

Creativity and Innovation – Preconditions for entrepreneurial education

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Teachers' thoughts on entrepreneurship education

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Introduction

How do teachers perceive entrepreneurship education and how can this theme be implemented and enhanced in the school context? It is questions such as these that I have addressed in my research¹ (Backström-Widjeskog, 2008). Entrepreneurship education was introduced into the Finnish national curriculum for comprehensive and upper secondary schools in 1994 during a time when Finland was undergoing a recession and consequently experiencing a high rate of unemployment.

That entrepreneurship education was introduced into the Finnish curriculum as a cross-curricular theme² and not as a core subject was challenging to teachers. In the Finnish national curriculum, cross-curricular themes are described as themes that integrate upbringing, education, theory, and practice and can therefore be considered a response to the challenges that schools face in postmodern society (Finnish National Board of Education, 2004). In postmodern society, qualification requirements as well as circumstances in working life have changed. In addition to external qualifications, an inner ability to manage the changes taking place in one's surroundings and in the labor market is also stressed.

¹ This chapter is based on the results of the research for my doctor dissertation. The overall purpose of the dissertation was to better knowledge and understanding of entrepreneurship education and to investigate how such can be expressed in a school environment.

² It should be noted that the Finnish Ministry of Education in 1994 initially used the term "intercurricular issue", which has since been changed to the term used in this chapter.

Already in 1989, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) initiated discussions regarding introducing themes that emphasize entrepreneurship and enterprising learning, and this discussion has continued for two decades. Individuals today live in a postmodern society characterized by a high rate of change and an enormous flow of information. Growing cultural diversity, increased globalization, and rapid and complex technological developments are also characteristic of postmodern society. While previously established values are eroding, pluralism and ambiguousness as well as privatization and individualization in individuals' lifestyles are increasing. Society offers human beings enormous possibilities and options with, on the one side, a tempting freedom yet, on the other side, continuously present insecurity, uncertainty, and instability. Such insecurity is not new, but Bauman (1999) maintains that the insecurity and instability seen in today's society is dissimilar to that seen previously, which naturally places new demands on education.

So how can educational institutions successfully stimulate and motivate students in such circumstances so that they are prepared for the future in an adequate and goal-oriented manner? Moreover, what is it that current and future workers in actuality need? Which types of competences are necessary for the citizens of modern society? According to Bauman (1999), education can rectify the feelings of insecurity and instability caused by changes and increased freedom, provided that education is organized to promote the development of a strong identity and incite the courage in individuals to act on their own values.

Individuals' characteristics and the needs of society

Postmodern society needs individuals who are autonomous and self-efficient, individuals who possess a firm morality and identity. In actual job vacancy advertisements, one sees this need being emphasized when the individual being sought should be willing to take initiative, flexible, responsible, and enterprising. Workers should be independent individuals who are capable of team work, dare to think "outside the box", and are capable of making things happen (action).

Such characteristics can be related to entrepreneurship education. In my research, which aims to provide a specific description of the entrepreneurship education of individuals who have a classical behavioral science or educational background (not economic), it is stressed that the

aim of entrepreneurship education is to stimulate student's individual development. For example, Leo, one of the study's³ respondents, said:

Every stupid rebellion against school rules is of course in fact an indication of an enterprising initiative. (An enterprising initiative) is about breaking off and dare to start something new, because not everyone can work (as an employee) at Nokia in the future. Instead we need innovative thinking. And when students write, they always write something new, they invent something themselves. You throw them into a situation like "you are in New York all by yourself and have no money but you speak the language — what do you do?" Then they have to be so enterprising that they survive the situation.

Furthermore, Leo reached the conclusion that:

Any person in any work situation can of course show enterprising initiative ... because regardless of where and in what profession they work in the future it is important that they themselves dare take initiative and actually work without someone telling them what to do all the time. To continuously just wait for instructions must feel really meaningless ... That's why it's so important already at school to take responsibility for one's work.

