

Enacted experiences: analysing drama in entrepreneurial training

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Abstract: *This paper identifies and interprets enacted experiences in drama workshops organized as part of an entrepreneurship training programme. The authors argue that drama is an effective tool in entrepreneurship training offered to practising entrepreneurs. Drama exercises, by providing ‘enacted’ experience, can contribute to creating, reinforcing or complementing different forms of entrepreneurial experience. The results are encouraging for those who advocate using drama in training programmes for entrepreneurs. Drama sessions provide powerful experiences that might otherwise be out of reach of the participant. The paper contributes to the entrepreneurship training and entrepreneurial learning literatures by showing how enacted experience in drama workshops is a form of experience that, together with mastery, vicarious and social experience (Erikson, 2003), is connected to entrepreneurship development. Methodologically, the paper illustrates how visual material can be applied in research.*

Keywords: *experience; drama; entrepreneurial learning; entrepreneurship training; female entrepreneurs*

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Small firms are seen as the backbone of economies and as sources of new business, new jobs and innovation (Parker, 2009). However, they are considered to be at a disadvantage, in that they are not motivated to pursue growth (Autio, 2007); nor, in many cases, are the owner-managers of small firms competent to expand their firms (Ibrahim and Soufani, 2002; Heilbrunn, 2004). Hence, many training opportunities have been made available to entrepreneurs to address this shortcoming (Zhang and Hamilton, 2010).

This study participates in the discussion of entrepreneurship training and entrepreneurial learning, and in particular the role of enacted experience. Previous entrepreneurial experience is seen to be positively associated with new venture start-up and performance (Wiklund and Shepherd, 2008; Westhead *et al.*, 2005a; 2005b). Learning from discontinuous events such as failures is seen as an inherent part of entrepreneurial

learning (Cope, 2011). Entrepreneurs learn by doing. They learn from their own experience (mastery experience) but not from that alone. Erikson (2003) suggests three different types of entrepreneurial experience: mastery experience, vicarious experience and social experience. It is assumed that entrepreneurial training programmes can support experiential learning by offering an opportunity to reflect on personal experience; by providing role models for the entrepreneurs, for example, by inviting established entrepreneurs to act as tutors or to be guest speakers on the programme; and by enabling peer learning within the group. However, research endeavouring to make sense of the experiences in training programmes has to date been rather limited (Zhang and Hamilton, 2010).

The pedagogical discussion of and experimentation with different methods in entrepreneurship education for students has recently been lively (Pittaway and Cope,

2007). Based on reviews, interactive and student-centred methods are frequently applied in entrepreneurship education programmes including drama (Akola and Heinonen, 2008). A similar trend of increased interest in using drama is identified in management education (Boggs *et al.*, 2007). However, such discussions are primarily limited to and focused on students or nascent entrepreneurs in the pre-venture phase, and few if any studies consider the use of drama in training programmes targeted at practising entrepreneurs. Most studies discussing different methods only concentrate on describing them, and very few provide any evaluative, research-based evidence on the feasibility or impact of the methods used (De Faoite *et al.*, 2003; Henry *et al.*, 2004; Heinonen and Akola, 2007; Pittaway *et al.*, 2007). For example, Gibb (2011) suggests that:

‘Drama, for example, can be used to create empathy with entrepreneurial values, stimulate creativity, build self-efficacy and communication skills, simulate decision-making under pressure; support team-building capacity, and in general enhance recognition of the role of the entrepreneur as an actor delivering different images to different stakeholders.’

This may well be true, but the statement is difficult to evaluate since no empirical evidence is offered to support it. However, there is no doubt that the application of arts – for example, drama – in entrepreneurial training, merits more attention, not least because drama and theatricality have also recently been applied as methods for or metaphors of understanding entrepreneurial action (Anderson, 2005; Damgaard *et al.*, 2005).

