

**Governing the Entrepreneurial Mindset:
Business students' constructions of entrepreneurial subjectivity**

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ABSTRACT Promoting entrepreneurship education to develop the entrepreneurial competences and mindsets of citizens has become an important mission on the supranational educational policy agenda. This endeavour constructs the ideal of a self-guided entrepreneurial subject who is active, adaptable and capable of tolerating uncertainty. Utilising the theorizations of governmentality, we attempt to discover how entrepreneurial subjectivity is being constructed and negotiated among university-level business students. The data consist of the writing assignments of a group of students ($N = 24$) enrolled in entrepreneurship studies in a Finnish university. The findings illustrate how entrepreneurial discourse as a culturally appropriate manner to express oneself as a self-disciplined and self-governed subject is adopted among students and reproduced in the practices of entrepreneurship education. We suggest that, among educators, the aim to educate entrepreneurial subjects should be recognised as a political, moral and, hence, negotiable objective, rather than as a value-neutral or imperative objective.

Keywords

Entrepreneurship education, governmentality, entrepreneurial discourse, entrepreneurial subjectivity, university

Introduction

Within the entrepreneurial discourse that has appeared in the economic, social and political arenas of society, citizens are expected to become entrepreneurial, self-guided and responsible subjects (Peters, 2001; Brunila, 2012; Bengtsson, 2014; Siivonen & Brunila, 2014). Entrepreneurship has established its position on the supranational educational policy agenda and has become an increasingly debated topic in the education literature as well as in the daily press (Mahieu, 2006; Fayolle, 2013).

In the global knowledge-based economy where the skills and competences of individuals are acknowledged as important sources of competitiveness, expectations are increasingly pointing towards education and lifelong learning (Brunila, 2011). On behalf of powerful supranational bodies, such as the European Union (EU) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), increasing attention has been paid to the opportunities in and attempts at entrepreneurship education (EE) to equip citizens with entrepreneurial mindsets and skills such as creative thinking, problem-solving and taking initiative (see e.g., European

Commission, 2012; Dahlstedt & Hertzberg, 2013). In higher education, EE attempts to enhance economic growth, development and competitiveness. Further, it is expected to improve student employability and to encourage individual responsibility and personal effort in constantly changing and insecure social circumstances and in the competitive world of work (Gibb, 2002; Hytti & O’Gorman, 2004; Rae, 2007; Van Gelderen, 2010; European Commission, 2012; Rae et al., 2012). In the 21st century, most of the EU member states have included EE in their policy programmes and education systems. Finland has been in the forefront, with the Ministry of Education declaring in 2004 that EE should be offered at all educational levels from pre-school to university (Opetusministeriö, 2004; Korhonen, 2012). In recent EU education policy documents, European universities are encouraged to create an entrepreneurial culture and to adopt EE as an overlapping theme in the curriculum in all fields (see e.g., European Commission, 2008, 2015).

Not much is known about how entrepreneurial discourse is internalised and how it transforms and reshapes people (Brunila, 2012, p. 479). Further, there is little research on how students negotiate the thematic area of entrepreneurship (Komulainen et al., 2013, p. 1081), and critical examinations on the premises and endeavours of EE are relatively few (Fayolle, 2013). Therefore, the overall aim of this study is to examine how the entrepreneurial subjectivity produced in entrepreneurial discourse (Peters, 2001; Bengtsson, 2014; Siivonen & Brunila, 2014) is constructed among

university-level business students. We examine how business students who participated in a course on corporate entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurial mindset define entrepreneurial subjectivity and how they define their own position in the entrepreneurial discourse. We consider these questions to be important in ascertaining whether understanding one's subjectivity as entrepreneurial is seen as the only appropriate way to express oneself in entrepreneurship education or whether alternative ways to be heard and included in society are available.

The article begins with an overview of the central notions and goals of EE concerning the debated necessity to educate entrepreneurial subjects and to promote an entrepreneurial spirit in universities. This overview is followed by a description of the theoretical approach of the study, which is based on the Foucauldian concept of governmentality. Thereafter, the data and methodology of the study are described, after which the findings are presented. In light of the findings, we discuss the attempt to educate entrepreneurial subjects as a negotiable moral choice. Finally, conclusions and implications for research and practice are presented.

The imperative of entrepreneurship education

Since 2006, the *sense of initiative and entrepreneurship* has been acknowledged as one of the eight key competences for lifelong learning defined by the EU. Key competences are deemed necessary for personal fulfilment and development, social

inclusion, active citizenship and employment, and therefore necessary for all members of a knowledge-based society. As a key competence, the sense of initiative and entrepreneurship covers a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes involving creativity, innovation, risk-taking and the ability to plan and manage projects (European Union, 2006). Accordingly, the EU has proclaimed itself a long-time supporter of EE (European Commission, 2014).

In the academic debate, there is no single theory of entrepreneurship or EE. However, entrepreneurship researchers seem to share the notion that entrepreneurship is a holistic process of becoming, in which existing stability disappears (Bygrave, 1989). Entrepreneurship is about entrepreneurial individuals interacting with their environment and, thus, exploring and exploiting opportunities (Shook et al., 2003). Therefore, EE encompasses the activities of educational institutions to promote such activities among students.

