



Fighting against all odds: Entrepreneurship education as employability training

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abstract

In this paper the efforts of transforming ‘regular’ entrepreneurship to a specific kind of ‘entrepreneurial self’ in education are linked to the materialization of employability. It will be illustrated that schoolchildren, under the guise of entrepreneurship education, are taught how to work on improving their selves, emphasizing positive thinking, the joy of creating and awareness of the value of their own interests and passions. This ethic reminds us that we can always improve ourselves, since the enterprising self can never fully be acquired. The flipside of this ethic is that, by continuously being encouraged to become our best, it may be difficult to be satisfied with who we are. Highlighted in this paper is that, with all the amusement and excitement present in entrepreneurship education, also comes an expectation of the individual to fight against all odds. Recruiting students to this kind of shadow-boxing with their selves should involve critical reflection on its political dimensions, human limits, alternative ideals and the collective efforts that are part of entrepreneurial endeavours.

Prologue

‘I have never needed to look for a job. I found my own way.’

It is an evening when dinnertime has been delayed due to one of those deadlines that most academics continually seem to struggle with. The TV is on in the background and I am just about to get the dinner ready when I hear a woman talk about how she made it as an entrepreneur in life, never having to search for a job, but carving out a life path of her own. I quickly recall that a real estate entrepreneur is this evening’s celebrity-in-the-news interview on the ‘My truth’

(*Min sanning*) show on Swedish public TV¹. I reach for the remote control to increase the volume and find myself subsumed by a scene where the host, Kristina Hedberg, is asking a neat, middle-aged, well-dressed woman about the sacrifices she had to make during her entrepreneurial journey in life. The entrepreneur, Wanna I De Jong, explains her success:

Hedberg: You've written that *everything* depends on how you think – your relations, your health and even your finances are a result of how you think.

De Jong: Absolutely, absolutely... absolutely [*she nods several times to emphasize the meaning of the message*]. We are who we think we are.

Hedberg: But what does that say about those who didn't succeed the way you have, did they just think the wrong thoughts?

De Jong: Yes, in those cases, their thinking was wrong.

Hedberg: But what about people who are unhappy with their lives? Is their thinking wrong too?

De Jong: I've been unhappy in my life too; I've even tried to commit suicide. There's misfortune everywhere. I've experienced wealth and poverty, and I believe I found myself from there... For sure, I've been at the bottom several times.

Hedberg: But wasn't it just external circumstances? Can't something just hit a person?

De Jong: Yes, misfortune can hit a person – disease, death...

Hedberg: But, we can't think that away.

De Jong: You can think away pretty much. You can do that. I know. When you really love life, then you'll find a solution... When we hit the bottom and get back up – that makes us stronger, it builds who we are. Because life is a fantastic adventure, after all.

Billionaire entrepreneur Wanna I De Jong was born in 1960 in Przasnysz, Poland, the youngest daughter of an entrepreneur and a garden-loving mother. By the time she was four, she was taking care of the family's food purchases so her mother could look after their garden. At six, she was selling parsley and chives at the market, since these products were the easiest to carry and made her the most money per kilo. At thirteen, as an outstanding student, Wanna was awarded a school trip to the former Soviet Union, where she realized she could exchange her clothes and make-up for gold (wedding rings and jewellery). This trip thus evolved into a business activity and led to several further trips where she went undercover as a dedicated communist in order to get access to Soviet communities interested in doing business. At seventeen, she decided to go to Sweden, a choice of destination she evaluated carefully after having met a group of Swedish engineers who were constructing the largest building in Warsaw. In Sweden, the student counsellor ridiculed her when she talked about her dream of becoming a businesswoman. Instead she was advised, with her top marks, to go for the medical program at Karolinska Institutet. After three years, however, she

¹ The TV show 'My truth' with Wanna I de Jong was first broadcast 1 May 2012 at 8 pm. It has also been possible to see this show on the Internet website SVT Play.

changed her mind and started at law school, but soon changed her mind again to finally decide to go for what she wanted from the start: to become a businesswoman.

At this point, she would go into any kind of business she could make a living from, ranging from technical solutions to selling butter, beer, or porcelain. She bought her first real estate in Holland and, as is often said in these kinds of stories, the rest is history. Today she owns – privately – a real estate empire worth a billion Swedish kronor. It is symbolic that she owns Yxtaholm Castle, fulfilling her dream of living in a castle from when she was six years old. However, as illustrated in this dialogue, her journey was not always easy or free of friction, but followed a hard, tough life of poverty, disease, divorces, lost relations and several other setbacks.

