

Entrepreneurial learning as practice: a video-ethnographic analysis

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Abstract

Purpose – Despite the gains that have been made by adopting contemporary theories of practice in entrepreneurship studies, the field still lacks a comprehensive practice theory of entrepreneurial learning. In this article, we develop a practice theory of entrepreneurial learning by elaborating on the relations between practicing, knowing and learning.

Design/methodology/approach – Using a video ethnography of a two-day “Startup Weekend for Refugees” event in Amsterdam, our aim is to further theorise the relational, material and embodied nature of entrepreneurial learning through analysing video fragments of naturally occurring practices.

Findings – Our findings demonstrate that entrepreneurial learning transpires through, and is emergent from, practices and their relations. On the one hand, practitioners learn to competently participate in various practices by sensing, observing and experimenting with the meaning of others’ gestures and utterances. On the other, the learning of new opportunities for value creation emerges as practitioners connect various practices to one another through translation.

Originality/value – This article contributes by illustrating and explaining real-time instances of learning to develop a practice theory of entrepreneurial learning. This contributes to the literature by detailing the relations between learning, knowing and practising entrepreneurship, which leads to a novel alternative to existing individual- and organisational-level learning theories.

Keywords Entrepreneurial learning, Practice theory, Business modelling, Video ethnography

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Over the past decade, there has been a growing interest in contemporary theorisations of practice in entrepreneurship studies (Johannisson, 2011) given their ability to re-contextualise entrepreneurial processes and phenomena (Steyaert, 2007). As Thompson and Byrne (2020) explain, this literature places analytical and theoretical emphasis on neither individuals nor social structures, but rather on observable practices and their relations. In this vein, studies by Teague *et al.* (2020), Hill (2018) and Keating *et al.* (2013) have made novel gains by reconsidering phenomena of pitching, strategic fit and resourcing from practice theory foundations. Similarly, recent work has investigated selling (Chalmers and Shaw, 2017), networking (Anderson *et al.*, 2010) and marketing (Gross *et al.*, 2014) practices to reveal the

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deeply contextual, processual and relational nature of these phenomena. Accordingly, entrepreneurship as practice, as a new research field (Champanois *et al.*, 2019), posits that the study of entrepreneurship is only possible by explicating how entrepreneurial phenomena are actually lived in and through practices (Thompson *et al.*, 2020).

Despite the gains that are being made by adopting practice theory in entrepreneurship studies, the entrepreneurial field still lacks a comprehensive practice theory of entrepreneurial learning. Knowledge and learning remain core aspects of all theories of practice (Gherardi, 2000; Nicolini, 2011), but have thus far not been fully integrated into entrepreneurship studies. Consequently, the field still has a limited understanding of how practicing and learning entrepreneurship are inherently interrelated. Learning is widely held as central to entrepreneurship (as indicated by Minniti and Bygrave's (2001, p. 7) assertion that "entrepreneurship is a process of learning, and [a] theory of entrepreneurship requires a theory of learning"), receiving keen scholarly attention over the past two decades (see Wang and Chugh, 2014 for review). However, despite the broad agreement that learning and doing entrepreneurship are interlinked (Cope and Watts, 2000; Pittaway and Cope, 2007; Rae and Carswell, 2001), existing studies investigating the various everyday practices through which entrepreneurs and stakeholders participate and learn are exceedingly rare. Empirical studies have primarily focused on either individual-level (e.g. Cope, 2003; Corbett, 2005; Minniti and Bygrave, 2001) or organisational-level mechanisms, processes and characteristics (e.g. Cohen and Levinthal, 1990; Jones and Macpherson, 2006; March, 1991; Zahra and George, 2002) using in-depth interviews or large sample survey methods. In experiential learning studies, where one would expect to find analyses of practices, scholars have focused solely on individual entrepreneurial learning processes (Cope, 2003; Deakins and Freel, 1998; Politis, 2005). As a result, everyday practices recede further into the background or disappear entirely from contemporary empirical and conceptual work.

Alternatively, a practice theory of entrepreneurial learning has the opportunity to contribute to entrepreneurship studies in two primary ways. First, a practice theory of entrepreneurial learning may help to drive the scholarship on entrepreneurial learning (and the associated literature on entrepreneurship education) in new directions by offering a non-individualist alternative to current theoretical frameworks. While several scholars have reconceptualised entrepreneurial phenomena in terms of social interplay, rather than as individual-level occurrences (Dodd and Anderson, 2007; Fletcher, 2006; Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017), a shift away from entrepreneurial behaviour to interrelations among multiple stakeholders often leaves concepts, such as learning, vague and elusive. By elaborating on the links between practicing, knowing and learning, a practice theory of entrepreneurial learning contributes to entrepreneurial learning literature by enabling future research to grasp the logic of practice (Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2011) and conduct more comprehensive and engaged scholarship. Second, a practice theory of entrepreneurial learning would help to clarify the central role of knowledge and learning in entrepreneurship as practice literature by detailing their relations to the enactment of observable practical activity. As knowing, learning and practising are central components to all theories of practice, we posit that there will be significant advances when integrated with entrepreneurial learning literature.

This article develops a practice theory of entrepreneurial learning using a video ethnography (Heath *et al.*, 2010) of a two-day "Startup Weekend for Refugees" event in Amsterdam. In particular, we aim to further theorise the relational, material and embodied nature of entrepreneurial learning through the analysis of video fragments of naturally occurring practices. Hence, we abductively theorise upon the observable real-life unfolding of practices to further a practice-based understanding of entrepreneurial learning. We aim to articulate the position that entrepreneurial learning transpires through the participation in practices as well as emerging simultaneously from the ordered translation among practices. As such, learning is relational to the practices being enacted and does not exist as an activity

or process separate from them. In the discussion, we argue that our study has several significant implications for future theorising and the study of entrepreneurial learning (and education). Finally, we develop a methodological contribution by discussing the value and limitations of conducting a video ethnography for future studies of practices.

This article continues with a brief literature review of practice theory in entrepreneurship studies and the relationships between knowing, learning and practice. Subsequently, we describe our methodological approach and analyses, which is followed by a findings section. The article ends with a discussion about theoretical contributions and future research.