The objectives of EE in higher education have been perceived as three-fold (Hytti & O’Gorman, 2004): 1) to learn to understand entrepreneurship, 2) to learn to become an entrepreneur and 3) to learn to become entrepreneurial. First, increasing the understanding of entrepreneurship as a social phenomenon and of the entrepreneurs’ role in modern economies implies that entrepreneurship is being taught and studied as an academic subject. Second, EE aims to promote new business ventures by providing students with a knowledge base and the skills needed to start,

develop and grow one or more successful businesses. Third, one objective is to support students in learning how to become entrepreneurial by encouraging enterprising behaviour and by equipping them with entrepreneurial skills. As a result, EE contributes to the development of a skilful and entrepreneurial workforce. It has been noted and strongly emphasised in the recent literature that the ability to adopt entrepreneurial thinking and behaviour is becoming an increasingly important individual resource in working life. In particular, in academic entrepreneurship studies, the focus is on developing transferable skills to support students to act entrepreneurially and as entrepreneurs, rather than on offering practical tools to start a business (Heinonen & Hytti, 2010.) These objectives usually overlap (Klofsten, 2000; Hytti & O’Gorman, 2004), but they have implications in relation to why and how universities address entrepreneurship.

The notions and goals of EE have become increasingly visible in the university sector. As in many other Western countries, the university sector in Finland has been undergoing major changes in order to increase its impact and add value to society. The increased significance of the university institution as a producer of knowledge and a source of national competitiveness has given rise to an entrepreneurial paradigm in universities (Etzkowitz et al., 2000; Olssen & Peters, 2005; Rinne & Koivula, 2005). In Finnish universities, a shift towards the entrepreneurial university model occurred in the late 2000s (Rinne et al., 2014), and it is demonstrated, for example, by giving

more emphasis to entrepreneurship in university strategies and development programmes and offering EE courses across all faculties. During the shift towards the entrepreneurial model, the purpose of university education is shaped by the emphasis on its economic and vocational aims (Down, 2009). Universities are increasingly expected not only to contribute to academic entrepreneurship but also to provide students with relevant and transferable entrepreneurial skills in the changing labour market. Large companies and the public sector have reduced their employment opportunities, and entrepreneurial work in small firms is becoming a more common career alternative. Moreover, the nature of salaried employment has changed so that features connected to entrepreneurship, such as independence, initiative and creativity, are emphasised in working life (Heinonen & Hytti, 2008). Therefore, the role of entrepreneurship programmes, courses and initiatives that support entrepreneurial activities have become more prevalent in universities. Several Finnish universities, as well as numerous universities in other Western countries, have launched various entrepreneurship initiatives and do their best to accommodate work-related challenges.

By developing entrepreneurial skills, thinking and behaviour—a holistic entrepreneurial approach to the world—EE also attempts to answer the need and demand for individuals to take responsibility for their own learning, career and life in uncertain social circumstances. According to this ‘new imperative of EE’, there has been a call for increased individual responsibility and autonomy of citizens. This has

been acknowledged as a social necessity to equip citizens with an entrepreneurial mindset to help them deal with the constantly changing circumstances of, and to succeed in, their (working) lives. Further, with national competitiveness being increasingly dependent on skills and innovativeness in the workforce, an entrepreneurial approach to working life by employees is acknowledged as having become an important source of success in any organisation. (Hytti & O’Gorman, 2004; Van Gelderen, 2010.)

Governing the entrepreneurial mindset

The aim to educate self-responsible entrepreneurial subjects is clearly articulated in the recent expositions of the objectives of EE (e.g., Van Gelderen, 2010; European Commission, 2012). Educating students toward acquiring entrepreneurial mindsets is, among the advocates of EE, presented as a necessity and as an empowering practice which supports students in an insecure society by encouraging them to take responsibility for their own lives. In this study, we question the taken-for-granted necessity and neutrality of this endeavour by utilising the theorizations of governmentality (e.g., Foucault, 1991; Dean, 1999; Miller & Rose, 2008). In accordance with previous critical examinations of the topic (e.g., Peters, 2001; Holmgren & From, 2005; Davies & Bansel, 2007; Brunila, 2011, 2012; Korhonen, 2012; Dahlstedt & Hertzberg, 2013; Komulainen et al., 2013; Bengtsson, 2014), we

acknowledge EE as being connected to neoliberal rationality in its attempt to educate autonomous, self-responsible and self-guided citizens who possess an entrepreneurial mindset and who contribute to the economy. EE may be seen as a particular kind of governmentality, connecting students and their subjectivity to the rationality of the market (Dahlstedt & Hertzberg, 2012, p. 259).

Neoliberal rationality has affected education by bringing economic principles and ideals into educational objectives (Korhonen, 2012). Within neoliberal rationality, an individual's future is pictured as a matter of individual effort and capability (Peters, 2001; Olssen & Peters, 2005). The shift from the Keynesian welfare state to the neoliberal model has been a dominant trend since the 1980s in Western countries, propelling the move from a culture of dependency to one of self-reliance (Peters, 2001). The language of freedom, autonomy and choice was strengthened in political argumentation, and appropriate citizenship was to be active and individualistic rather than passive and dependent (Davies & Bansel, 2007; Miller & Rose, 2008). Contrary to the welfare state in which governing was based on the principles of solidarity, safety and modesty, the neoliberal welfare regime expects subjects to act and think entrepreneurially by emphasising responsibility, self-control, risk-taking, autonomy and flexibility. In neoliberalism, the role of the state is not to patronise, but to create suitable circumstances and institutions that support neoliberal endeavours and

encourage individuals to take responsibility for their own lives (Peters, 2001; Miller & Rose, 2008).