In Finnish society it is said that a paradox regarding entrepreneurship and/or entrepreneurial activity exists. On the one hand, good conditions for entrepreneurship exist: for example, through a large reserve workforce, technical skills, and business-related consultation or consultation about entrepreneurship. On the other hand, however, entrepreneurial activity is still weakly developed. The courage for and positive attitude towards enterprise are not considered sufficient; knowledge of enterprise is also needed. Despite that it should be relatively simple to alleviate this lack of knowledge about enterprise through education, other measures must be taken in order to improve attitudes and develop Finns' self-reliance and ability to take initiative and, above all, to reduce their fear of failure (Römer-Paakkanen, 2004).

Much of the research available on entrepreneurship pertains to measures that are primarily focused on economy. Such a research perspective obviously is not sufficient as regards changing attitudes. My research is pedagogical and, emanating from a phenomenographical and phenomenological approach and a hermeneutical analysis, pertains to interpreting how

³ In the empirical portion of the study, thirty teachers from Swedish-speaking areas in Finland have been interviewed.

teachers perceive entrepreneurship education and how they operationalize and value this phenomenon. A total of 30 teachers who worked at Swedish-language schools⁴ in Finland were interviewed for the study. Selection occurred so that the group would consist of both male and female subject teachers working in the higher classes of compulsory education and at the secondary stage (general upper secondary school or a vocational institute). The students taught by the teachers participating in the study were in the age group 13–18 years. The starting point was to capture the teachers' perceptions in order to see how entrepreneurship is interpreted in the school culture and thereby attempt to create a change in attitude in teacher education and further education concerning entrepreneurship education. Schools have a concrete task, which is to raise good citizens with auspicious (propitious) attitudes and initiative emanating from a national curriculum, and it is ultimately teachers who realize the curriculum.

The research shows that teachers tend to focus on other goals within entrepreneurship rather than economic ones. Above all, teachers emphasize the importance of attitude education and stress aspects that can equally well be used in contexts other than economic ones. They stress, for example, that entrepreneurship education pertains to spurring students to personal and social development: that students, through activity, authenticity, and an auspicious atmosphere should be enticed to take the initiative and be creative, and to develop self-confidence and self-reliance and independence – exactly those competencies that are, according to Bauman (1999), important in modern society.

By these means, entrepreneurship education is a multidisciplinary phenomenon. My research emanates from the field of tension occurring when entrepreneurship is transferred from an economic, pragmatically oriented context to a context that stresses an attitudinal and personality-developing educational goal. The essence of that which I garnered from my pedagogical research is shown in Table 8.1, where I have compiled a number of key concepts that describe the content and goal of entrepreneurship education.

⁴ There are two official languages in Finland, namely Finnish and Swedish, and students attend schools which use either Finnish or Swedish as their predominant administrative and/or instructional language. Thus the school system is divided linguistically into Finnish-language and Swedish-language schools.

Table 8.1. Content and goal of entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education based on pedagogical research.

<i>Entrepreneurial competences/ Content</i>	Skills	Attitudes	Abilities	Pedagogical approach	Characteristics of learning environments aimed at entrepreneurship education
<i>Individual entrepreneurial competences</i>	Practical wisdom, autonomous increase of knowledge	Self efficacy, be appraisal of own strength and weaknesses	Enterprising, autonomous, creative, curious, motivated, purposeful	Experience-based learning that is personal and autonomous <i>Constructivism</i>	Individualized, student-centered and lifelong learning
<i>Social entrepreneurial competences</i>	Social and communicational knowledge	Respectful empathic and constructive attitude	Social ability, collaboration, friendly, sound judgement, original	Learning through collaboration <i>Sociocultural learning</i>	Problem- or project-based learning, collaborative methods
<i>Functional entrepreneurial competences</i>	Entrepreneurial, business-related knowledge, professional knowledge for working life	Tolerant to risks and instability, optimistic, determined, possibility seeker	Energetic resultoriented, profitminded, venturesome, efficient	Practical and pragmatic learning in an authentic environment <i>Situated learning Pragmatism</i>	Cooperation with society and industry, production- and/or business, working life orientation

Even though entrepreneurship education has been characterized using only a few descriptive concepts, Table 8.1 still shows the necessity of defining characteristics and hence making the pedagogical aims and didactical approaches used in instruction more precise. These key concepts can be used, for example, when teachers plan the implementation of entrepreneurship education in practice and to help them specify and define educational aims concerning entrepreneurship education.