Theoretical motivations

While not meant as an exhaustive review of entrepreneurship as practice, this section begins by providing an overview of the unique features of this perspective. This section then reviews and integrates different theories of practice that discuss knowledge and learning to develop a practice-based theoretical framework of entrepreneurial learning.

Entrepreneurship as practice

A growing number of entrepreneurship scholars have recognised the value of “taking the practice turn” in their conceptual and empirical work (Thompson *et al.*, 2020). Among many reasons, one benefit of the practice turn is that it enables entrepreneurship scholars to re-contextualise entrepreneurial phenomena, thus cutting “entrepreneurship loose from its controlling marriage to methodological individualism” (Steyaert, 2007, p. 468). Practice theory achieves this by advancing an alternative onto-epistemological position in which all entrepreneurial phenomena occur within and are aspects or components of the *nexus of practices* (Hui *et al.*, 2017). While there are multiple theories of practice, they share several assumptions that make it a unique theoretical point of departure (see Nicolini, 2012). First, practice theorists loosely define practices as an organised, material-mediated constellation of actions (Schatzki *et al.*, 2001). No one definition of practice is possible, as doing so would reify them, so practice theorists generally characterise them as identifiable social phenomenon (cf., ways of brushing teeth are different from driving a car). Practices are not unchanging substantive entities, but are collaboratively emergent activities that are embodied, materially mediated and deploy shared understanding in circumstances that unfold over time and space (Schatzki *et al.*, 2001). Second, practices rarely exist in isolation. Instead, practices connect to form ever more complex “nexuses” constitutive of “larger” phenomena, such as projects, ventures and organisations (Nicolini, 2009). Importantly, this means that larger phenomena are not ontologically separate from the performance of the observable, materially accomplished practices that constitute them. Third, practices are non-individualist because they presuppose the individual practitioners that enact them (Rouse, 2006). This is to say that because practices are relationally composed, they frame the state of existence and understanding of those that participate in them. Hence, while individual agency, in part, produces or reproduces practices, practices cannot be reduced to any one individual (Reckwitz, 2002). Finally, practical knowledge guides practitioners’ ability to undertake actions and make sense of others’ actions, although this remains mostly tacit and unacknowledged (Alkemey and Buschmann, 2017). Practical knowledge, as is explained in greater detail later, rests upon specific socio-material configurations of minds/bodies/objects/activities that constitute a practice, rather than residing only in individual minds, words, texts or symbols.

Despite the “turn” towards theories of practice in entrepreneurship studies gaining traction, the entrepreneurial field still lacks a developed practice theory of entrepreneurial learning. Existing studies have primarily been concerned with either conceptually demarcating the difference from traditional ontologies, epistemologies and methodologies (Chiasson and Saunders, 2005; Sarason *et al.*, 2006; Tatli *et al.*, 2014). Champenois *et al.* (2019) recently found in their review that most contributions adopt a critical perspective to

rejuvenate thinking about traditional entrepreneurship phenomena, such as opportunity identification and exploitation, venturing and financing, networking and strategizing. While this is undoubtedly an important first step for the nascent field, there is a need to further a practice theory of entrepreneurial learning because knowledge and learning are central to the practical performances of organising and managing new ventures. However, with two exceptions, practice theories have so far made little inroads in studies of entrepreneurial learning. The first exception is the work of Higgins and colleagues (Higgins *et al.*, 2013, 2019, Higgins and Aspinall, 2011). In these studies, the authors begin to develop a practice sensibility of entrepreneurial learning by arguing that learning is a social process rooted in practitioners' practical concerns. The authors discuss how learning occurs as practitioners engage in the "practice of inquiry" through which they develop and deploy methods to understand and define problem areas, draw evaluations and make conclusions. The practice is influenced and mediated by the articulation of power relations among practitioners, such that entrepreneurial learning may be highly political and contentious. The second exception is Karataş-Özkan (2011), who draws on Bourdieu (1977) to argue that entrepreneurial learning can occur as one unreflectively acts in accordance with various practices. In her ethnographic study of five nascent entrepreneurs starting a creative arts venture, she illustrates that entrepreneuring practitioners can articulate and grasp the meanings of others without separate processes of thought and reflection, as is assumed by the majority of contemporary entrepreneurial learning theories. The next section further develops these ideas into a more consistent practice theory of entrepreneurial learning by reviewing primary texts on learning and practicing.

Practice theories and learning

Learning and practicing are intimately connected in the "family" of practice theories, such that the organising context and content of what is being learned are inseparable. While practice theorists discuss and debate these relations in a variety of ways, generally speaking, learning can be analytically thought of as occurring in two ways (although in practice they occur instantaneously). First, learning flows from the *pre-reflective* participation in one or more practices; thus learning is understood as practical, dynamic and embodied (Gherardi, 2012). Second, learning emerges as practitioners collectively enact, relate and organise multiple practices (Nicolini, 2011).

In the first consideration, learning is "coming to be able to" participate in practice by acquiring and performing the practical knowledge required for meaningful and acceptable participation. Learning to participate in practices occurs through mutual accountability to the possibilities that practice makes available and to what is thereby at stake in response to those possibilities (Rouse, 2007). As Nicolini (2012, p. 5) puts it, "becoming part of an existing practice thus involves learning how to act, how to speak (and what to say), but also how to feel, what to expect, and what things mean". Learning is thus intimately linked to the use of practical knowledge, which is defined as a *pre-reflective* "knowing-how" to participate and is an irreducible form of knowledge beyond facts (Bourdieu, 1977; Nicolini, 2011). Practical knowledge does not exist as an entity, resource or substance that pre-exists its utilisation; instead, it is an *embodied* "knowing how" to carry on in certain situations, and it is made salient through its use (Chia and Holt, 2006). In other words, people act and learn both *with* their bodies and *as* bodies: learning occurs as the sensual-material interplay with a concrete world. In this view, learning is located in embodied interactions that bring novices to possess collectively shared practical knowledge that is (re)created in these very same interactions (Lave and Wenger, 1991). Learning what is normatively "right" and "wrong" cannot be understood as the passive acquisition of operational skills or propositional knowledge; rather, it "lives" through the members as they practise (thus, it does not stem from any one individual's beliefs or actions). This means that an individual's cultural background may

shape their practical knowledge related to certain practices (i.e. habitus), but does not restrict or preclude them from further learning (e.g. learning a language). Within this social-material interplay, novices learn by taking not only experts' perspectives, but also of other novices, as they continuously correct themselves, recognise room to manoeuvre in and, thus, keep within the order at hand. Hence, *all practitioners teach themselves and each other practical knowledge* (Alkemey and Buschmann, 2017).

