



# FOSTERING AN ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET IN CHILDREN

Trudie Murray is a Lecturer in Entrepreneurship and Economics at the Cork Institute of Technology in the Republic of Ireland. In this article she explores how children as young as 2 years old can develop an entrepreneurial mindset. Her aim is to develop an innovative framework that will enable early childhood educators, internationally, to enhance their own practices.

My research explores the novel proposal that it is the early childhood educator that should be the starting point in the influencing and nurturing of entrepreneurial development in children, thereby consequently generating more creative and innovative people who will positively contribute to society, economy and community. Furthermore, this theory will support the progression of entrepreneurship education further up the education line.

Globally, education systems are constantly evolving and new areas of focus are being introduced to, and addressed by curricula, in all tiers of the education system. One such focus is the entrepreneurial mindset.

While concepts on entrepreneurial learning and entrepreneurship within a university or school setting are ongoing in research, it is not yet as clear what types of entrepreneurial competencies are necessary to practice within the preschool context.

Nevertheless, entrepreneurial learning as a teaching and learning approach can be used by preschool educators to help children develop an entrepreneurial mindset and to develop skills that will grow with them as they progress through the education system and that will ultimately allow them to positively contribute to society and the economy.

Much research has been published highlighting that young children are more primed for learning and so childhood is the ideal stage to influence attitudes towards entrepreneurship. During the first five years of a child's life their brain develops more and faster than at any other time in their life.

The values of entrepreneurship that can be developed from an early age, through everyday active experience, are self-confidence, honesty, independence, responsibility, creativity, hard work, caring for the environment, teamwork, discipline and respect.

The aim of early childhood entrepreneurship education should be to develop entrepreneurial non-cognitive skills. Non-cognitive entrepreneurial skills (e.g. risk-taking, propensity, creativity, need for achievement, self-efficacy, pro-activity, persistence, and analysing) are thought to be best developed at an early age.

In order to increase entrepreneurial quality output from our third level graduates, entrepreneurship education needs to start at early childhood education and progress as a child works through the education ladder.

Teachers are a key factor in affecting children's attitudes and the development of an entrepreneurial mindset as they are one of the most influential and prominent factors in children's interest at school.

However, research indicates that the aims and practices of entrepreneurship education are confusing and unclear to teachers due to lack of resources, assessment challenges, time constraints and costs. Teachers are often reluctant to acknowledge entrepreneurship education in consequence to its business-oriented associations. Teachers need inspiration and support to provide entrepreneurial learning environments for their students.

The Entrepreneurship Education at school in Europe report (2012) identified that some 75% of countries within the EU did not have any strategic recommendation on entrepreneurship education in relation to initial teacher education.

The 2006 EU Conference on 'Entrepreneurship Education in Europe: fostering mindsets through education and learning' highlighted that there is international evidence that students who receive entrepreneurship education excel in life skills, work skills, academic performance and are more likely to find employment. They cite the reason that students achieve these benefits is that the 'primary goal of entrepreneurship education is not to get everyone to start their own business but to give our young people the ability to think positively, to look for opportunities to make things happen, to have self-confidence to achieve their goals and to use their talents to better society (economically and socially)'. ■