The moral of this story seems to be that, with positive thinking, the game is yours to win (cf. Ehrenreich, 2009). The underlying message is about suppressing (bad) feelings so that they do not interfere with the self-fulfilling dreams of a person's life. No matter how hard you get hit, you need to get back on your feet, again and again and again. Fighting against all odds. This quite amazing story can be easily read as a new kind of Cinderella story of our times. Rather than turning into the passive princess – waiting to be rescued by a prince – Wonna I de Jong turns herself into the self-made businesswoman, which by the way makes up a story-line that is often provided these days in cartoons for girls such as the Barbie films. Nevertheless, in the TV interview she is depicted as one of the few who has managed to create an empire. Just as Joseph Schumpeter, often referred to as the founding father of entrepreneurship theory, once described what entrepreneurs do. Referring to Schumpeter, Elliott (1980: 49) states that 'the successful Marxian capitalist, like his Schumpeterian entrepreneurial counterpart, presumably embodies a significant "will to found a private kingdom", a "will to conquer", and a "joy of creating" (Schumpeter, 1961: 93)'. Whilst de Jong's story initially revolves around the joy of creating and the host asks questions about the private kingdom and how it was conquered, the story about fighting against all odds turns out to be the real outcome of the interview.

At the end of the interview, the host asks de Jong what she will do with her fortune. Enthusiastically she talks about how she would like to work with young and exposed people to inspire them to make a similar journey as she did herself and to fight against 'Jante's law'² – a cultural norm that is seen to permeate Swedish society with its 'Don't ever believe you are someone!' Her idea is not to

2 'Jante's law', made popular by Danish-Norwegian author Aksel Sandemose, was to criticize individual success and achievement as unworthy and inappropriate.

donate any of her fortune to a particular charity, but to start her completely own foundation to specifically address initiatives that promote the entrepreneurial ideals she endorses. With all due respect for Wonna I De Jong's achievements, I want to keep the focus here on how young people – students, pupils, children – relate as entrepreneurial, creative, active, positive thinking individuals with unique interests and passions, to a story that stresses the joy of creating. The flip side, however, of fighting against all odds, is present also but remains as subtext.

It will be argued that schoolchildren, under the guise of entrepreneurship education are taught how to work on improving their selves, emphasizing positive thinking, the joy of creating and awareness of the value of their own interests and passions. This training accentuates the need to work on one's self in order to be attractive to future employers – unless, that is, you 'choose' to start a company yourself. That might as well be what you need to do because there are no other options available. Or you may consider the entrepreneurial path as something that suits you, as Wonna I de Jong did. In entrepreneurship policy research, this distinction is often referred to as 'push' and pull' (Audretsch et al., 2007). No matter if you are pushed or pulled into starting up a company, you are expected to work on your self in order to manage in the market. The entrepreneurship discourse does not seem to escape anyone but accentuates, and presupposes, an enterprising self, whether you are looking for a new job, have a job, or are about to set up a new business.

Hence, entrepreneurship education and employability are tightly linked, since they both centre on the 'enterprising self' (Peters, 2001; Down, 2009; Komulainen et al., 2009; Korhonen et al., 2012). In this paper, I will illustrate how entrepreneurship education takes the shape of employability training in schools. The article proceeds as follows: First, the entrepreneurship discourse is discussed regarding how it has broadened from focusing on only the heroic entrepreneurs to include everyone. This is followed by an elaboration of the links among entrepreneurship, employability and the enterprising self and a section where entrepreneurship education is examined. The concluding discussion concerns possible future consequences with regards to how entrepreneurship education fosters the enterprising self. Because if the 'joy' emphasized in Wonna I de Jong's story comes at the cost of fighting against all odds, how much fun is that?