As can be gleaned, learning in this perspective is intimately related to the practices being enacted. Hence, learning can pertain to all kinds of practices and different kinds of practices imply their own techniques and contents of learning. However, this does not mean that learning can be reduced to habituating to the routine or procedural aspects of a certain practice. Performing a practice "not only leads to stability through habituation but also diversity, brought by the unstable structure of practices themselves" (Gherardi, 2012, p. 228). This is because practices themselves distribute their practitioners into different positions with distinct perspectives, thus differentiating them (Nicolini, 2012, p. 94). To practitioners, practices never appear as entirely predictable sequences of responses to the situation; rather, they demand elements of improvisation. Continual learning *by all practitioners* is thus necessary to cope with the often conflictual demands and situationally specific requirements that they are confronted with (Gherardi *et al.*, 1998). Hence, learning is not only reductive to the formation of practice-specific habits and routines, but also able to deal with conflicts, ambivalence and uncertainty. Consequently, this view of learning is inherently non-individualistic and contextual to ongoing practical activity and circumstance as practitioners engage with the world.

In the second consideration, learning is a collaborative accomplishment, achieved through forging and stabilising specific relations among practices. As stated previously, "larger" phenomena, such as ventures and organisations, are constituted by a contingently accomplished nexus of practices (Nicolini, 2009). Nicolini (2011) builds from Latour (2005) to characterise this work of knotting together practices as *translation*. Translation simultaneously denotes transference and transformation by proposing that practice relations are assembled and temporarily stabilised through observable discursive practices, such as storytelling and meetings, and by circulating intermediary objects (e.g. images, texts, contracts) across space and time. Discursive practices and intermediaries thus constitute both the means through which practice associations are established and how they are kept in place. When it is acknowledged that translation does not "just happen" but is experimented, enacted, improvised and repeated, it follows that learning occurs as *an outcome of assembling practice relations through translation*. In this consideration, learning follows from the collective, interactive nature of translation. Discursive practices and intermediary objects become vehicles through which knowledge is expressed and communicated, which is learned through the speaking and doing of various practices. Translation, however, does not imply harmony and perfect alignment among practitioners, but necessarily produces or reproduces specific empowerment effects and power relationships (Latour, 2005). Similarly to the argument made by Higgins *et al.* (2019; Higgins and Aspinall, 2011), forging linkages among practices provides situations in which power relations among practitioners are altered or reproduced, making translation and learning outcomes possibly contentious and political.

Learning as practicing entrepreneurship

These two considerations of learning have several implications for entrepreneurial learning. On the one hand, to learn to engage in entrepreneurship, at a minimum, means one "comes to be able to" participate in one or more practice(s) associated with entrepreneurship competently enough so that others can understand one's actions and words as "doing entrepreneurship". Put another way, to learn entrepreneurship is to come to be able to competently engage in certain ways of practicing that are associated with entrepreneurship through the use of practical knowledge, such as who, where, when, what and why to engage

in a practice. This involves embodied interaction with other people as well as sensual-material interplay with the technologies and objects that enable the performance of a practice. As practices are never a completely predictable sequence of responses to situations, entrepreneurial learning is not limited to mastery of propositional knowledge, routines, procedures, mindsets or habits, but practically coping with the conflictual demands and situationally specific requirements that confront practitioners. Thus, entrepreneurial learning rests on the subtle use of the embodied, practical know-how associated with a practice – all the unsaid and taken-for-granted ways of engaging in the social-material aspects of the practice in question. On the other hand, entrepreneurial learning is also simultaneously a collaborative outcome that is produced through ordering or weaving together various practices through translation. As ventures are constituted by practices, which are themselves organised-in-action through arrangements of objects, actions and practical knowledge, binding practices together forges new associations among objects, actions and practical knowledge. Central to entrepreneurial learning is, therefore, the production and use of the discursive practices and intermediaries that bind practices together and make ventures socially identifiable as a novel phenomenon. Consequently, this article posits that developing new ventures is ontologically equivalent to developing new knowledge, as, in both situations, it is the performance and assembly of practice relations through translation that underpin their existence.

In sum, careful empirical consideration of the real-time performances of practices and their relations is fundamental to understanding what, where, when, why and how entrepreneurship is learned. The remainder of this article conducts a video ethnography to shed empirical light on some of these practices and relations to further a practice-theory understanding of entrepreneurial learning.

Research practices

In the empirical portion of this article, we keep with a practice theory perspective by reflexively absorbing the notion of practical knowledge, which entails a non-representationalist view of academic knowing as something that we do (and which we are). Hence, this study should be read as deploying an interpretivist epistemology (Yanow and Schwartz-Shea, 2006), such that we learn to “do research” as well as collaborate with others to generate knowledge. In other words, when seriously taking the position that knowledge and learning occur performatively, we must acknowledge the primacy of an entanglement of “their” practical activities with “ours” (Spinosa *et al.*, 1999). Hence, we do not assume an objective stance; rather, our empirical interpretations should be understood as emergent, co-produced and intersubjective.