Olssen and Peters (2005) have maintained that neoliberalism in higher education has introduced a new mode of governmentality, that of an economically self-interested subject who rationally optimises his/her interests and needs. Similarly, Rose (1999) has described a type of self-technology through which one reflects and shapes one's own personality and capabilities to better meet the culturally appropriate ideal of an enterprising, autonomous, active and self-responsible citizen. Accordingly, as we apply the theorizations of governmentality in this study, we see subjects as personalities, selves and identities that are simultaneously targets of governing and active shapers and controllers of themselves (Foucault, 1991; Dean, 1999; Miller & Rose, 2008; Dahlstedt & Hertzberg, 2013). Governing is here understood as a 'conduct of conduct' or an exercise of power that subtly aims to guide subjects' identities and behaviour toward obtaining certain objectives that are recognised as important in society and in a specific historical context (Foucault, 1982; Dean, 1999; Miller & Rose, 2008). We acknowledge that, through the technologies of power and technologies of self, students involved in EE are guided to make decisions which seem free, personally meaningful and socially valued but which essentially strive for wider social and political aims (Miller & Rose, 2008; Dahlstedt & Hertzberg, 2013). The attempt to shape individuals and collectives' conduct is linked with questions relating

to ethics and morality as it defines what is recognised as an appropriate and virtuous way of being (Dean, 1999). In entrepreneurial discourse, entrepreneurial subjectivity is a norm justified in the name of citizens' well-being. However, as governmentality presupposes that actors are free and make self-guided choices as moral agents, it also entails the possibility for subjects to resist and to think and act differently from what is expected (Dean, 1999, p. 15).

In this study, we use the term entrepreneurial subjectivity to refer to the above-described ideal image of a subject encouraged in EE and produced in entrepreneurial discourse under neoliberal rationality, i.e., a subjectivity which is creative, risk-taking, responsible, autonomous, active, motivated, confident and curious—in all, a subjectivity characterized by an entrepreneurial mindset and behaviour (Dahlstedt & Hertzberg, 2012, 2013; Siivonen & Brunila, 2014). Entrepreneurial discourse is acknowledged as a productive, regulatory, powerful and historical practice that reflects shared norms, ideals, meanings and values in society. This discourse sets limits for subjects' possibilities to define themselves and others, but, at the same time, it is constantly under construction and may, therefore, be challenged (Foucault, 1980, 1982). With these starting points in mind, we move on to the description of the empirical part of the study.

Research data and analysis

The study data consist of the pre-assignments and reflection papers of 24 students collected from an undergraduate level entrepreneurship course in the School of Economics, University of Turku, Finland, in the autumn of 2014. The course was about corporate entrepreneurship and intrapreneurship, i.e., entrepreneurial behaviour in an existing organisation (Antoncic & Hisrich, 2003), and developing an entrepreneurial mindset. We were the teachers of this course, one of us with lengthy academic experience in business science, particularly entrepreneurship, and the other with an academic background in education science. According to the intended learning outcomes defined in the syllabus, the course aimed to increase students' understanding of corporate entrepreneurship and its benefits for employees and organisations. Another aim was to have students learn how entrepreneurial behaviour and an entrepreneurial mindset can be developed. In addition, it was stated that students would experiment with entrepreneurial behaviour in the classroom and that they would learn to assess themselves as entrepreneurial agents.

The course consisted of five four-hour sessions which included lectures, discussions and exercises. In order to be able to start the course, the students were required to submit a course pre-assignment focused on the course topic. For each session, the students read two to three scientific articles on the topic of corporate entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurial mindset, and they prepared a reaction paper of learning reflections from the previous session and the readings. In the beginning of

the each session, the lessons learnt were opened up within the class through various types of guided discussions, exercises or group/pair work. The goal of the exercises and discussions was to support students' reflection processes and broaden their learning in the entrepreneurial spirit of co-participation and social co-learning (see e.g., Taylor & Thorpe, 2004; Löbler, 2006). During the session, the students were encouraged to be brave, innovative and creative and to throw themselves into the entrepreneurial process (see Heinonen & Poikkijoki, 2006) as well as challenge and question their potential stereotypical view of entrepreneurship.

As a course pre-assignment, students were asked to compose three brief writings entitled 'Story of an entrepreneurial individual', 'Story of an entrepreneurial organization' and 'Am I entrepreneurial?' In these writings, students were asked to describe their images of and ideas about being entrepreneurial. No strict boundaries or instructions were given, and it was underscored that there were no correct or incorrect answers to be evaluated. The purpose of the pre-assignment was to orientate students to the course topics as well as to get an overview of their preconceptions. At the end of the course, students were asked to read the three stories they had written prior to the course and to reflect on whether they would change their stories after having taken the course. The goal here was to evaluate how the course had affected students' understanding of entrepreneurial subjectivity. Each student studied the pre-assignments in the class and wrote a brief reflection of these writings, summarising

the changes that had taken place in his or her understanding. The writings comprise a total of 96 pages of text. Students were informed of the research in the first session. All 24 students gave their approval for the use of the material they produced during the course for the research purposes of this study.