From the Entrepreneur to personal entrepreneurs

Much of the strong legitimacy of entrepreneurship in modern society rests upon the general notion of entrepreneurs as creative and energetic frontrunners that

undertake innovative action that in the end will mean prosperity and development for all of us (Ogbor, 2000). Joseph Schumpeter (1883–1950) saw the entrepreneur as an individual who carries out new combinations (innovations) that bring the market out of equilibrium. Accordingly, not many within a human population have this quality, and often this action is limited to a certain period of time, while ‘those who follow the pioneers are still entrepreneurs, though to a degree that continuously decreases to zero’ (Schumpeter, 1934: 414). This reasoning implies that there are Entrepreneurs – those with capital E – and there are entrepreneurial followers. The relevant question to ask from a Schumpeterian perspective is ‘Who is an entrepreneur?’ – which also led to the desire to map the actual traits of The Entrepreneur.

The efforts to nail down a particular kind of person appear to have been unrewarding. Nevertheless, this research can be seen as very successful in constructing the traits that remain central to the entrepreneurship discourse (Jones and Spicer, 2005; Berglund and Johansson, 2007a). The critique of the trait approach that dominated entrepreneurship research for a long time led to a new and dominant stream of research, instead turning towards studying new business creation, attaining a slightly more inclusive notion about who may be included in the herd of entrepreneurs (e.g. Gartner, 2001). The initial question thus changed in the direction of looking at practice: ‘What should a person do in order to become a successful Entrepreneur?’. Accordingly, many entrepreneurship and management textbooks today emphasize how to develop successful business ideas, how to recognize opportunities, how to build an entrepreneurial team, how to write a business plan and how to manage a growing entrepreneurial firm (e.g. Barringer and Ireland, 2006). The idea of the Entrepreneur – the one with capital E – remains, but it is now acknowledged that the rest of the population can train their entrepreneurial competences in order to develop successful businesses.

Recently, entrepreneurs are portrayed not so much in relation to starting a business, as in relation to making their (dream) life come true, as ‘personal entrepreneurs’ (Olsson and Frödin, 2007). Personal entrepreneurs denote a new era of mankind comprising all those people who make things happen and who discover how they – themselves – can create new energy by discovering that much of what they previously believed in was not true (ibid.). Accordingly, with this attitude to life, it is argued as being much more possible to fulfil one’s dreams and to have fun whilst exploring one’s ideas. The joy of creating is emphasized and entrepreneurship is depicted as a personal adventure.

This version of entrepreneurship thus fits well with ideas on personal development. In relation to the previous two business-related questions, this

version unfolds a new question in relation to the entrepreneur, namely: 'How can people (in general) take on entrepreneurial traits in order to develop their immanent selves?' In this vein, many other books – such as self-help books – provide a rich source for how we can become more entrepreneurial, more enterprising, by searching for our immanent selves, teaching us how to affirm the parts of ourselves that are seen as valuable and enriching, as well as modifying the parts that interfere with our search for a 'deeper, truer self' (see also Bröckling, 2005; Costea et al., 2012). This runs well with ideas on self-management, where self-development is tightly linked to the employing organization, which in terms of personal entrepreneurship can be yourself. Consequently, employment and personal development are united. The more personal development, the more you work on your employability, becoming the sought-after person – just as Entrepreneurs have always been sought out (Jones and Spicer, 2005).

The process of rewriting the Entrepreneur to the entrepreneurial possibilities of us all has coincided with an (academic and public) struggle for ascribing to entrepreneurship something more specific (or general) among different entrepreneurship discourses, for instance, stressing communal, social, ecological and egalitarian values (Berglund and Johansson, 2007b). Entrepreneurial traits, however, emphasizing someone who is totally committed to a task, takes risks, and creates something completely different, remains central to both the entrepreneur and the enterprising individual (Ahl, 2002; Berglund, 2007). Despite all the richness of 'entrepreneurial' and 'enterprising' identities that have been invented in contemporary society (e.g. Cohen and Musson, 2000), it has been illustrated that entrepreneurship discourses are highly gendered (e.g. Bruni et al., 2004), positioning women as less entrepreneurial than men, thus making up an antithesis to the entrepreneurial man (Ahl and Marlow, 2012; Holmer Nadesan and Tretheway, 2000). For this reason, among several others such as economic bias (see Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004), there have been attempts to create more justifiable entrepreneurship discourses. This has concurrently created a seedbed for various entrepreneurial discourses since they all draw upon the idea of the creative human being (Berglund and Johansson, 2007b; Sørensen, 2008), in which God is replaced by an immanent Self to be explored. The Entrepreneur with the capital E is still discernible, but now is subsumed in the Darwinian masculine stereotype that Ogbor (2000) speaks of and against whom enterprising selves are judged in terms of a flexible subject, sensitive to market signals.