This paper addresses these research gaps by analysing a training programme targeted at female entrepreneurs. The programme included drama workshops facilitated by a professional theatre director. It soon became evident that the programme was a success, at least if the participants’ enthusiasm demonstrated at the training sessions and their commitment to the programme were any indication. This stirred our curiosity about what kind of inspiring elements the programme included that could explain such enthusiasm. In this paper, we shall make sense of the experiences in drama workshops on an entrepreneurship training programme. Further, we shall integrate our ideas about the enacted experiences of the drama workshops with the extant research on entrepreneurial learning from experience. The analysis will be linked to recent theorizing of entrepreneurship through the theatrical/dramaturgical approach (Anderson, 2005).

We came to understand the drama workshops as arenas for enacting experience. Our analysis of videotapes of the workshops leads us to suggest that

there is a form of entrepreneurial experience that may be gained through experiencing a powerful event in training. Hence, we propose extending Erikson’s (2003) conceptual framework by adding a fourth type of experience: *enacted experience*.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we present a review of the literature on entrepreneurial learning as a foundation for exploring the entrepreneurial experience. Second, we discuss different approaches for linking drama and entrepreneurship. Third, we discuss research on entrepreneurship training courses to understand what kind of learning they aim to provide for entrepreneurs. We then illustrate our argument by offering an account of how entrepreneurs enact experience in drama workshops. Finally, we discuss our findings, present theoretical and methodological contributions, suggest avenues for future research and develop the practical implications of the study.

Role of experience in entrepreneurial learning

The study contributes to the discussion on entrepreneurial learning, and more specifically to the discussion on enacting experiences. While the research on entrepreneurial learning is flourishing, we do not yet fully understand the role of experience generally, and different experiences in particular, in learning (Cope, 2003). Development in this area is important since many entrepreneurs invest significant personal resources in creating and managing a small venture, exposing themselves and their families to considerable financial, emotional and social risk (Cope, 2003; Crick, 2011).

In its simplest form, experiential learning means that if a particular endeavour turns out successfully, it will be repeated, the opposite being the case for an unsuccessful endeavour – it will be abandoned (Minniti and Bygrave, 2001). There is a widely supported view within the literature on entrepreneurial learning that entrepreneurs are action-oriented and learn primarily ‘by doing’: that is to say, learning is based on experience. Certain events – critical incidents – have an important role to play in the process of entrepreneurial learning (Cope and Watts, 2000; Rae and Carswell, 2000; Deakins and Wyper, 2010). It seems that discontinuous learning events, different challenges and problems can be rich sources of learning (Cope, 2003). The ability of entrepreneurs to bolster their knowledge as a result of experiencing these learning events will determine how successful their firms eventually become (Deakins and Freel, 1998). Thus, non-routine events have an important role to play in how entrepreneurs learn.

As an extreme non-routine, discontinuous event, Cope’s (2011) study of failed ventures extends under-

standing of that topic. His research demonstrates that entrepreneurs learn a great deal not only about themselves and the death of their ventures, but also about networks and relationships. Previous research therefore seems to suggest that particularly challenging new experiences and even failures are a good source of entrepreneurial learning. Exposure to different experiences facilitates 'learning as you go' (Van Gelderen *et al.*, 2007).

Various scholars have attempted to conceptualize the type of experience that can be a source of learning. Morris *et al.* (2012) suggest in their conceptual model built on affective events theory that, as the venture unfolds, it produces events that are experientially processed and produce affective reactions in the entrepreneur. The affective state is characterized by positivity or negativity and levels of engagement. Hence, it is the entrepreneur's feelings and emotions at a given moment that influence his or her entrepreneurial learning. As a result, affective reactions to past and present experiences and anticipation of the future facilitate entrepreneurial learning. We also understand that entrepreneurial learning is closely linked to sense making, as both deal with the creation of meaning (Schwandt, 2005).

In applying Wood and Bandura's (1989) framework, Erikson (2003) suggests that there are different types of entrepreneurial experience: mastery experience, vicarious experience and social experience. The most effective way for individuals to develop a strong sense of self-efficacy is from practical experience and repeated accomplishments (mastery experience). The skills acquired through past achievements, including previous career experience, reinforce self-efficacy and contribute to higher aspirations and future performance. However, this is not the only way to gain experience. Observational learning from role models is an alternative way to strengthen self-belief. An entrepreneurial role model (vicarious experience) will positively affect self-efficacy through a social comparison process, as people usually judge their capabilities in comparison to others. The third way to strengthen the sense of self-efficacy is through social influence (social experience). If people receive positive encouragement, for example from their peers, they will be more likely to expend greater effort.