It was crucial to take the context and student backgrounds into account in the analysis and to recognise that the students did not attend the course nor write their assignments without any expectations, awareness of the course setting or previous understanding of the topic. The course participants were business students: 12 men and 12 women, aged 21–34 years. The course was mandatory for students majoring in entrepreneurship and optional for the rest of the business school students. Of the course participants, six were international students studying in an international master's degree programme. Attendance in the course was restricted to 24 students because of the interactive learning methods used. Due to their previous studies, all of the students attending the course were somewhat familiar with the course topic, and it is likely that students who participated in the course were also interested in the thematic area of entrepreneurship. Students did not write their texts anonymously since the assignments were taken into account in the course evaluation. To give students the space to openly express themselves, we reminded them, in the instructions for the assignments, that attention would be paid to how carefully and

thoughtfully they delved into their assignments and justified their arguments, not on right or wrong answers per se.

Using the given titles, the students constructed their understanding of entrepreneurial subjectivity by describing their images of what constitutes entrepreneurial characteristics, how these attributes appear and what it means to be entrepreneurial in (working) life. Further, especially in the self-reflective 'Am I entrepreneurial' writings, the students discussed their own position on being entrepreneurial. They constructed their writings in various ways. Some writings consisted of a clear storyline with imaginary heroes, while others focused on more general definitions of entrepreneurial characteristics or on real-life examples. Compared to the writings about the entrepreneurial individual and organisation, those on 'Am I entrepreneurial' were more homogeneous in terms of the manner of writing. They were self-reflections in which the students' own personalities and identities were at the centre. In the reflection papers written at the end of the course, students described points they would include in their stories if they wrote them now. In addition, students discussed what they would change and what would remain the same, hence, reflecting also how the course had affected their understanding of the course topic. Overall, the concepts of entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial and entrepreneur were mixed and interrelated in the writings. Nevertheless, based on our interpretation, the students defined their understanding of entrepreneurial

characteristics, skills and behaviour—i.e., entrepreneurial subjectivity—through all of these concepts.

The analysis focused on how students were attached to the entrepreneurial discourse, how the ideal of a self-responsible entrepreneurial subjectivity had been internalised as self-evident and something to pursue, or whether the ideal was questioned or challenged. Accordingly, we focused our analysis on investigating taken-for-granted truths, renegotiations and subject positions that were constructed in the definitions of entrepreneurial subjectivity. We were interested in investigating the extent to which students drew on commonly accepted, and likely, value-neutral language, in their definitions of entrepreneurial subjectivity and themselves in relation to it. Further, we investigated the role of the course in the construction of entrepreneurial subjectivity, i.e., how attending the entrepreneurship course changed students' engagement in the entrepreneurial discourse. Overall, we examined how entrepreneurial discourse, as a historically constructed and collectively shared practice, operates in EE, how it shapes the thinking, behaviour, beliefs and desires of subjects and how truths are adopted and negotiated.

In the analysis, we became familiar with the rich and varied data through systematic reading. The data were then coded with keywords according to the characteristics, activities, expressions and tones that emerged in the writings. Simultaneously, notes and preliminary interpretations were written down. Based on

the theoretical approach adopted, but still remaining sensitive to the data and their variations, we identified two thematic entireties defining students' understanding of entrepreneurial subjectivity: the *agile achiever* and the *responsible citizen*. In addition, we identified two oppositional attitudes in how students identified with entrepreneurial subjectivity: *attachment* and *detachment*. In the description of findings, selected original quotes from the students' writings are presented to demonstrate students' reflections and interpretations on entrepreneurial subjectivity. (Snumber) after the quote denotes the individual student whose quote is presented in the text.

Findings

Portrait of an entrepreneurial subject

From the analysis of the students' writings, we identified two types of constructions of entrepreneurial subjectivity. The agile achiever was constructed as a result of the pursuit of individual success in constantly changing circumstances. In turn, the responsible citizen, as a figure of entrepreneurial subjectivity, was focused on the virtuous attributes of diligence and dedication, both in personal and working life. It was typical that a student described both of these figures in parallel in the writings, as if defining the portrait of an entrepreneurial subject with two different faces. As the

course progressed, some aspects of the initial images altered, engagement in the entrepreneurial discourse strengthened and the few initially critical voices attenuated.

For the agile achiever, innovativeness is an important principle. In order to succeed in life, the agile achiever, who is most usually an entrepreneur running his/her own business, aims to creatively recognise and utilise opportunities and stand out from the competition. He or she thinks that conventional rules and norms must be broken and that things must be done in a new way. One of the students expressed this clearly:

An entrepreneurial individual to me would be a person who has a well-rounded personality in terms of risk-taking ability, opportunity seeking, opportunity identification and utilisation of those opportunities. (S2)

The agile achiever is constructed as an extremely individualistic figure, and social relationships have mainly an instrumental meaning for him or her. Social networks are described as an important resource when pursuing success:

He/she likes to network, because new people usually mean new ideas and opportunities. (S8)

She used all of her available networks to raise the capital, get the ideas, attract the customers and sell the products. (S24)