Enhancing individual entrepreneurial competences entails focusing on an individual and his/her life-long personality development. The view of how learning can be stimulated emanates from constructivism and the educational activity is based on individualization, student-centering, and life-long learning. The aim is to develop practical wisdom and abilities, such as the ability to take initiative and responsibility, and purposefulness. We need practical wisdom for the development of intellect in order to be able to understand and manage the circumstances we meet in life. In addition to good judgment, this entails, for example, the

ability to reason and think analytically as well as the capability for flexibility and reflection (cf. Aristotle, 1993; Löfstedt, 1999; Gustavsson, 2003). Attitudes are based on an individual's belief in his/her own ability and a consciousness of their own strengths and weaknesses; failure is not considered as a defeat.

Social entrepreneurial competences are strengthened when an individual develops his/her social abilities and willingness to cooperate. This can be stimulated through various cooperative methods based on trust and fellowship in a safe environment, where an individual's originality is allowed to blossom. The development of social and communicative skills is sought as well as an attitude based on humility and empathy and a constructive attitude towards the other members in a group.

By focusing on the third category, functional entrepreneurial competences, applicable and practical experiences are lifted into an authentic milieu. The educational activity is comprised of business-related, production and/or company oriented activities and cooperative exchanges or project-focused activities. The skills, attitudes, and abilities that are emphasized are all more or less related to economics and focus on developing individuals' ability to act. Functional entrepreneurial competences are comprised of, amongst other things, increased knowledge of enterprise and the ability to realize ideas and manufacture products.

A content-oriented, practice-oriented, and value-oriented approach

How do teachers perceive entrepreneurship education and how can this phenomenon be operationalized in the educational (school) context? My research emanates from three questions through which I study the phenomenon from a content-oriented, practice-oriented, and value-oriented perspective. In the first research question I look at the teachers' conceptions of entrepreneurship education. In the second question the attention is on didactic actions in entrepreneurship-directed educational activities. The third question focus on attitudes and values related to entrepreneurship education.

The results of the *content-oriented focus* show that entrepreneurship education is primarily perceived by teachers as a personality and social skills developing activity that should permeate school work, work that aims to further development of strong identities and promote self-efficiency based on pupils' own values. Thus the majority of the teachers underscored

that the purpose or goal of activities is the development of individual and social entrepreneurial competences directed towards personal qualifications in contrast to functional entrepreneurial competences, where emphasis is placed on entrepreneurial skills, production, and economics.

Teachers' conceptions of entrepreneurship education can be defined as immanent, technical, and/or cooperative activity. If entrepreneurship education is defined as immanent, it is understood as permeating and integrated in the learning environment. The pedagogical purpose is relationally directed (Buber, 1993) with a focus on individual growth.

Buber (1993) maintains that "the true fosterer" should be interested in the whole individual, just as he/she is and lives in the actual situation (reality), and even in who the individual has the possibility to be, i.e. the potential individual, and not merely focus on certain fixed knowledge or skills that "need to" be developed. When an individual is perceived as an entity, his/her personality, experiences, and development potential are recognized. Empathy, confidence and/or trust, and encouragement constitute the relational interplay. Teachers who emanate from such an approach place their students in the center and the educational task lies in supervising, supporting, and encouraging the students.

However, if teachers' conceptions of entrepreneurship education are technical, entrepreneurship education is defined as a separate course or project which is graded and evaluated and carried out during a certain period of time. Here, the economic dimension dominates. Students learn what entrepreneurship means but do not necessarily adopt an enterprising mindset or pattern of actions. The technical form of entrepreneurial activity focuses on cognitive development of business-related entrepreneurial skills, i.e. functional entrepreneurial competences.

When entrepreneurship education is understood as a cooperative activity, emphasis is on the cooperation between schools and society/business for the purpose of preparing students for working life. This form of entrepreneurship education is usually realized in conjunction with an individual's surrounding society, for example through trainee positions, company lecturers, and similar, which means that it usually involves practical activity. The emphasis lies therefore on a basis in reality with the purpose of developing vocationally-oriented qualifications. This cooperative activity also entails an adjustment to the actual needs of

society. The studied teachers' answers relating to the content-oriented question are summarized in Figure 8.1.