Accordingly, we are particularly interested in observing and elucidating entrepreneurial learning in and through practice, rather than retrospectively through interviews or surveys. To do so, this study followed several scholars under the banner of “microethnography” (Streeck and Mehus, 2005) and conducted a video ethnographic study (Heath *et al.*, 2010). Video ethnographies have gained a following in anthropology, sociology and management and organisation scholarship but are rare in entrepreneurship studies. Crucially, video ethnographies differ from other visual forms of data, such as advertisement videos on a crowdfunding platform or professional videos of pitch performances. Generally speaking, video ethnographies enable the research to gather videos of naturally occurring “backstage” practices, as these videos can help to understand the minutiae of how practices are made accountable (i.e. observable and reportable). This renders fast-paced entrepreneurial life amenable to rigorous analysis (Llewellyn and Burrow, 2008). As the analytical focus of practice-based studies is not solely on language, videos go beyond audio data by enabling the observation and study of bodily movements and social interactions as they happen. In the discussion section, the benefits and limitations of video ethnographies are discussed in greater detail.

Research site: Startup Weekend for Refugees

We attended a two-day Startup Weekend event for refugees in Amsterdam organised by the non-profit organisation Refugees Forward. The event offers “newcomers the opportunity to obtain funding, training and expertise for their entrepreneurial projects in the Netherlands, through a supportive community of students, NGO’s and businesses” (Refugees Forward, 2018). Among other events organised during the year, the Startup Weekend specifically aims to help newcomers discover “what entrepreneurship in the Netherlands means” (Refugees Forward, 2018) by developing and pitching a business idea with an intercultural team. To do so, the two-day event includes training sessions conducted by coaches and organisers focused on business methodology, communication and starting a business in the Netherlands, intensive sessions with teams of refugees and Dutch students where team members work together to develop their team’s business idea, mentoring and guidance by volunteer entrepreneurs and business professionals and ending with a “Pitch Finale” where teams compete for votes by a jury for the most viable business idea. This was the second time that Refugees Forward has hosted this event. Table 1 provides an overview of the event, participants and data collection.

Data collection practices

We undertook a few different research practices to generate data – shooting videos, writing observation notes, writing introspective-participatory notes and interviewing participants – which are discussed below. First, the first researcher acted as an observer throughout the two-day event and shot long video recordings aimed at rendering the participants’ gestures and talking observable throughout the weekend. This enabled a level of detail that is not possible with observation notes. Because the event is dynamic, the research had to move the camera to the locations of interactions, so they were clearly visible; thus, the video camera was not in a fixed location. Moreover, when teams broke up into different locations to work on a business idea, the researcher videotaped only one of the teams (the second researcher is included in some of these videos). Hence, our study is similar to a single case research design, using a dense record of events over time to abductively theorise observations. Second, the first researcher wrote 25 pages of field observation notes. The notes are descriptive in an attempt to retain the sequence of activities that make up the entire event, as well as to note down the site-specific language used and the place and movement of certain participants. The second researcher volunteered and participated as a mentor in the event. This was made possible because of prior relationships with the event’s organisers. By participating as a mentor, the second researcher engaged with the event’s participants by contributing to the development of the business ideas (including the idea of the team videotaped). Because mentors were asked by the organisers to move freely amongst the teams as they saw fit, the

Event	Startup weekend for refugees
Place of event	Team Academy, Amsterdam
Date	10th and 11th of February 2018
Organisers	Deiderick van der Wijk and David Hwan
Refugee participants	20
Student participants	20
Mentor participants	10–12 (including researcher)
Total duration of field observation	20 h
Total time length of observational videos	266 min
Number of pages of single-spaced, typed field notes	30
Number of interviews	5 (organisers, refugee entrepreneurs)

Table 1.
Overview of event,
participants and data
collection

second researcher was not limited to mentoring one team. The second researcher took five pages of reflective notes during breaks and other opportune moments. Finally, the first researcher also engaged in ethnographic interviews with organisers, mentors, refugee-entrepreneurs and students at the event ($N = 5$). These interviews were all tape-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data analysis practice

The analysis pragmatically followed procedures set out by [Heath et al. \(2010\)](#). This consists of the researchers sharing notes and insights at the end of each day, which helped to organise data collection the next day. Shortly after the end of the Startup Weekend, each researcher completed preliminary readings of all the field notes, interview transcripts and video recordings, and these were discussed as a team. To develop inferences based on our generated observations, we then proceeded abductively, partly based on the emerging evidence and partly from the sensitising concepts derived from the existing literature on practices. In particular, we began by organising the videos using V-Note software (<https://v-note.org>). V-Note enabled the researchers to incorporate and index all the video files, to tag segments of the videos according to what is happening (such as, “discussing value proposition”) and to organise the tags into common categories. After creating categories of tags, the video fragments were reviewed within each category to identify and select key video fragments that were illustrative of entrepreneurial learning. Following this, the selected video fragments were transcribed using the Jeffersonian transcription system for video ethnographic analyses (see [Hindmarsh and Heath, 2007](#)), and the observable instances of learning were analysed in detail as they unfolded through the sequential order of social interaction. Finally, the analysis was completed by reviewing the field notes and interviews as they pertained to the selected video fragments to assist interpretation and explanation of observed action and outcomes. The following section presents analyses of selected video transcripts selected for their demonstrations of more general insights.

Entrepreneurial learning as practice

This section proposes that by observing the real-time ordered accomplishment of scenes of action, how people attune to these practices and their interconnections, instances of entrepreneurial learning can be understood. Specifically, we analyse video transcripts to demonstrate that (1) entrepreneurial learning transpires through the participation in practices, and (2) entrepreneurial learning emerges from the ordered translation among practices.

Entrepreneurial learning transpires through the participation in practices

We argue here entrepreneurial learning transpires through the participation in practice by negotiating and improvising the normative language and procedures that orient a practice, and competently using the materials and technologies that mediate a practice. As such, learning is achieved by tuning into and becoming absorbed in not only one practice but an ongoing practice nexus (such as becoming an entrepreneur means to learn how to participate in many interconnected practices).