The agile achiever is dynamic, flexible and able to react to rapidly changing conditions. He/she is not like everyone else, but rather special and, as an employee, superior to persons perceived as average employees. One student used a hockey game as a metaphor for entrepreneurial behaviour which aptly summarised the student's thinking: in the game, as well as in life, winners must be capable of making quick decisions in changing situations. For the agile achiever, doing ranks higher than thinking, while controlling and planning imply brakes and limitations, and formal education appears as a potential drag for which there are no guarantees of success:

Ordinariness is a swear word for her—she believes that people have to constantly go forward: a rolling stone gathers no moss. (S15)

—education was supposed to inspire him to move forward but was actually blocking all of his creativity. (S12)

Statements describing courage are repeatedly used in the definitions of being entrepreneurial. The agile achiever is eager to go out of his/her comfort zone, face challenges and take risks. Conversely, the characteristics of shyness, fear, caution and safety remain outside of the descriptions. Self-confidence embodied entrepreneurial subjectivity in the definitions:

Entrepreneurial people do not impose fears upon themselves. (S2)

Although entrepreneurial subjectivity was mainly described as an ideal character using expressions with positive connotations, the definitions did not remain outside the scope of criticism. Especially in the construction of the agile achiever, entrepreneurial subjectivity was not necessarily well-behaved and organised, but was rather messy. In particular, self-centredness related to the entrepreneurial subject was considered dubious. The entrepreneurial subject was, in some writings, pictured as a selfish and arrogant achiever who, on the way to success, tended to neglect social relations as well as his/her own health:

The image of an 'entrepreneurial individual' didn't however sound very positive to me at first. In the first place, I remember that these persons are sometimes grumpy, sometimes very arrogant, they are so lousy at keeping to agreed schedules or what they have promised, but they still promise a lot and to everyone. I just hate that kind of behaviour. (S20)

—an entrepreneurial person may be passionate in an aggressive way. She may want to highlight herself and make sure that her work is noticed, including economically. If she is an entrepreneur instead of a regular employee, she may want to take all the credit for herself. (S14).

The *responsible citizen* is a self-guided and hard-working person who contributes to the community and constantly aims to develop him/herself. In the writings, these are typically either entrepreneurs or employees, but entrepreneurial attributes may also occur in the other everyday life roles of a citizen, be it a parent or a student. A strong sense of control and sense of direction are characteristic of the responsible citizen. This figure of entrepreneurial subjectivity was presented as a free and autonomous agent who is determined and responsible for his/her own, as well as the community's, success.

In the definitions, hard work and diligence were central. The responsible citizen is passionately devoted to what he/she does. He/she is not satisfied with his/her performance, aims at continuous improvement and does more than is required:

You just have to work hard as hell every single day and love the work you do. (S17)

She's not afraid of hard work. She's full of joy and excited about her own job. (S15)

Entrepreneurial individuals think of their own job as something that can be developed.

It's not just about doing what is expected of you, but thinking of ways to make it better. You can either do your job as expected, or you can think of it as your own entrepreneurial act. (S8)

[in an entrepreneurial organisation] continuous improvement is hard coded in every employee's backbone. (S7)

Learning was described as a central tool for self-development:

He/she is also passionate about learning more and more. (S6)

He was the one who was eager to learn every possible thing the world had to teach him. (S7)

Social skills, supporting others, serving society and making an effort to attain common goals were also noted as examples of being entrepreneurial. The responsible citizen is reliable and conscientiously takes his/her part of shared responsibility. Especially in the descriptions of an entrepreneurial organisation, shared goals and shared responsibility played central roles. Everyone in the organisation needs to share the same commitment because:

—a bad apple will spoil the barrel. (S7)

—most of the failure is on the shoulders of employees and teams. (S17)

If everyone is looking at the same direction, they can assist the company the most in its goals. (S22)

The responsible citizen is entrepreneurial in all spheres of life. That means an active and energetic lifestyle and attitude that reflect in his or her work, hobbies and social relationships:

—an entrepreneurial individual can see entrepreneurship everywhere he looks. He is able to use entrepreneurship as a lens through which he can see and think, analyse, learn, act, make decisions, feel, get inspired and innovate, for instance. (S9)

A person who is highly entrepreneurial is often entrepreneurial in everything he or she does. It is more of a way of life than a single characteristic. (S1)

She is on the phone 24 hours a day, 7 days a week; she is always accessible, but it does not bother her because her business is not only her job; her life seems to be really interconnected with what she does. She does it, not only for living, but also as a hobby and for self-development. She sets the aim and does what she can to reach it. (S4)

The responsible citizen appears as an ideal citizen and a desired employee: no employer would say no to a hard-working, committed and responsible employee who constantly and passionately aims to improve his/her performance for the common success.