The entrepreneur is also an ideal that operates well with contemporary neoliberal ideals, since this person is her/his own capital, her/his producer and who becomes her/his own source of property (Foucault, 1978). According to du Gay et

al. (1986: 170), the entrepreneur can no longer be ‘represented as just one among a plurality of ethical personalities but must be seen as assuming an ontological priority’. The enterprising self is obviously at the centre of entrepreneurship discourses and has come to inform individuals to work, not only on their businesses, but also on themselves. Whilst the former is still described in terms of entrepreneurship, the latter is described in terms of employability, stressing how people are expected to relentlessly update and improve their knowledge and skills, trying to feel good about themselves while satisfying the Big Boss, a composite of all potential future employers (Cremin, 2010). Accordingly, entrepreneurship and employability have at least one thing in common: they both assume an enterprising self. In the next section, entrepreneurship and employability are further elaborated as discourses on the enterprising self.

Entrepreneurship and employability: discourses on the enterprising self

The enterprising self is at the centre of entrepreneurship and employability as both invoke the idea of infinite personal development. According to Costea et al. (2012), the principle of potentiality lies at the heart of employability, and one highly potent figure is the entrepreneur her/himself, the one who creates (Berglund and Johansson, 2007a). Thus, discourses on employability and entrepreneurship emphasize individuals as borderless, always open for development, advancement and progress. This is how Rose (1996) sees the enterprising self –as occupying contemporary ideas on the individual:

Become whole, become what you want, become yourself: the individual is to become, as it were, an entrepreneur of itself, seeking to maximize its own powers, its own happiness, its own quality of life, though enhancing its autonomy and then instrumentalizing its autonomous choices in the service of its life-style. (*ibid.*, 1996: 158)

Like entrepreneurship, employability has in recent decades come to be cast as the solution of individual, organizational and societal success. Whilst traditional entrepreneurship discourse has accentuated the already resourceful individual (e.g. Ogbor, 2000), employability speaks of the exploration of infinite human resourcefulness (e.g. Costea et al., 2007), which invokes the subject of self-management (Heelas, 2002), giving shape to individuals who have everything to ‘win’ and nothing to ‘lose’ from working to improve their selves. It is suggested that through becoming enterprising we can be in control of both our work and our lives. As Rose (1996: 158) put it, we fulfil ourselves ‘not in spite of work but by means of work’. Becoming enterprising seems to offer a lot at first glance, but may also convey some disastrous consequences:

Just as companies are supposed to best increase their profitability by organizing their internal procedures to be market-compatible, transforming themselves into a multitude of ‘companies within the company’ and ultimately promoting every employee to a subcontractor, the individual is supposed to be able to fully develop his [*sic*] entrepreneurial virtues only by applying the principle of intrapreneurship to himself and splitting himself up accordingly: as ‘customer of himself’, he is his own king, a being with needs that are to be recognized and satisfied by the ‘supplier of himself’. If the latter ignores the demands of his internal business partner, this partner will chasten him with lethargy, exhaustion or other forms of energy deprivation. If the exchange works well, however, both profit from it. (Bröckling, 2005: 13)

The emphasis on the enterprising self (and entrepreneurship/employability) goes hand in hand with a state that has been redefined from being a distributor to an offeror of services (Jacobsson, 2004), or, as Rose (1999) put it, with the shift from a social state to an enabling state, where individuals are free to make active choices. Accordingly, employers in general, including public sector employers, are positioned in such a way that they are expected to make it possible for ‘the individual to stay employable in relation to the workplace in which she/he works’ (Fejes, 2010: 100). And vice versa, ‘the individual is positioned as responsible for making use of the opportunities offered as a way of transforming her/himself into an employable citizen’ (*ibid.*).