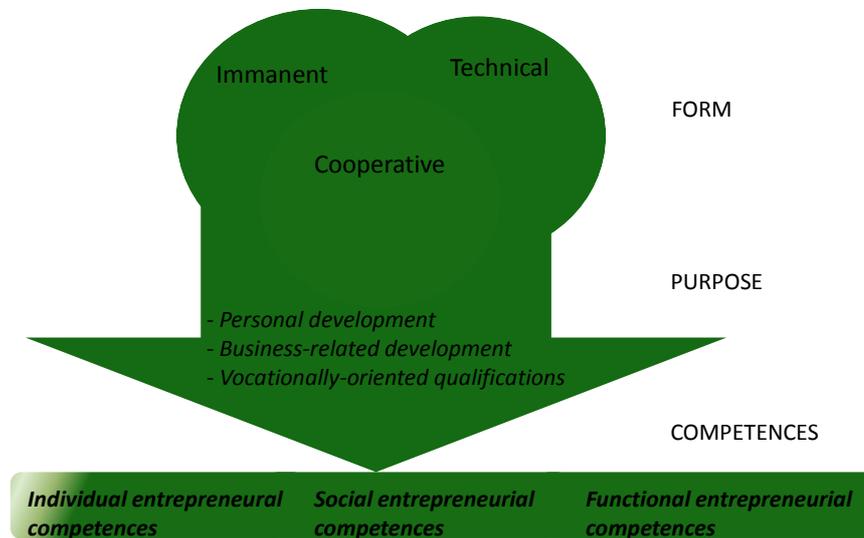


Figure 1: Summary of the content of entrepreneurship education.

The purpose of the *practice-oriented focus* was to direct attention towards the teachers' didactic actions in entrepreneurship-directed educational activities or, in other words, to distinguish teachers' operationalization of entrepreneurship education. Teachers were asked to explain how they believed students can be spurred towards enterprising initiatives. When describing the prerequisites of an enterprising mindset, that is to say that which should comprise the result of entrepreneurship education, the teachers pointed out activity-based methods, authenticity, and an auspicious atmosphere. All of the teachers in the study emphasized the importance of activity as a method for fostering characteristics and manners of thinking that encourage learners to act, play, and solve problems by themselves. Teachers' activity-stimulating advising was emphasized, rather the conventional manner of providing ready-made solutions.

Through authenticity, activity is connected to everyday life and perceived as substantial and relevant. In such a learning environment the focus on authenticity and relevance emanates from constructivism, sociocultural perspectives, and situated learning theories. The pedagogical method is student-centered, and the social environment creates meaning and acts as support for the development of knowledge. Genuine contact with concrete activities

provides experiences that correspond to real life. Accordingly, the knowledge developed is more lasting.

In addition to authenticity, teachers also emphasized the significance of an auspicious atmosphere in entrepreneurship education. An auspicious atmosphere consists of encouragement and confirmation which leads to students feeling confident and accepted. A positive manner of thinking is encouraged which allows for creativity and courage. When self-efficacy and internal motivation are fortified, the longing to take responsibility, test, and have an opportunity to succeed also increases amongst learners. The answers to the practice-oriented questions are summarized in Figure 8.2. The circles on the balloon correspond to each of the 30 respondents and their answers.

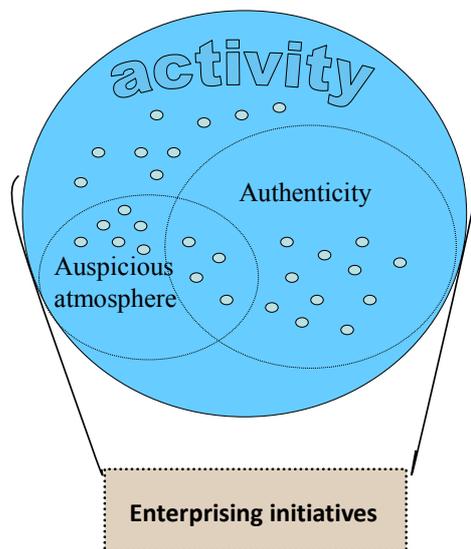


Figure 2: Teachers' thoughts on how students can be spurred towards enterprising initiatives.