Despite the complimentary definitions, in the pre-assignments the entrepreneurial discourse was also questioned with the descriptions of the possible negative sides of being extremely diligent and devoted:

There are also negative effects of being an entrepreneurial individual. Pretty often, they work so much that it can damage their health. I know several people, myself included, who have been diagnosed with burn-out. Working too much affects your relationship with family, too. Because you love to do something so much, there is not enough love for everyone. (S17)

Widened definitions

In the reflection texts written at the end of the course, entrepreneurial subjectivity was defined more loosely than at the beginning of the course. Students' understanding had widened, in the sense that being entrepreneurial was less attached to the pursuit of individual success, or running a business, and more connected to the question of intrapreneurship and mindset. Also, the stereotype of a superhero with endless energy and impeccable business instinct was questioned:

The biggest difference was that I would now take a more intrapreneurial view of the individual, whereas before I looked at her as an 'entrepreneur'. (S16)

Before, I would think that an entrepreneurial individual is someone who starts their own business/businesses and always thinks outside the box and comes up with new opportunities. However, now I would also include intrapreneurial thinking with that. It is also very possible to be entrepreneurial within an organization. (S5)

My pre-assignment was overly positive about the whole idea. An entrepreneurial individual most definitely won't have to be 'a man of good self-esteem and positive attitude'. (S11)

Overall, the picture of entrepreneurial subjectivity remained positive. What is remarkable in the reflection texts is that the few resistant voices expressed in the pre-assignments had disappeared while the image of entrepreneurial subjectivity had widened:

Now, I am able to view entrepreneurship in an even more positive manner, in which people think, behave and act more actively and contributively. (S6)

I have wider meaning of entrepreneurial individual. I see this whole 'entrepreneurial individual' thing in way more positive light. (S10)

The reflection texts also included detailed notions of the course topics based on course readings and discussions. One of the most considered was 'resistance' as an entrepreneurial characteristic. Based on what students had learned, an entrepreneurial

subject was presented in the reflection texts as someone who questions established procedures and norms and, in this way, catalyses change in the society. In the organizational context, this questioning is perceived as a valuable source of renewal and innovation:

Another difference was the resistance aspect, that the individual can be entrepreneurial also through resistance, and consequently initiate change. (S16)

The reflection texts verify how entrepreneurial discourse is reproduced and renegotiated. However, the change is not detectable in each text. While most students reported changes in their understanding and reshaped their definitions, there were a few who were happy with their initial descriptions and pointed out that they would keep their stories the same. There were also a couple of reflection texts which were restricted to listing the contents of the course readings and were, hence, less reflective—and less informative for the study.

Constructing the entrepreneurial me

In defining their own positions in terms of entrepreneurial subjectivity, the students expressed two oppositional attitudes: attachment and detachment. At the beginning of the course, the majority of the students identified somewhat with entrepreneurial

subjectivity, but not everyone saw it as an attribute that was natural to them. The students' division in terms of identifiers and avoiders was not clear-cut as some students expressed both attitudes in their self-reflection.

In the expressions of attachment, the entrepreneurial subjectivity was depicted as a desirable way of being. This was emphasised in the expressions in which the students recognised a need to develop themselves to become more entrepreneurial:

—while I was imagining an entrepreneurial individual and writing about it—I realised at some point that the person I was describing was actually my ideal of a woman. My image of an entrepreneurial woman is actually the woman I would like to become in the future! (S15)

I know I still have room for improvement, but I believe I am entrepreneurial. (S24)

Entrepreneurial subjectivity was also described in relation to career goals. An entrepreneurial subject was seen as a realiser of his/her own passion. Freedom and fulfilling oneself were matters that the students also deemed desirable for their own future careers:

Overall, I don't understand the people who see their jobs just as a way to bring home the bacon. I think that it has to be more meaningful than that so you can motivate yourself to do it every single day. That is something that I look for in my future job—

something that I can be proud of, something that challenges me every single day and gives me a sense of importance and success. (S8)

In the attitude of attachment, entrepreneurial subjectivity appeared to the students as an unquestionable ideal and as a target of admiration that requires continuous learning to become achievable. One's own characteristics, which were interpreted as entrepreneurial, were presented in a reassuring manner. In this reassurance, the students appealed to their own personality traits or to their family background, which they described as feeding their entrepreneurial characteristics:

When I think about myself as an entrepreneurial person, I feel that I am quite entrepreneurial because I act really well independently, but I also take responsibility for everything I do. I also give my everything to projects. (S19)

I love taking risks and jumping into the unknown. (S5)

How I live my day-to-day life is by constantly challenging myself to do new things or by simply doing old things better. (S7)

I have a very strong family business background which is why I probably also consider myself rather entrepreneurial. (S15)

Through *detachment*, the students discussed mismatches between their images of being entrepreneurial and their own characteristics and personalities. They stepped

back from the ideal image of entrepreneurial subjectivity, which was described as contradictory to their own personalities and identities, and therefore appeared unattainable. For instance, their own risk-taking ability, tolerance of uncertainty and relentlessness were questioned:

—entrepreneurs are usually determined as brave risk-takers. This is not me, however. ... I have always had my back-up plan, I have always analysed what happens and how I can handle it if things go wrong. ... I love my spare time, and I like security so I can enjoy that spare time and family time better and plan for the future. I don't want to risk that. (S20)

Perhaps everyone likes the conformity and certainty of paid labour. I am one of those people. I like the fact that I know when I have work to do and that I can be sure that I am going to be paid for it. ...I think I am less than half entrepreneurial. (S14)

Very often, I've pushed myself to the limits to achieve lots of things just by working more efficiently. The more I do, the more energetic and dynamic I feel. However, I don't know if this is a good way of living if done for a long period of time because it can drain all the energy and ultimately lead to possible burnout. (S19)