The enterprising self is not only accentuated in relation to employers, employees and citizens in general, but is also discernible in the educational system. Peters (2001) traces how the ‘enterprise culture’ in the UK, which emerged under Prime Minister Thatcher’s administration, took the form of ‘enterprise education’ and ‘enterprise curriculum’ in education, and shows how the ‘responsibilization of the self’ was invoked in the educational context:

The duty to the self – its simultaneous responsibilization as a moral agent and its construction as a calculative rational choice actor – becomes the basis for a series of investment decisions concerning one’s health, education, security, employability and retirement. (*ibid.*: 61)

Komulainen et al. (2009) report on the same movement in Finland, where entrepreneurship has been introduced in education, and where the action plan above all stresses ‘inner entrepreneurship’ – a general enterprising attitude to be taught in schools. Examining narratives written by students in comprehensive school for the yearly competition ‘Good enterprise!’, they find that the hero entrepreneur is rare in the students’ stories, which they argue is at odds with the growth-oriented action that is pursued in the policy documents. Instead, the entrepreneurship narratives highlight the moral virtues and qualities of respectable citizens, stressing diligence, honesty and self-responsibility. What is more, these stories are classed as well as gendered, favouring boys in the

competition since they better match the culturally valued representations of the autonomous, risk-taking entrepreneurial individual. This may not be a surprise since the entrepreneurship discourse – portraying the hero Entrepreneur – is itself gendered.

Holmer Nadesan and Tretheway (2000) further the reasoning on the gendered enterprising self by illustrating how popular magazines encourage women to embrace the entrepreneurial ideal, striving for success. However, simultaneously, they confront ‘subtle remarks that they as women can never hope to achieve it’ (*ibid.*: 224). They argue that women’s discourse offers a paradox, in the sense that success is contingent on developing an enterprising self that is ultimately held to be unattainable because of ‘unsightly (feminine) leakages that always/already reveal their performances as charade’ (*ibid.*). Nevertheless, ‘inspiring stories’, ‘self-help sections’ and ‘improve-yourself articles’ dominate women’s magazines (Bröckling, 2005) and can be seen as a motive to the fact that women must work harder on their enterprising selves.

The enterprising self thus has ambivalent and contradictory dimensions since it approves some personal properties and one set of personal properties and defines others as deviant (Komulainen et al., 2009: 32). What is required to reconcile its heterogeneous element is not any authoritarian dictatorship, but partaking in an ‘inner’ decision-making dialogue. Following Bröckling’s (2005: 13) reasoning, ‘the self, unlike a “real” business, can neither choose its staff members nor fire them for unsatisfactory performance’. This is what children are taught under the heading of entrepreneurship education. Now let us see how entrepreneurship education has been introduced in the education system.

Creating the entrepreneurial generation

It is a frosty morning in the midst of fall in Reykjavik, Iceland, 11 October 2007. Around 120 people have gathered from various nations of the European Union to discuss ‘Entrepreneurship in vocational education – a key to social inclusion and economic development in Europe’. As a researcher interested in the EU program ‘Equal’, I am identified as one of the academics who could contribute to the dialogue at this conference. My experience from the Equal projects falls back on participators’ mutual efforts to turn entrepreneurship into subversive action by way of addressing – and trying to subvert – discriminating and excluding structures. Making a long story short, this was my background, and I therefore expected discussions on structural obstacles, power regimes, and how these could be overcome.

Imagine my surprise when the initial guest on the conference program was a young male entrepreneur who had started a war game on the Web. He had an hour at his disposal but took much more time, to the other presenters' frustration. But the audience was completely amazed by his story; albeit every other sentence was judgmental (for instance, dismissing women since they were not interested in Web games, ridiculing different ethnic traits and so forth). Except for this presenter – who turned out to be a kind of a role figure for the conference (as if the goal would be to turn all youngsters on the edge into Web game designers), three boys from an Irish school participated on the merits of having won an entrepreneurship competition. When the moderator asked the boys about their dream, they shared the vision – once they had become real entrepreneurs some time in the future – of coming back to their old school in a red helicopter to inspire future students that 'it really is possible to achieve something when you want to'. How the organizers stitched diversity and inclusion into this program remains a mystery; however, this occasion served as an awakening moment illustrating how young people – in very diverse ways – are recruited to fantasize about themselves and share their fantasies with the public whilst being rewarded with warm applause.

These examples, depicting the Entrepreneur almost as some caricature, are nonetheless commonly contested or renounced by teachers involved in the practice and development of entrepreneurship education in Scandinavian countries (Berglund and Holmgren, 2013; Korhonen et al., 2012; Skogen and Sjøvoll, 2010; Komulainen et al., 2009). These kinds of 'hero versions', embodying the raw economic ideals of an exploiting capitalist, are rejected in favour of another kind of entrepreneurial ideal that is seen to embrace, include and develop students. In the Finnish version, 'inner entrepreneurship' is called for, which Komulainen et al. (2009) refer to as a 'new basic skill and competence for every citizen'.