First, we observe learning as manifesting through the sayings and doings that make up a practice. The event begins with a presentation by Andy (an organiser and coach). In his presentation, he follows a “typical” coaching presentation on business modelling closely, including using a projector, slides, images and videos. His presentation has a particular way of being accomplished, a sequence that, when enacted, reproduces the notion that purposeful coaching transfers normative information about how (and why) to complete another practice:

in this case, business modelling practice. Andy works systematically through the normative ordering of a business model practice step-by-step, filling in details with personal examples and metaphors, as the audience take notes and listen quietly. In [Transcript 1](#), Andy states in Frame #1 and #2 that business modelling is about “you develop an idea, you drink a lot of coffee (.) you develop a lot of ideas >and you start it< (.) and uh (.) that is pretty much what we are doing here right?”, “making people happy [and]. . . we need to make money” and it is “like a prototype”. Andy attempts to teach the key practical concerns and ways of thinking that are necessary to complete a business model. Next, the mentor’s question in Frame #3 and #4 points out that the Canvas is limited in its guidance. Andy agrees with this, but he also clarifies that sticky notes represent “big decisions” that need to be thought through carefully, and states in Frame #4, “it’s more like a prototype”. Through these discursive practices, it is not only the audience who learns the language, procedure and possible limits of business modelling practice, but Andy learns to improvise answers, realises gaps in his explanations and provides guidance as he feels best.

Second, while one abstractly learns “how to” normatively proceed with business modelling practice through coaching practice, enacting a business modelling practice is much more than simple rule-following, as can be seen in [Transcript 2](#). In this transcript, the start to the team’s business modelling practice demonstrates the uses of numerous interruptions, waving gestures, cross-talk and redirection to negotiate the practice. For instance, in Frame #3, Nick proposes moving through the Canvas, as presented by Andy previously, by physically touching the Canvas in the order in which it should be completed, while the others observe his movements. Afterwards Nick glances at Amir to check if he agrees with the proposal (Frame #4). Lisa signifies her agreement by beginning to state her idea about “value proposition” and reaches out to touch the Canvas; however, Amir simultaneously directs Nick (in Arabic) to research who their suppliers will be (a question not “supposed” to be raised until later), meanwhile David works alone to define a “customer segment” (Frame #5). This fragmentation leaves participants with the choice to follow, or to interrupt and redirect others. Nick follows Amir’s suggestion to research suppliers using Lisa’s computer, while Lisa continues working on the value proposition box by writing on a sticky note (Frame #6 and #7). When Lisa interrupts Amir and David (Frame #8), she aims to bring the team back in line with an orderly pattern of business modelling by querying Amir on “how do you make money on that?” The team’s enactment of business modelling practice begins with fragmentation and disagreement on which elements to discuss. Throughout the event, the researchers observed numerous occasions in which the team learned moment-by-moment and step-by-step to improvise content for the completion of the business modelling, while constantly coping with conflictual perspectives by negotiating the normative procedure of the practice. Learning to perform the practice thus occurs as the participants observe and react to each other’s sequential movements, utterances and embodied interactions with physical objects and technologies.

Third, participants must learn to correctly use practical terminology of which they had not previously known. In [Transcript 3](#), David and Lisa are advising Amir, who will conduct a pitch presentation in the next 30 min (Frame #1 and #2). Before this transcript, all the teams received guidance from a coach on “best practices” for a “good” pitch. Now, the team has the presentation slides open on Lisa’s computer. David and Lisa are directing Amir on what to say, and specifically that he has expertise in this area. However, Amir does not speak English well and says to Sam that he is having trouble remembering everything that needs to be said (Frame #3). The team solves this practical problem by writing down on a sticky note the critical points for Amir (Frame #4, #5 and #6). Meanwhile, Nick, who is preparing by reading the slides on the computer, asks Lisa and David, “acquisition, what does it mean, acquisition?” (Frame #7). Lisa looks to the distance and uses her hands to grasp in the air in a gesture of acquiring something, uttering, “getting things, like, customers” (Frame #8). Lisa helps Nick

learn a word that is common for a competent pitch presentation, using her body and gesture to communicate. Next, David (organiser) shouts, “two minutes, two minutes”, and Amir exclaims, “I have not had time to read it [pointing at the computer]!” David suggests that they quickly look through the slides once together. However, Nick replies, “but we maybe need ten minutes more. . .”, with a facial expression of concern (Frame #9). Sam points out that maybe David and Lisa should take the lead, as they have a higher fluency with the language needed for a competent pitch. The team agrees (Frame #11), and Lisa and David work on the slides as the others watch (Frame #12). As can be seen, the team rehearses their presentation by using and checking their use of new terms like “acquisition”. Moreover, they make a division of labour based on practical expertise of language, which is deemed necessary to participate in a competent pitching practice. Over the two days, numerous instances where team members learn what is expected of them with regards to particular practices and then help each other learn to participate in a practice competently were observed.

Finally, all practitioners learn to use materials and technologies that mediate a given practice. Andy’s presentation ([Transcript 1](#)) and the team’s business modelling ([Transcript 2](#)) and pitch preparations ([Transcript 3](#)) are mediated by computers and software, which becomes evident at the scene when they have difficulties projecting, connecting to the Internet and playing videos. We observe in [Transcript 2](#), only one person, Lisa, had brought her computer with her on the first day (Frame #1), while all the team members did on the second day. This indicates that they have learned the vital importance of this technology for the completion of the practice. Throughout the weekend, it becomes clear that having access to the Internet on a laptop is crucial to practising business modelling as well as pitching. However, it is the Canvas that is perhaps the most critical artefact of learning at the entire site. It plays a central role in business modelling, as practitioners constantly look to it to learn what various dimensions mean, how their business idea can be mapped and structured by it and which elements are yet to be completed. As shown in [Transcript 2](#), participants regularly inspect and physically interact with the Canvas as a means to orientate others to the unfolding practice, emphasise their ideas and materially capture the content of ongoing discourse.

Entrepreneurial learning emerges from the ordered translation among practices

Entrepreneurial learning is also simultaneously a collaborative accomplishment in which knowledge is produced through ordered arrangements of practices. Put another way, as practitioners (i.e. entrepreneurs, students, organisers, mentors) formulate, discuss and agree upon ideas and proposals, they participate in ordered arrangements of practices, and as they do so, learning becomes rooted in and expressed via those linkages.