In spite of doubts relating to their own entrepreneurial characteristics, entrepreneurial skills were acknowledged as something that the students should pursue in order to succeed. Within the expressions of detachment, as students considered their non-

entrepreneurial characteristics, they tended to present themselves as incomplete or imperfect—as if they were lacking something:

How could I become an entrepreneur with this lack of self-confidence to get out there in the world and maybe establish a business to turn my dreams into reality? I have truly acknowledged that my inadequate risk-taking ability is preventing me from succeeding at many cases... shyness to some extent exists in my blood... (S6)

One thing that I would like to improve about myself is leadership and charisma. As a great entrepreneur, I would probably have many employees. So the problem I see is that I don't think I am that charismatic when it comes to taking the lead in a group (S7)

In the expressions of detachment, the students also questioned their own capability to engage in entrepreneurship as a career choice. Their capability of being brave and responsible entrepreneurs was questioned:

What makes me non-entrepreneurial? My initial thought of someday being an entrepreneur was that I had the creativity and rationality to survive in this area. But then I thought that I didn't have the personal traits or the financial courage to be an entrepreneur. (S9)

I could imagine myself starting a business if it was about something I cared for or was interested in. I would preferably like to start a business with someone, not alone, because I do not like the idea of me being responsible for everything. Also, I would not mind dividing the profits because I would have someone there for me, in the same boat. (S14)

From wavering to confidence

By the end of the course, in the reflection texts, students' ideas of themselves as entrepreneurial subjects had become more optimistic than at the beginning of the course. Simultaneously, with the widening definitions of entrepreneurial subjectivity and diminishing criticism, students identified with entrepreneurial subjectivity more strongly:

—the answer to my question of whether I am entrepreneurial has changed. It is no longer a 'NO', as now I understand that being entrepreneurial does not always have to be an entrepreneur. Therefore, I can confidently say that I am ENTREPRENEURIAL. (S6)

I have realized that I have a very entrepreneurial view on everything I do. I doubted myself before this course. The only thing I should consider more is my openness towards change and risk. (S8)

I consider myself even more entrepreneurial than before. (S20)

At the end of the course, no student expressed strong detachment, and no one defined him/herself as less entrepreneurial than prior to the course. Some students, however, noted that the course had not affected how they feel about themselves in terms of being entrepreneurial. Most commonly, students defined themselves as somewhat entrepreneurial— saying that it depended on the situation.

Overall, the students found it rather difficult to define whether they were entrepreneurial or not. It would appear that being entrepreneurial was seen as a spectrum whereby one is situated at different points depending on the situation and time. The entrepreneurial me is not a static concept; it evolves depending on how much effort one is prepared to put in it.

Altogether, at the beginning of the course, students constructed their understanding of entrepreneurial subjectivity through two figures. The agile achiever was constructed as a self-confident risk-taker pursuing success while the responsible citizen was characterized by diligence and devotion. Both sides of entrepreneurial subjectivity were pictured as admirable, but at the same time, both were critically evaluated. When defining themselves in terms of entrepreneurial subjectivity in the pre-assignments, the students expressed both attachment and detachment. While entrepreneurial subjectivity mainly appeared as desirable, for some it seemed unnatural and unattainable. By the end of the course, the contours of the

entrepreneurial figures had stretched and obscured making entrepreneurial subjectivity a less strict mould; therefore, it became easier to identify with. The definitions had widened in the sense that more emphasis was put on intrapreneurship and the entrepreneurial mindset, and it was underlined more than at the beginning that to be entrepreneurial one must not necessarily run one's own business nor be an invincible superhero. To conclude, the findings indicate that during the course, through renegotiation, students' engagement in the entrepreneurial discourse strengthened.

Discussion

In this study, EE has been examined as governmentality, making visible how the practices of EE reproduce entrepreneurial discourse making entrepreneurial subjectivity an unquestionable norm. The findings illustrate how entrepreneurial discourse, as a culturally appropriate manner to express oneself as a self-disciplined and self-governed subject, is adopted among students and reproduced in the practices of EE. Autonomy and responsibility, as well as learning and constant self-development, were acknowledged as necessary individual resources. Further, flexibility, risk-taking ability and innovativeness were described as virtues. In their definitions, the students also talked about passion, dedication and shared responsibility as self-evident virtuous attitudes in (working) life. They told about their entrepreneurial characteristics in a reassuring manner and about their non-

entrepreneurial characteristics in an apologetic manner. Overall, the entrepreneurial subject appeared as a taken-for-granted ideal which everyone should pursue in order to succeed in life.

In light of the students' pre-assignments it seems that entrepreneurial discourse had been, to a great extent, adopted already prior to the course, and according to the closing reflections, during the course, engagement in the discourse further strengthened. The definitions of entrepreneurial subjectivity widened and loosened; consequently, students' experience of themselves as entrepreneurial subjects was confirmed. Due to their expanded understanding of entrepreneurial subjectivity, the students appeared to have more room for positioning themselves in the entrepreneurship discourse. The findings indicate how students attending EE were conditioned by the limits and possibilities of the entrepreneurial discourse, and how this discourse, at the same time, was reconstructed and renegotiated. This study offers a practical example of how subjects are shaped in educational settings (see Davies, 2006, p. 425), and it contributes to the examinations 'of the way neoliberal discourse works in and through us to constitute us as viable subjects' (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 256). Altogether, the findings illustrate how EE, as governmentality, operates through the interaction of the technologies of power and the technologies of self, strengthening students understanding of themselves as entrepreneurial subjects.