In Sweden, an 'entrepreneurial approach' has gained acknowledgment, stressing that the school will encourage students to develop an approach that promotes entrepreneurship in the sense of stimulating creativity, curiosity and self-confidence in order to solve problems, try out ideas and take initiative and responsibility (Curriculum, Lgr 11, 2010:6). This approach will be promoted throughout schooling. Even if daycare centres are not directly referred to (in the curriculum for these centres, enterprise and creativity are emphasised), there are also day care centres working with entrepreneurship as a project (Berglund, 2012). And, even if there are still teachers who resist entrepreneurship, the idea of becoming entrepreneurial as an individual has received wide acceptance.

As early as 1997, Johannisson and Madsén voiced how citizenship could be fostered among students by introducing an enterprising approach, stressing the commitment that can be discerned among small business owners. In 2006, Leffler highlighted how an enterprising discourse, based on student activity that encourages students to take initiative and responsibility, had become part of teaching, which she contrasted to an entrepreneurship discourse that referred to 'core' business creation (Leffler, 2006: 223). Furthermore, in a 2007 study, the entrepreneurial approach was verbalized by committed teachers, many of whom saw themselves as initiators of entrepreneurship education, emphasizing students' ability to be creative, active, take initiative and to reflect on their selves and their relation to society and to life itself (Berglund and Holmgren, 2007).

Whether 'inner entrepreneurship' or 'entrepreneurial approach' is highlighted, they both refer more to encouraging a broad approach to life itself among children than to a process of setting up a new company. This approach stresses being active, seeing opportunities (in life) and exploring them. It is how discovering one's personal passions and dreams, taking initiative, daring to try new things, learning to fail and to never give up have become integral parts of teaching entrepreneurship in schools. Arguably, this fits well with the ideas Olsson and Frödin express in their book *Personal entrepreneurship*:

Start a company, find a dream job, realize a volunteer project or do whatever you find worth doing in life. You can use your personal entrepreneurship to do exactly what you want. So what are your dreams and passions, small and big? (Olsson and Frödin, 2007: 15)

Entrepreneurship education has indeed come to embrace more than knowledge on how to start a company, and it has opened up for a market for new 'products' – teaching material, teacher's guides and associated courses – that have been introduced to support teachers as they take on entrepreneurship, as an approach to life itself, in their education work. In a knowledge survey edited by the Swedish National Agency for Education in 2010, titled 'Skapa och våga: Om entreprenörskap i skolan' ('Create and dare: About entrepreneurship in school') entrepreneurship is discussed as a panacea: 'entrepreneurship, in its widest sense, ascribes to each individual a potential in life, studies, work and in society to deal with problems, see opportunities and be energetic' (p. 63). In this publication, eleven different concepts are presented. The premise in all concepts is that entrepreneurship is more than running a business. According to one of the concepts, entrepreneurship is about creating 'an arena with a space to make what is fun in life; to create a life situation that feels meaningful' (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2010: 21). Mainly, these concepts are directed at primary and secondary school, where the entrepreneurial approach is more prominent in the lower grades, while business creation is addressed more often

in the higher grades. Johansson and Rosell (2012), however, found that the entrepreneurial approach was also part of higher entrepreneurship education, both at a university and in a folk high school (*folkhögskola*) and concluded that this kind of education is more about personal development than starting a business. In the folk high school...

[t]he education program began with a period where the students and the SIP staff got to know each other personally. This was done through various social events. One important activity was that the students all got the opportunity to perform their own lectures to the rest of the class on subjects that they were particularly interested in. Just to mention a few examples, students have lectured on the Brazilian dance, Capoeira, how to make a tattoo, medieval games, or the design of a chair included in the product range of a small business. (*ibid.*: 249)

In this case, students' interests are part of an education where they are encouraged to make more out of their interests, since those interests set a ground for personal development. Moreover, the fun part of education – and of life – is highlighted, though the 'fun' bears on the ability to try something out, to fail (and try again) in order to be able to succeed. The 'fun' is also emphasized in the sequel book to *Personal Entrepreneurship* with the subtitle 'Feel good while you succeed', which is advertised this way on their website:

