reflections***

The investigation into how contextual complexity is, is not, and should be considered in entrepreneurship education generates multiple paths for future research. What is commonly addressed from a general perspective relates to geography, environment, regulatory frameworks, institution, and discipline. Culture, mutability, and interrelatedness of contextual elements are uncommonly addressed, though recognized as powerful influencers in a learning process. Investigation also highlights common assumptions considering that entrepreneurship education resides around new venture creation and financial benefit, while value creation including social, cultural, and environmental perspectives is less common. In the learning space, pedagogy, curricula, and the discipline “type” of students are common considerations. Less common is consideration of (and self-reflection by) the educator in terms of how their background, experience, and perspective may influence entrepreneurship education, along with learning methods and policies for education.

This reveals that context is certainly recognized as influencing educational designs in entrepreneurship education, but there is less understanding or even awareness of in what ways, and by whom, this is done either intentionally or not. In the dialog with and between the experts, a number of contextual implications are articulated. First, translation from excluding to including language was advocated to consolidate meaning in learning designs. Another implication points to ways in which dialogue carries context through time by the interacting participants in a space. Finally, context also can be both constraining and enabling in entrepreneurial processes. Place dictates structures and resources, and didactical choices should consider/leverages this.

We chose a European focus in our study to consider the diverse yet somewhat integrated educational traditions of this region, which are at times overshadowed by a North American perspective on entrepreneurship, illustrated through common examples such as Silicon Valley, Steve Jobs, and Google. Indeed, such examples

also carry a success, growth-oriented, and ICT sector bias that again points questions at the broad applicability of these examples. Taking a European perspective also serves to bind contextual complexities to a particular scope.

Being a Delphi study of experts, the findings are of course also biased to the particular position of these actors, mainly as researchers in entrepreneurship education, but also educators, though some are now retired. As also emphasized by the experts, developing and understanding of contextualization in entrepreneurship education needs to include the voices of current educational (and training) practitioners, students, university managers, and policymakers. At the same time, it is recognized that these voices can and often do carry divergent views, and it is important to consider the responsibility of knowledge-bearing individuals and organizations to qualify what contextual elements to consider, recognizing that there may be a need to revisit who are deemed as knowledge-bearing.

**Acknowledgments** We are grateful to the nine experts for their contribution and efforts in supporting our study. Any possible mistakes rely solely on the authors of the chapter.

## References

- Bandera, C., Santos, S. C., & Liguori, E. W. (2020). The dark side of entrepreneurship education: A Delphi study on dangers and unintended consequences. *Entrepreneurship Education and Pedagogy*, 4(4), 609–636.
- Dalkey, N., & Helmer, O. (1963). An experimental application of the Delphi method to the use of experts. *Management Science*, 9(3), 458–467.
- Gibbs, A. (1997). Focus groups. *Social research update*, 19(8), 1–8.
- Landström, H., & Benner, M. J. (2010). Entrepreneurship research: A history of scholarly migration. In H. Landström & F. T. Lohrke (Eds.), *Historical foundations of entrepreneurship research* (pp. 15–45). Edward Elgar.
- Steyaert, C. (2007). ‘Entrepreneurship’ as a conceptual attractor? A review of process theories in 20 years of entrepreneurship studies. *Entrepreneurship and Regional Development*, 19(6), 453–477.
- Thomassen, M. L., Williams-Middleton, K., Ramsgaard, M. B., Neergaard, H., & Warren, L. (2020). Conceptualizing context in entrepreneurship education: A literature review. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 26(5), 863–886.
- van Gelderen, M., Wiklund, J., & McMullen, J. S. (2021). Entrepreneurship in the future: A Delphi study of ETP and JBV editorial board members. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 45(5), 1239–1275.
- Verduijn, K., & Berglund, K. (2020). Pedagogical invention in entrepreneurship education: Adopting a critical approach in the classroom. *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research*, 26(5), 973–988.
- Welter, F. (2011). Contextualizing entrepreneurship—Conceptual challenges and ways forward. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 35(1), 165–184.

**Michael Breum Ramsgaard** ([mibj@via.dk](mailto:mibj@via.dk)), MA (Education), is an associate professor at Research Centre for Innovation & Entrepreneurship, VIA University College, Aarhus, Denmark. His research interests are entrepreneurship education, entrepreneurial university, pedagogy, and context. He has previously published in *Education + Training*, *Industry and Higher Education*, and *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development*. Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5753-9651>

**Mette Lindahl Thomassen** ([melt@via.dk](mailto:melt@via.dk)), MSc (Marketing Management), is an associate professor at the Department of Engineering at VIA University College, Horsens, Denmark. She conducts research within the field of entrepreneurship education, where context, sustainability, and intrapreneurship are currently in focus. She has published in the *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research* and the *Journal of Workplace Learning and Industry and Higher Education*, among others. Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8734-3502>

**Karen Williams Middleton** ([karen.williams@chalmers.se](mailto:karen.williams@chalmers.se)), PhD, is an associate professor of Entrepreneurship at Chalmers University of Technology. Her research interests include entrepreneurial identity and behavior, entrepreneurial education and learning, nascent entrepreneurship, and university entrepreneurship. Her research has been published in, for example, the *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour and Research* and the *International Journal of Management Education*, among others. Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9531-7120>

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