Teachers emphasized the importance of “enticing” students to undertake enterprising initiatives and, in accordance with the immanent form, encouraging them to act in an enterprising manner in all educational activities. Remes (2003) underscores this idea when she points out the importance of distinguishing between possessing knowledge of entrepreneurial skills and working in an enterprising manner. There is a difference between learning about entrepreneurship and learning to actually act in an entrepreneurial manner. During the process, an individual learns how to act in an entrepreneurial manner and become enterprising. Here, the focus lies mainly on the process and not on the results.

Entrepreneurship education is thus a process-related educational activity. The didactic tools that teachers need in entrepreneurship education emanate from their reflection on purpose, content, and implementation and/or realization.

Consequently, in the content-oriented focus, teachers were allowed to reflect on the aim and purpose of entrepreneurship education, while during the practice-oriented focus they reflected on implementation and/or realization (in the educational context). The question of how they perceived the theme affected how they valued it. To obtain the results for the *value-oriented focus* I made a comparison between the first and the second content orientation. In the beginning of the interview (the first content orientation) the teachers gave a free association of entrepreneurship education. In the end of the interview (the second content orientation) they gave their ideal vision of entrepreneurship education. The results from the value-oriented focus show that the ability to reevaluate and change one's initial attitude is influenced by the skills and consciousness that teachers possess concerning the interpretive possibilities that entrepreneurship education expresses.

Similar to Ristimäki's (2000) results, the results from my study show that teachers who possess a broader and deeper understanding of the phenomenon focus more on individual and social entrepreneurship competences, while those who possess limited knowledge focus on economic and business-related activities.

One interesting fact is that barely one-third of the teachers studied reevaluated their views during the course of the interview or modified the main manner in which they defined entrepreneurship education. This means that instead of stressing the external dimensions they stressed the internal dimensions. This also entails that a previously negative attitude in several instances became positive. The inference that one can draw from this is that the ability to reevaluate and change one's attitude is influenced by an increased knowledge and that, in the case of entrepreneurship, one becomes more conscious of the possibilities and meanings that entrepreneurship education expresses.

However, if teachers' understandings of educational goals concerning school and entrepreneurship education do not correspond, teachers' attitudes may remain negative and, likewise, their interest in implementing the cross-cultural theme in educational work. In this study, those teachers who expressed an ambivalent attitude during the first content orientation

had solely accentuated functional entrepreneurial competences, a prerequisite of a technical form of activity, and business-related entrepreneurial knowledge. In the second content orientation, the ideal vision of entrepreneurship education was immanent, with teachers emphasizing that the purpose was individual growth. The change is illustrated in Figure 8.3.

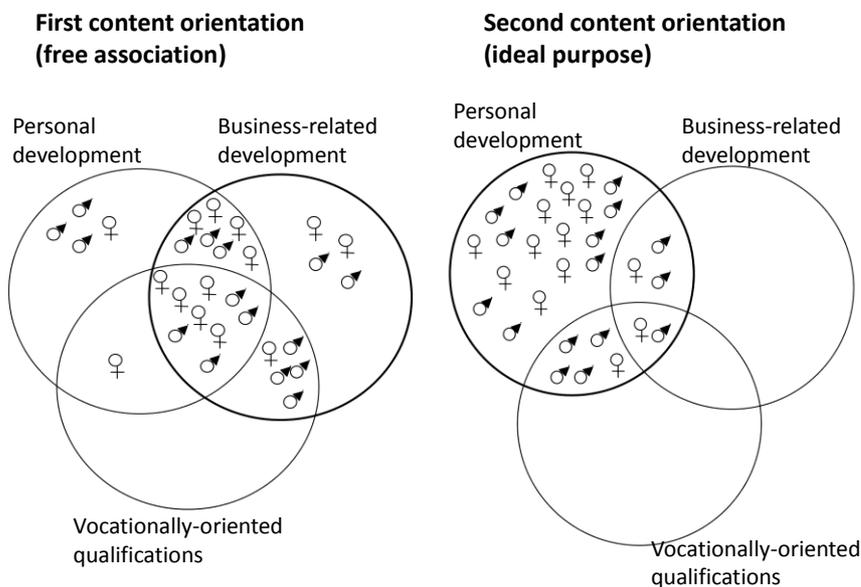


Figure 3. Teachers' conceptions of the purpose of entrepreneurship education.