Personal entrepreneurship is the bridge between thought and action. Your ability to make your ideas into reality. Ideas on how you want to live your life and the things you want to create in your life... Personal entrepreneurship is about realizing dreams, making things happen and feeling good while you're doing it. It is an approach to life with a focus on opportunity, power, desire and willingness to do what you want, right now. It's about daring to try, daring to fail and daring to succeed. (Frödin and Olsson, 2013)

In general, 'fun', 'excitement' and 'adventure' are recurrent words describing the activities in entrepreneurship education. It is easy to envisage that these courses get high marks on 'customer satisfaction'. The approach runs all the way through school, from small children in preschool (with stories and playful exercises) to more ambitious enterprise competitions that are introduced in the higher grades. Through these activities, children are expected to turn into innovators, find their own potential (exploring their interests and tastes), and then become extroverted storytellers to communicate their ideas.

In one of the concepts, 'Flashes of genius', directed towards children six years old, positive thinking is emphasised by way of a number of different stories. In one of the stories, the fairy-tale characters No-no and Yes-yes are introduced to help train young children to relate to themselves in a certain way. Where Yes-yes sees opportunities to create new ideas and solutions, No-no is the figure that makes us think before we do anything wrong, so that nothing goes amiss.

Referring to Bröckling's (2005: 13) description of the enterprising self, No-no and Yes-yes make up the dialogue between the customer and the supplier of one's self. This kind of exercise emphasizes that there may be pitfalls to consider and that children must learn to balance positive and negative aspects to make choices about what to go for. In the teacher's guide to these stories, the need to train this balance is distinctly expressed. Hence, this illustrates the need to exercise an 'inner' dialogue in order to reconcile the heterogeneous nature of the enterprising self.

So, if business creation is not the common denominator in the concepts launched under the umbrella of entrepreneurship education, then 'fun', 'own interests' and 'finding one's passions' certainly are. They tie together what is recognized as entrepreneurship education. This direction is echoed in a book written by 18 students during an entrepreneurial program at a high school. One of the stories in the book is how they came to get to learn about each other's dreams during this year, and how they had to search within themselves to do so:

We had to dig deep within ourselves, and to bring forward passions we did not know were there when we started working on our individual projects. (Påtända osläckbara själar, 2007: 81)

Thus, the entrepreneurial approach can be trained and is considered vital in order to explore the enterprising selves of children. In these education activities, they learn that everything is possible and that if one fails – whether it is about starting a business or getting a job – it is just a matter of getting back on your feet again. To try again and again and again. To have dreams to fulfil is the most important part. Whether those dreams can be realized depends on if one has the right approach – to fight against all odds. This illustrates some of the ways that entrepreneurship education has turned into employability training in schools. The question is: what are the implications of this emphasis on having fun and learning to never give up?

Fostering the enterprising self

That entrepreneurship has come to be connected with the 'good' (and often God-like) is hard to deny. Entrepreneurs are worshipped as saviours of our times and entrepreneurial-making initiatives have found their way into organizations where they would have been unthinkable only 10 or 15 years ago. Swedish schools are just one example; there are many other contexts to look into, such as the state agencies promoting this discourse, the public sector promoting its employees to become more entrepreneurial (e.g. Fejes, 2010), the foundations created by

retiring entrepreneurs who want to leave behind a legacy, or the universities that we academics ourselves are a part of (Costea et al., 2012).

Returning to the introductory story of Wonna I De Jong, after going into depth about how she had to fight against all odds, she finally resolved the heterogeneous parts of her life: ‘...life is a fantastic adventure after all’. Entrepreneurial features are increasingly promoted in the institutions I have mentioned here, promising coaching advice in our adventurous journey of life. However, this coaching advice is no longer optional through newspapers and books – it has become central to educational policies and is now part of the curriculum.

Entrepreneurship education aims at fostering the enterprising selves of children, training their employability and creating conditions for future entrepreneurship. This fits well with how we as inhabitants of a neoliberal society increasingly become part of an ‘enterprise culture’ (Wee and Brooks, 2012) by which notions of employability, flexibility, project orientation and individual responsibility are made central to our way of justifying ourselves and our actions (e.g. Chiapello and Fairclough, 2002; Cremin, 2011; du Gay et al., 1986). The enterprising self can be seen as the invisible role model against whom individuals are judged, and judge themselves, in contemporary society. The recurrent watchwords for this subject seem to be ‘Achieve more!’ ‘Perform!’ ‘Fight against all odds!’ and ‘Have fun in the meantime!’