In [Transcript 1](#), we observe that this instance of coaching practice reveals and justifies to the audience to the normative purpose and ordering of business modelling, as materially structured by the intermediary object of the Canvas. This information is carried over and negotiated in the subsequent business modelling practice by orienting the team’s discussions and research (as seen in [Transcript 2](#)). Importantly, as the team uses the Canvas, they materially represent their agreements on sticky notes and organise them into an emergent structure. In doing so, the Canvas becomes the means as well as a critical intermediary object of translation. In particular, the Canvas acts as a mediator for tying together shared ideas of what, how and why to create value for whom. This is economical because they are effective at stabilising agreements that would otherwise have to be repeated. The Canvas also knots all the involved ideas and feedback together when the team revisits the placement of sticky notes following a pitch presentation, which then informs the next round of business modelling and pitch presentations. For example, in [Transcript 4](#), Nick participates in an “elevator” pitching practice by filling in the details that his team has agreed upon in the prior business modelling session. His initial pitch communicates the details that his team has agreed upon (Frame #1,

#2 and #3), but shows a lack of depth and misses some key aspects of a competent pitch (as warranted by the previous session on “best practices of pitching”) (Frame #4). Thus, immediately afterwards, the mentors provide additional insights on not only how to improve the team’s business proposal but on the pitch practice itself (such as having a “clear problem and solution” and a “punchy” ending).

Furthermore, we observed the information gleaned from the first pitching practice was brought into business modelling practice again the following day, particularly by revisiting underdeveloped aspects of the “value proposition” and “channels”. Again, as in the first day, ideas created through conversation are manifest on the Canvas through the writing and placing of sticky notes, which are subsequently used by the team as an artefact to structure the making of the final pitch slides that are necessary to participate in the final pitching practice. The learning about (and opportunities for) selling a product or service requires, in this setting, consideration of the entanglement of practices of coaching, business modelling and pitching; the expertise and activities of the coaches, mentors and judges (who inform, evaluate and prescribe what “should” be included in business model and pitch); the knowing shared by the organisers (who have put together the agenda); the knowing enacted by the refugee entrepreneurs (who have selected the business idea); and the knowing of the students (who help translate and develop ideas) – plus, of course, the knowing that goes into making the Canvas, the sticky notes and the computers used in the research. Each entrepreneurial project is, therefore, the totality of these interconnected and mutually dependent instances of local practices, with entrepreneurial learning emerging through the *translation* of these practices.

Discussion and conclusion

In this article, we propose an alternative theoretical perspective of entrepreneurial learning, one that is contextual and sensitive to the observable “doings” and “sayings” of practitioners. Combining existing practice theories and analysis of video data collected during a Startup Weekend event, we theorize that entrepreneurial learning both occurs and emerges through the participation in and through the translation of practice relations. The remainder of this section discusses the theoretical contributions and the implications for future research of this practice theory as well as this study’s limitations.

Theoretical contributions and implications for future research

Our practice theory of entrepreneurial learning has several contributions and implications for future research on entrepreneurship as practice and entrepreneurial learning. First, we further the literature on entrepreneurship as practice by clarifying the relational, material and embodied nature of entrepreneurial learning as it happens in and through practices. While there is a growing interest in practice theories in entrepreneurship scholarship, the absence of a consistent and practice-oriented perspective of entrepreneurial learning has hindered the field by lacking a clear conceptualisation of the relations between learning, knowing and practicing entrepreneurship. In particular, there is a risk of falling into what [Turner \(1994\)](#) calls the problem of the opacity of the practice concept. These relationships are not straightforward and risk being misconstrued as a call for more micro-studies of individual entrepreneurial learning behaviours. This narrow interpretation is possible when the entrepreneurial field does not have a clearly delineated substitute to the dominant belief that subjects are the ultimate source of meaning, learning and knowledge. The fact that practices are enacted through “human agency” should not distract researchers from the fact that practicing, knowing and learning are never solely individual but rather interactional phenomena. As can be seen in this article, a practice theory of entrepreneurial learning views

knowledge, meaning and learning as residing in and through a nexus of practices (Hui *et al.*, 2017). Additionally, as there is no one unified theory of practice, there are notable differences in how various theories and traditions address knowing, learning and practicing relations. We contribute to entrepreneurship as practice by delicately weaving together these different traditions to find a common conceptual ground. This enables the novel exposition of a practice theory of entrepreneurial learning that is much needed but missing in this nascent field. Future research may further advance our theory by further clarifying constitutive elements, for example, the myriad of ways in which different material technologies and objects, social positions and relations and communities are implicated in entrepreneurial learning.

Second, we contribute to the more developed literature on entrepreneurial learning by positing a non-individualist perspective of the phenomenon. Specifically, by introducing the notion of practical knowledge, this article has brought in under-theorised bodily, pre-reflexive and non-linguistic aspects of entrepreneurial learning (Alkemeye and Buschmann, 2017), thereby avoiding the reduction of entrepreneurial learning and education to cognitive processes or individual acquisition of propositional knowledge. Moreover, our theory aims to avoid any reification of learning as a distinct activity or process by understanding it as potentially taking place in any practice. Hence, a practice theory of entrepreneurial learning may further this burgeoning research area by delineating a new onto-epistemological groundwork: the relational constitution of entrepreneurial learning. In particular, this article has shown that rules do not apply themselves, but require finely tuned judgement and learning to work out what they mean in the given situation. We have shown that learning emerges both in the doings and sayings, and in the body, artefacts and preoccupations of many people. Therefore, learning is an inherently collective and heterogeneous endeavour. While some research espouses the importance of the socio-cultural dimensions (Secundo *et al.*, 2017; Taylor and Thorpe, 2004), experiencing real interactions with others (Cope and Watts, 2000; Rae, 2017) or the role of embodied actions (e.g. observing role models (Zozimo *et al.*, 2017), little existing research has investigated the intricate relations among the body, artefacts, practical concerns and situations that structure real-time social interaction and learning outcomes. Moreover, this study also speaks to refugee entrepreneurship literature (Heilbrunn *et al.*, 2018; Meister and Mauer, 2018), which explores how a person's traumatic background shapes entrepreneurial behaviour, by demonstrating that competent participation in practices is structured by one's past (i.e. habitus), but does not preclude the possibilities of practicing and learning. Moreover, it furthers the conversation about nascent entrepreneurship, in particular, by investigating the learning in relation to practices during early idea creation (Hill, 2018), but without conflating idea generation to any one individual (Nielsen and Gartner, 2017). Our theory thus addresses calls for developing a non-individualist perspective of entrepreneurship (Dodd and Anderson, 2007; Fletcher, 2006; Gaddefors and Anderson, 2017) that undercuts the idea that "individual subjects [are] the source of meaning and normativity" (Schatzki, 2001, p. 12). Future research may, for example, begin to more systematically examine why there are commonalities and varieties of entrepreneurial learning concerning naturally produced or reproduced practices and practice relations.