If teachers experienced their first spontaneous definition (first content orientation) as the “true” definition and this clashed with their ideal vision (second content orientation), entrepreneurship education appears to be less important. This means that when teachers decide to implement entrepreneurship education in their teaching, it is essential that they also in a personal manner make clear for themselves what their purpose is and how they intend to proceed in practical terms. They need to reflect on which values and goals are underlying, whether introducing or not introducing a given theme.

Realizing entrepreneurship education

A conscious taking of responsibility and position presupposes amongst teachers personal reflections and shared discussion as well as the deliberation of goals and tools so that they, in a suitable manner, can complete an activity. Through cooperation with colleagues, school administrators, students, and the surrounding society, teachers, together with their students, can bring about a thorough “version” of entrepreneurship education at school. This should be

able to satisfy both teachers' educational goals and students' needs and interests while they at the same time meet external conditions, such as educational-political goals and societal needs.

In that the goal of entrepreneurship education was bound to the recession occurring in Finland during the early 1990s, the main emphasis naturally lay on functional entrepreneurial competences. With a focus on external entrepreneurial knowledge, profits, and entrepreneurial activity, entrepreneurship education could be considered a contribution to the educational-political solution to a societal problem (cf. Ikonen, 2006).

The functional view of entrepreneurship education is still emphasized and often stressed in the form of demands for economic growth. Erkkilä (2000) maintains that the greatest benefit of entrepreneurship education is to allow it to serve national economic development and, by these means, become an externally steered activity (cf. Remes, 2003). Through this technical-economic accentuation, a tension relationship is created between economic societal interests on the one hand and the humanistic and pedagogically oriented values that still characterize teachers' professional qualifications on the other hand.

One problem that appeared in the research pertains to the handling of entrepreneurship education in school curricula. Ambiguity is seen in both the naming of concepts as well as the formulation of content. Normally, educational texts are the result of political compromises and, therefore, the content can be both watered down and vague. Moral and ideological emphasis occurs through the help of concepts that have ambiguous content and which can consequently be interpreted in a variety of ways (Tiller & Tiller, 2003). In my study, too, teachers commented on feeling such vagueness and insecurity. The result may have been that teachers on the whole chose not to address the theme or else chose to do so half-heartedly. At the same rate as society and its needs change, new concepts that are not always sufficiently explained enter the world of schools and the teachers as well, who therefore, do not always possess the capacity needed to realize them. This can result in negative attitudes and resistance to change. It is in this respect that teacher education and teaching institutes providing continuing education play a central role.

I will return to this thought, but would first like to provide an example. A distinct turning point in the interviews occurred when the question of how students become enterprising was raised. This practice-oriented question was aimed at directing attention towards didactic

actions with the purpose of motivating the students to act in an enterprising manner. In doing so, the teachers were given the opportunity to define their didactic actions based on what felt right and of value to them and their students – and not based on what is considered correct and proper in accordance with the national curriculum.

There was a clear need for teachers to define the content of the concept “enterprising” before formulating their answers on how students can be spurred towards enterprising initiatives. While the word itself was immediately associated with individual entrepreneurial competences such as initiative, ability to act, and spirit, entrepreneurship education was in certain cases understood as actions aimed at developing functional entrepreneurial competences, i.e. business-related activities and entrepreneurial qualifications. “Hilde”, a respondent in the study, reflected this thought process:

Researcher: How do students learn to become enterprising?

Hilde: Well, now I’m thinking of something completely different, of course [laughter]!! Now I’m thinking about it – that they make up their mind to do something and then it is of course this [thing] with projects – that they are able to think themselves and find out, that [we] do not serve up everything. But ... I have never thought like that before.

Researcher: Really?