The flipside of De Jong’s story is not so much about having fun, but struggling against the odds. Likewise, entrepreneurship education challenges students to see opportunities, to work on their potentialities and to become ‘more’ (cmp. Costea et al., 2012). Students are no longer just in search of knowledge, but are also encouraged to search for their selves. These are particular selves that are expected to be developed, namely the enterprising selves. They are never sufficient as one can always become ‘more entrepreneurial’. Being entrepreneurial, as well as being employable, has no limits. According to Costea et al. (2012: 33), advancing oneself – becoming ‘more’ – places the self in a position to be in ‘permanent antagonism with itself’. By failing to recognise human limits and making false promises about absolute freedom, ‘more’ is not the path to happiness and success, but rather a tragic path where individuals need to fight, not only against all odds, but also with themselves (*ibid.*).

The narrative of Wonna I de Jong illustrates that it has been hard work to accomplish the success that became the ticket to the interview show. However, this hard work is not described in the sense of (traditional) physical labour and long hours of work, with tough assignments and challenging tasks, but is

emphasised more as training oneself to think in a certain way. As in Pavlov's conditioned reflex, she explains how she trained herself so that whenever she met resistance, she would think positively about herself and challenge herself to get on her feet again and to fight against all odds. In other words, her story is all about her – the individual – who should accept a situation in order to adapt to new circumstances and situations. Adversity is not constructed as a loss of something, but as a journey, which paves a way for life as a fantastic adventure. What is missing in this story is the collective part – about those who have played a part in creating her success – as well as the difficulties and structural conditions that may not have been that easy to just 'think away'. Nor is the 'destruction' part of the story (a concept central to Schumpeter, by the way), for all those words that denote 'loss', 'damage', 'harm' and so forth are suppressed.

Finally, I should comment that this paper situates its point of departure in the story of a woman who was brought up by an admired entrepreneurial father. Entrepreneurship is indeed a gendered discourse, but when this discourse changes from tracing 'Entrepreneurs' to promoting 'the entrepreneurial', it may have unexpected consequences. My apprehension is that it twists gender in sophisticated ways. Whilst 'boys' remain pinpointed as the 'real entrepreneurs' – in school they often turn out to be the mischievous boys (e.g. Berglund and Holmgren, 2008; Korhonen et al., 2012) – 'the girls' are introduced to acquiring their enterprising selves by finding ways to 'be good' and to continually improve themselves. This pursuit of an enterprising identity requires for women, according to Holmer Nadesan and Tretheway (2000: 245), a 'constant vigilance and the expenditure of both time and resources in the pursuit of disciplining what is articulated as an unruly psyche and an overflowing body'. This would not subvert gendered structures then, but retain them, keeping them even more invisible and thereby hampering the potential of collective and feminist action. Thus, whilst the search for a 'true' enterprising self is seen to secure economic and political well-being in contemporary times, it not only leaves prevailing unjust and unequal structures intact, but reinforces them.

Summing up, entrepreneurship education offers the exercise of a work ethic that reminds us that we can always improve ourselves, and that the enterprising self can never fully be acquired. This is because our enterprising self is always escaping us, teasing us to keep on moving, to take one step further, to become 'more' (Costea et al., 2012) in order to improve our lives. Ironically, however, the flipside is that by chasing to become our best we can never be satisfied with who we are or feel content about our selves. Recruiting students to this kind of shadow-boxing with their selves should involve critical reflection on its political dimensions, human limits, alternative ideals and the collective efforts that are part of entrepreneurial endeavours.

Even if de Jong seems to be reaping the fruits of her success, she wants to move on to new endeavours: helping poor and exposed young people on their entrepreneurial journeys and simultaneously freeing the state from direct intervention. She talks about the ‘fun’ and enjoyable part of her journey and how she wants to introduce individuals – in particular, young people – to the ‘fun’ of life. But what I have highlighted in this paper is that with all this amusement and excitement comes the expectation of the individual to have to fight against all odds.

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