Finally, and relatedly, this article makes a methodological contribution to the study of entrepreneurial learning. When conducting an empirical study, it is important that onto-epistemological assumptions match with methodological choices, and practice-based studies are no different (see Nicolini, 2017). In this study, the primary data were the observable naturally occurring practices, as it is here where learning is occurring and emerging over time. In a practice-based study, priority is given to the real-time unfolding of practices, whereas retrospective interviews and surveys are seen as separate discursive practices. This is an important step, as learning practical knowledge is not always (accurately) reportable by

practitioners themselves, particularly during and after fast-paced sequences of interaction have passed. Hence, this article shows how using video ethnographic methods in which one researcher participates while the other observes using videos and taking field notes, deepens engagement with real-time practices. Video ethnographies thus assist and enhance explanatory claims by overcoming a fieldworker's limited cognitive and physical ability to capture all the nuanced and rich expression cues, body positions and spatial arrangements, *in situ*, using field notes. Moreover, videos enable a faithful record of the audio and video data to be kept after completing fieldwork, which reduces the reliance on fieldworkers' or participants' memory and enables repeated scrutiny of important episodes by multiple researchers (Heath *et al.*, 2010). Nevertheless, it is necessary to acknowledge that video ethnographies do not merely "mirror reality", and researchers must make inclusion/exclusion decisions on what and who gets videotaped, which, in turn, influences the analyses and interpretation. Also, the presence of video cameras may subtly alter participants' behaviour, thus influencing later interpretations. As a consequence, video ethnographies are not only observing the nexus of practices but are necessarily co-emergent with knowing and learning at the site.

Contributions to practice and education

The notion that entrepreneurship goes hand-in-hand with learning is widespread in entrepreneurship education, whether it be in incubators, accelerators or university courses. However, organisers often work with unstated individualist assumptions about knowledge, learning and practice that may impair their ability to share experiences with others and to deepen participants' understanding. Our theory suggests that educators and practitioners should be aware of the practices that they promote, as they are cornerstones of what, why, when and how something is being learned. This departs from assumptions of individual learning processes in which propositional knowledge forms the basis of entrepreneurial learning. For example, in this study, the dominant discourse at the scene is that the refugee practitioners are those who are learning-to-become-entrepreneurs. However, the Startup Weekend is a dynamic site where knowledge is produced *in situ* by more than the refugee entrepreneurs alone – entrepreneurial learning intimately involves the students, organisers, mentors and coaches. By shifting awareness from individual learning outcomes to the practical experiences that facilitate learning, educators can experiment with different practices, and the interaction patterns, physical arrangements, material objects and technologies that structure them, to explore various learning outcomes. Much like medicine, entrepreneurship education would then benefit from educators being both practitioners themselves and systematic scholars of various practices and their relations. If knowledge and learning are not individual endeavours, then more explicit, fine-grained attention to how knowledge and learning are being co-constructed *in situ* through collaboration and dialogue is needed (see Campbell, 2019 for developments). Consequently, this would further justify more practice-based research to understand the effects of commonly reproduced practice nexuses (e.g. mentoring (Sullivan, 2000) and competitions (Passaro *et al.*, 2017)).

Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, it does not conduct a comparative case study of the teams that participated in the Refugees Forward event to compare and contrast patterns of learning. As the practices are the same for each team, it is highly likely that learning unfolds in similar ways; however, future research could be designed where multiple teams are observed, and then patterns of the instances of learning in practice and through practice relations may be concluded in the analysis. In particular, this research may find various

discursive or material elements that enable some teams to learn quickly and comprehensively (although there will be limits to the generalisability as the contextual and situational concerns matter greatly for learning). Furthermore, this study did not conduct a comparative study of other teams in other places that were also participating in a Startup Weekend, which may alter how learning emerges through the translation of practice relations. Second, this study ends with the Startup Weekend pitch event, but entrepreneurial learning continues as long as practitioners continue to participate in various practices (e.g. meeting with suppliers, sending out samples, making contracts with retailers). Our observations are thus limited to social interactions happening in an institutionalised setting, and it remains to be seen how learning emerges when teams leave the Startup Weekend environment. Additionally, many of the practices observed are common only to certain Western settings of entrepreneurship education, and there is, therefore, a considerable diversity of practice and practice relations not expounded here. Future research could add insights by travelling to other sites, to follow the translation among practices as they stretch over time and space, something which was only done in a limited capacity here. Finally, this study cannot determine if learning is happening at a rate or cumulatively that will likely increase the future probability that the entrepreneurial ventures will succeed. Instead, this study contends that learning occurs as novices engage with practical knowledge in action as well as when practices are collaboratively interconnected through translation. Future empirical research may explore if it is possible to determine why novices retain practical knowledge more than others in certain similar situations, as well as when practitioners are more or less successful in translating practice relations through the use of various discursive practices and designs and the deployment of intermediary artefacts. Again, however, there will likely be sharp limits to the generalisability, even when similar practices are being considered, as structural and practical concerns will vary widely between cases and contexts.