Hilde: Well, that is to say ... I only thought that they are going to start a business ... just think!! [laughter]

The teachers’ focus regarding the question of how students become enterprising was clearly directed towards individual entrepreneurial competences, which even entails a turning point in the understanding of possibilities for interpreting the actual phenomenon entrepreneurship education. Emphasis changed from an externally dominated entrepreneurial activity focused on production and entrepreneurial education to internal dimensions and immanent forms focused on personal and social development.

Accordingly, a kindred problem within this context is even the actual name of the phenomenon. In English, two words exist for the same phenomenon: *enterprise education* and *entrepreneurship education*. The Finnish Ministry of Education uses the term “entrepreneurship education” in curriculum texts and the European Commission also uses this term most frequently in its research and documents. However, in accordance with Gibb (1988), an “entrepreneur” is considered to be representative of a larger system consisting of

enterprising individuals. This implies that “enterprise” in fact represents a broader base than “entrepreneur”, which has a stronger connection to the business world.

Entrepreneurship education is not the same as entrepreneurship in an economic context. As mentioned previously, entrepreneurship is readily associated with business- or company-related activities and new liberal trains of thought. In the Finnish and Scandinavian languages, several linguistic variations of entrepreneurship education exist. Hence different nuances of the phenomenon and varying content can be discerned, some more functionally oriented, and others more individually and socially oriented. Entrepreneurship education, in other words, can pertain to results (profits) or specific behaviors, be strongly connected to profitability, or be connected to social activities and personal traits that do not emphasize profitability (cf. Johannisson & Madsén, 1997; Mahieu, 2006).

The teachers in the study stressed the value in that entrepreneurship education should be seen as a permeating, immanent, and internally steered activity that is primarily aimed at the personal development of an individual’s inherent traits. Consequently, taking such a view into account, it would perhaps be most appropriate to refer to the subject as *enterprising education*. The teachers expressed the goal of enterprising education through the help of humanistically influenced terms such as initiative force, self-efficacy, the taking of responsibility, courage, maturity, and happiness. The study’s findings show that the term *entrepreneurship education* was considered to be misleading, with the end result that some teachers were unable to realize the theme’s multi-dimensionality and alternative content orientations in the curriculum. Through a one-dimensional focus on entrepreneurship education as a technical and economic activity, with the purpose of developing functional entrepreneurial competences, multi-dimensionality is easily lost.

From the findings, it can be understood that in basic and continuing education for teachers it is important to take teachers’ own reflections on the concept into consideration and, through such means, strengthen and improve their knowledge of and attitudes towards enterprising education. By doing so, the practical educational situation and teachers’ ability to advance their knowledge and/or reevaluate their perceptions will be improved. Moreover, it is of central importance which theories and dimensions of enterprising education are stressed in teacher education.

In summary, it can be said that enterprising education is an activity that can give added value to schools' humanistically characterized world. The knowledge, skills, attitudes, and abilities related to individual and social entrepreneurial competences are based on a humanistic educational ideal. However, if focus is unilaterally placed on functional entrepreneurial competences, which are dominated by neoliberal values, the result can, in the worst-case scenario, be the opposite. In such a scenario, the starting point is no longer the individual and his/her needs; instead it is society's needs. Accordingly, in such a situation, enterprising education would no longer support humanistic characterized work but could instead weaken it. The conclusion one can draw from the results is that, as regards enterprising education, merit exists in not unilaterally focusing on functional entrepreneurial competences in basic and continuing education for teachers.

Enterprising education entails namely both an attitude and a concrete plan of action in pedagogical work. Nurturing enterprising education means casting off an emphasis on passive and non-autonomous actions and embracing activity and autonomy. It means leaving behind strict subject orientation and moving towards a greater holistic view, changing the focus from results to a focus on the process, from reproduction to creation. In a learning environment aimed at enterprising education, fixation on the learning of details shifts to an understanding of context, problem-solving, and life-long learning. The fundamental aspirations that permeate enterprising education are in harmony with the school system as a whole. Therefore, enterprising education can contribute to the important project that is the nurturing of active citizens, for which the mind-set "you can if you want to" is instinctive.

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