Brunila and Mononen-Batista Costa (2016) have, in their study, argued that while entrepreneurial activities offer skills for representing oneself in accordance with entrepreneurial ideals, they might limit opportunities to speak otherwise. This important aspect was demonstrated also in our study. Although the widened conceptions made entrepreneurial subjectivity more achievable for students and easier to identify with, the ideal of being entrepreneurial remained self-evident. Slender voices of challenging and questioning discovered at the beginning of the course finally attenuated. Entrepreneurial subjectivity may, in the light of the findings, be seen as a normative ideal pursued in EE. As Dahlstedt and Hertzberg (2013, p. 34) have noted, changing the self-conception of an individual to the desired direction appears among the advocates of EE as a liberating and emancipating practice. By contrast, it has been claimed that entrepreneurial discourse may lead to experiences of imperfection, incapability, vulnerability and fragility as social problems are within the discourse turned into signs of individual failure (Siivonen & Brunila, 2014, p. 169). This was further demonstrated in our study by the apologetic voices of students when referring to their non-entrepreneurial characteristics. In addition, the transfer of risk from the state to the apparently free and autonomous citizens may have a heavy cost to many individuals (Davies & Bansel, 2007, p. 249). It has been noted that, in EE, economical utility in education is emphasized at the expense of individual security (Dahlstedt & Hertzberg, 2012).

The present study demonstrates how the entrepreneurial discourse was naturally adopted among students, and how entrepreneurial subjectivity appeared as a self-evident ideal encouraged in EE. In educational practice, both educators and students are conditioned by available discourses. These discourses are constantly reconstructed, and they may be challenged by alternative discourses.

Conclusion

In this study, we examined how entrepreneurial discourse is being constructed and negotiated among university-level business students in EE practices. We analysed pre-assignments and reflection texts written by the students, a group of business students attending a course on corporate entrepreneurship and the entrepreneurial mindset. Throughout the course, students' definitions of entrepreneurial subjectivity widened, and simultaneously, adoption of the entrepreneurial discourse strengthened.

In this study, we have assumed a critical approach in EE research and, hence, contributed to the development of 'Critical EE studies' by challenging the legitimacy of existing entrepreneurial values and assumptions. We have made visible the taken-for-granted truths learned in EE. Similar critical examinations, revealing the premises and normative truisms of EE, have so far been marginal. Thus, our study contributes by addressing the above research gap. Based on our findings, we argue that, among educators, the aim to educate entrepreneurial subjects should be recognised as a

political, moral and, hence, negotiable objective, rather than a value-neutral or imperative objective. Without attempting to offer ready-made moral guidelines, we suggest that critical examination of the normative practices in EE, and how educators participate in reproducing them, is important among academics, pedagogues and policymakers. In Davies' (2006, pp. 436–437) words 'we must take responsibility for examining the documents and discursive practices that are taken-for-granted in our schools and universities, and ask: what conditions of possibility are they creating and maintaining for us and for our students? In what ways do those conditions of possibility afford our students a viable life? And in what ways may they be said to fall short of adequate care?'

Our study is not without limitations. The context in which the students composed their writings should be taken into careful consideration. First, the students' writings were assignments for a course that was organised at the business school, which targeted business students. Business schools can be identified as natural homes for EE, and it might be that the entrepreneurial ethos and positive outlook on the thematic area of entrepreneurship are especially strong in business faculties. In addition, due to their preceding studies, all the students who attended the course had some theoretical understanding of business as well as entrepreneurship. Naturally, the students had expectations of the course on the basis of the course objectives defined in the syllabus, and they may have had some pre-assumptions of the way in which

teachers might assess their identifiable assignments. It is possible that these matters affected the marginality of critical voices in the research data. After all, one should remain cognisant that students' definitions of entrepreneurial subjectivity may be different in other disciplines where businesslike thinking and a business approach are less familiar to students. Therefore, it would be interesting to examine how students from different faculties and with less pre-understanding of business life and entrepreneurship particularly relate to entrepreneurial discourse and whether differences exist.

For this study, however, these issues were not restrictive, as we were especially interested in what students in this specific setting thought they were expected to think and what they identified as culturally appropriate ways of expressing themselves, i.e., what were the discourses available for them. The most relevant offering of the study is an illustration of how both educators and students attending EE are conditioned by the norms of the entrepreneurial discourse, and how this discourse is constantly reproduced and renegotiated in educational practices. In addition, it should also be noted that the discourses affecting educational settings are dynamic and constantly reconstructed in wider social intercourse.

We assert that a deeper understanding of the justification and implementation of EE in the university context is needed to reveal how EE is legitimised in university education and how it reshapes activities at the grass-roots level and subjects'

conceptions of themselves. Most importantly, we suggest that the normative, taken-for-granted truths appealed to in EE should be examined more critically than has been done thus far. The development of 'critical EE studies' calls for deconstructing the assumptions and emancipating individuals from the notion that entrepreneurship and being entrepreneurial are always desirable either from a societal or individual perspective.

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