The development of key personal characteristics associated with entrepreneurs, such as tolerance of ambiguity, calculated risk-taking and achievement motivation, is facilitated by the ongoing processing of events as a venture unfolds (Morris *et al.*, 2012). It is through the lens of these experiences that entrepreneurs interpret events and construct a sense of self. The nature of the affective experience may also require that entrepreneurs build a new mental framework, which contributes to the development of an entrepreneurial

mindset. As the environment in which the entrepreneurs operate is shaped by events that are ambiguous and uncertain, it is possible that exposure to such events and experiences results in self-development as the entrepreneurs learn to cope, especially when these events create strong negative and positive effects. Shepherd (2004) claims that emotions and feelings can also be practised, and he suggests experimenting with various pedagogical methods that offer emotional experiences and the opportunity to manage those emotions.

Drama in entrepreneurship research

Recently, the drama or theatricality of entrepreneurship has been applied in entrepreneurship research in various ways (Anderson, 2005; Downing, 2005). The plots and characters of stage plays have been used to explain and interpret the drama of entrepreneurship, usually by highlighting parallels with a central character – Iago, for example, from Shakespeare's *Othello* (Hjorth, 2007). Another method applied has been to study entrepreneurship research and policy discourses to identify the (fictive) characters within them who occupy the key role of entrepreneur (Jones, 2012; Ahl, 2002). Another approach was proposed by Damgaard *et al.* (2005), who made use of their experience in the field as consulting entrepreneurs to create a drama in which their roles as an entrepreneur, a consultant and a researcher are clarified in a conversation between the characters. This fictive play contributes to insight into the entrepreneurial situation and how an entrepreneurial process is enacted. It uses drama in both its methodology and its analysis to locate the voice of entrepreneurs in a process of theory development spurred by the relationship between entrepreneurs and consultants. The authors also reveal a pedagogical ambition with the use of drama: making abstract concepts more tangible. Similarly, Watson (2012) uses fictional drama to present findings from ongoing ethnographic research on entrepreneurial action and the views of an individual involved in the process. In addition, Fletcher and Watson (2007) weave an entrepreneurial drama around the emergence of a business idea in a conversation between them. Consequently, they reinforce the relational and emergent quality of the entrepreneurial process. They also demonstrate how performing drama for students facilitates discussing the entrepreneurship process with them and encourages the course participants to bring their own experiences to the discussion. Hence, drama is applied both to study the phenomenon (enactive research, Johannisson, 2005) and to convey the results persuasively to different audiences.

Finally, in the search to understand entrepreneurship as an enacted social process, theatricality can offer a

way of seeing how the enactment works. Drama, for example, helps participants view entrepreneurship as a performance for different audiences (Anderson, 2005). These performances consist of selective and emotional processes that produce storylines, plot and narrative structure, supporting sense making and action making (Downing, 2005). In this study, we apply the latter by focusing on how entrepreneurs enact experiences in drama workshops. In our study, drama is both the context for the study – that is, the training activity our participants are engaged in – and an analytical perspective, when we as researchers participate in the drama as the audience and interpret the workshop participants' enacted performance. Next, we review the role assigned to entrepreneurship training programmes in support of entrepreneurial learning.

Entrepreneurship training programmes

Entrepreneurship training programmes are widely available for entrepreneurs in most Western countries. Training is considered an effective way of helping entrepreneurs to reduce the risk of business failure (Ibrahim and Soufani, 2002; De Faoite *et al*, 2003) and to assist small businesses to grow (Ojala and Heikkilä, 2011). The primary rationale for offering training programmes is to compensate for a lack of business and work experience; so a programme might, for example, offer the experience of trainers well versed in entrepreneurship or that of experienced business advisers (Calado and Cagica, 2009). Alternatively, it might facilitate a mentoring programme offering guidance and support to entrepreneurs (Ibrahim and Soufani, 2002; De Faoite *et al*, 2003). The experienced business owners and trainers should be capable of transferring their own experiences to current or aspiring entrepreneurs. They will also help the participants to build networks. The experienced business people act as role models, and the trainers together with the peer participants may also be a source of social support that helps to strengthen the self-efficacy of the participants and contribute to venture creation (Dumas, 2001; Henry *et al*, 2004; Brown, 2005).