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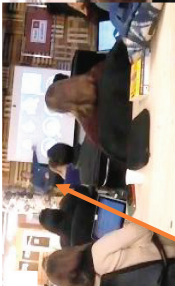
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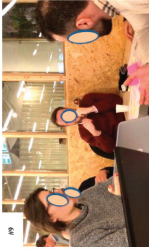
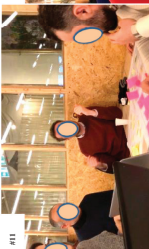
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Transcript 1.
10:45 a.m. on the first
day of the event

				
Andy Andy: If we look at entrepreneurship (.) this is pretty much it (1.0) ((pointing to an image of a series of crumpled pieces of paper being unfolded into a smooth piece of paper, and coffee mugs being emptied of coffee in succession)) A: You uh (1.0) you develop an idea, you drink a lot of coffee (.) you develop a lot of ideas >and you start it< (.) and uh (.) that's pretty much what we are doing here right?=(((clicks to the next slide showing heart and brain))	A:=What I believe is important is (.) that you depart from the uh social heart. And the social heart would be I want to do something good for the world, my value proposition <u>needs</u> to make people happy.= ((points to the heart on slide)) A:= And a business <u>mind</u>. You can only have long-term business if you have [a] sustainable business, which mean[s] that] we need to make money::: And this is already quite a difficult thing.	A: Uh no, the the <the the>..diagram that you want to have on the tables is what it takes to take a decision. The entrepreneurship is what it takes to take decisions. Unfortunately the Canvas is not like a magic wand, you look at it and find the right answer. ((gestures quickly to image of Canvas on slide)) A: But I understand your question (.) some of the things you put on the Canvas are just uh uh sticky notes (.) but they are really big decisions, so you need to think about it really well. Try to fill in the Canvas with the end in mind. But you have steps in the middle. You may need to develop a prototype, and then you might need to change the Canvas (.) again.	Mentor M: <But but> (.) the Canvas can't give you guidance right? Like if you have the choice of inhouse or outsourcing something. That's a key decision. Does the Canvas help you make those kind of decisions? A: Uh no, the the <the the>..diagram that you want to have on the tables is what it takes to take a decision. The entrepreneurship is what it takes to take decisions. Unfortunately the Canvas is not like a magic wand, you look at it and find the right answer. ((gestures quickly to image of Canvas on slide)) A: But I understand your question (.) some of the things you put on the Canvas are just uh uh sticky notes (.) but they are really big decisions, so you need to think about it really well. Try to fill in the Canvas with the end in mind. But you have steps in the middle. You may need to develop a prototype, and then you might need to change the Canvas (.) again.	Entrepreneur E: Um, if we are mentioning so many essential thing:s, why are many of them not in the Canvas? (1.0) If you need to solve a problem, why isn't that one the Canvas? A: I agree (.) that should be on the Canvas. But you can have another document, a plan, with a more detailed description because you cannot put everything in the Canvas since it is more like a prototype.

#1 	Lisa Nick Sam David Amir L: >Do you all have laptops here?< (1.0) ((A, N and S glancing at each other negatively))	#2 	N (shakes head): Okay () we will <u>begin</u> >>step-by-step<<= L: [um-hmm] N: =From here ((N hand touches VP box))	#3 	N: =To here = ((hand touches down on customer segments box)) = to here. ((hand touches down on channels box))	#4 	(N glances at A) L: <u>So</u> the value proposition is <u>clearly</u> that(((touches VP box))) [A addresses N in Arabic]	#5 	N ((turns to L)): We should do research instead on seed companies in [the] Netherlands. ((gestures with his hands to laptop)) ((D writes 'farmers in developing countries' on a pink sticky note and places it in the 'customer segment box'))	#6 	(L gives N laptop) ((L removes a sticky note from the 'value proposition box' and begins to write on it))	#7 	(L places sticky note back in same location) A ((turns to D)): We need to have a contract:: with a <u>guy</u> , a price::: () I can telephone my friend and <u>he</u> can tell:::	#8 	L ((interrupts A)): To <u>me</u> () I think it's a very nice idea. Like () you don't need a factory and it's easy to implement. It's a very nice idea. But () [what] you need to figure out is... your partners, I think they are willing to supply you. and () how do you make money on that? ((L address A with hand gesture))
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Lisa Sam David Amir Nick D: So [lib] same as yesterday () just introduce yourself a little bit = ((finger gesture to A)) D: "And then we do the slides and then at end you can say a little bit."	L: And makes sure you say you are an agricultural engineer and for 30 years this was your business, and you are very passionate about the trading of seeds (0.3) ((nods)) Okay?	S: ((speaks in Arabic to Amir and Nick, all laugh)) D: What did you say? S: Write it (laughs) write it for hi:m ((Amir objects playfully))	L: Should I write it? A: Yeah ((extends arm, nods head)) L: Ok and then ((begins writing on sticky note))
			
D: Okay () now we have four slides ((D glances at N)) do you know which one you'd like to present? N: I have to see it ((shakes head)) I don't know.	((N studies slides on laptop)) L: ((reads aloud as she writes)) <I am an agricultural engineer passionate about the trading of seeds for over 30 years> ((L looks at A and hands sticky note)) L: Want to try it?	N: ((interrupts)) <Acquis () aquasion> () What does it mean? ((L looks at screen)) L: Acquisition? ((Organiser shouts "Two minutes guys!")	D: To get new customers. L: [To get to get] them () like get them ((L hand acts like grabbing motion. N nods))
			
L: Oh shit! How long do we have? Two minutes? N: Maybe we need like 10 minutes more. A: "I have not had time to read it (pointing at the computer):" S: ((to D)) [maybe you do it and we e:h:]	D: Oh maybe that's a good () option L: So we do the presentation ((gestures to herself)) D: [Yeah] =	D: And you guys step in with answering questions ((gestures with hands to sides)) L: [Yeah] ((S: N and A nod)) D: Is that alright?	((Lisa moves laptop so David can see screen)) L: Do you want to do the beginning? D: [Yeah]

Transcript 3.
4:15 pm on the second
day of the event

 #1	 #2	 #3	 #4
<u>Nick</u> N: Uh (.) <alright> the business is called triple H =	N: = uh (.) we uh (.) = ((looks down and reads from note card)) N: = Are exporting uh (.) high quality uh (.) high quality hybrid seeds =	N: = To uh (.) ((looks at audience, move hands from left to right)) N: = Help farmer in North Africa and Middle East to increase the productivity of uh (.) vegetables uh (.) and other stuff.	N: So (0.3) = ((glances down at note card)) N: = That's it.