On the other hand, developing various functional business skills is seen as key to enhancing managerial ability. Ibrahim and Soufani (2002), however, stress that in the entrepreneurship context the acquisition of skills alone is not enough, as the participants will need to learn how to make decisions while applying those functional skills. In a small business education context, such learning can be achieved by encouraging participants to carry out assignments that are directly related to business. In the case of practising entrepreneurs, it is suggested that the participants learn not only from the

experience of seasoned entrepreneurs as teachers, but also from sharing experiences within the group and learning from each other (Zhang and Hamilton, 2010).

To sum up, we might conceptualize the role of entrepreneurship training programmes as being to substitute for the entrepreneurial experience that participants lack. Together with the use of experienced consultants and networking between the participants, drama workshops formed an important pedagogical method in our training programme.

Methodology

Context of the research

This study was part of a larger programme delivering competence training to support small business growth. The initial rationale for the training programme was to encourage the identification of new entrepreneurial skills of women owner-managers in a rural county in Finland. The aims included improving self-management and networking skills to develop an entrepreneurial motivation to aspire to growth. Nine entrepreneurs from a variety of backgrounds started the two-year training programme and agreed to participate in the research. We acted as participant observers throughout the training programme, which consisted of 12 drama workshops.

The object of the drama workshops was to study the individual entrepreneurial orientation for growth as well as management development by applying learning from the performing arts. The idea of applying such methods in training stemmed from a belief in their ability to engage people in ways that other methods could not. The performing arts, including theatre, touch a person emotionally and intellectually. The workshop content was based on techniques used in the theatre and known to offer a social experience, which encourages people to share emotions and energy. What makes the theatre beneficial for triggering change is its power to put people in a new context beyond their comfort zone, and thus prompt them to explore new ways of dealing with reality (Adler, 2006.) Theatre-based training fosters capabilities such as trust, spontaneity and creativity, collaboration, and interaction (Gibb, 2011). Drama therefore works as an alternative means of explanation or sense making. It enables us to see things that we otherwise might not have seen (Anderson, 2005).

In the drama workshops, each participant first wrote a psycho-biography highlighting significant and often intimate aspects of her life. They were encouraged to include special events, periods of time, people, feelings and smells or tastes. Then each participant chose a well known and successful female entrepreneur – a personal business guru – and studied her life story, and then recounted it to the group. Then both the entrepreneurs'

own life stories and the narrative life stories of the chosen gurus were used as the raw material from which to generate a script for the performance. The scenes were rehearsed and realized by applying theatrical techniques. Previous acting experience was not required. The drama workshops were recorded on video.

Research materials and analysis through vignettes

In this paper, the research material comprises the videos of the drama workshop sessions (an outline of all the sessions is included in the appendix). First, one of the authors screened the videotapes (approximately 35 hours of them) to form an overview of the working process in the workshops. The drama workshops introduced various working methods. For example, they offered the participants an arena for reflecting on different activities in the training programme as well as their business and private life issues. Thus, the video films included a good deal of conversation. In the first screening, the goal was to identify scenes in which 'real drama' – that is, theatrical activities – took place. We anticipated that these scenes, which were emotional and elicited affective responses from the participants (Morris *et al.*, 2012), would be important to isolate the experiences arising during the training. Then the videos were viewed again, paying special attention to those scenes, and a transcription of the events of each scene was written, including, for example, how the facilitator initiated the activity and what happened subsequently. Researchers were careful to focus on elements of both verbal and non-verbal communication.

In our study, the analysis is based on our sense making and interpretation of the visual scenes (Belova, 2006; Eriksson *et al.*, 2008; Harper, 2005; Taylor and Ladkin, 2009). We applied the theatre metaphor in the analysis. We did not seek to probe what kind of learning the actors acquired or believed themselves to have acquired from enacting the particular scene. Instead, as in theatre, the drama scenes allow the audience to build its own informed social construction of the scene (Anderson, 2005) and make sense of why and how this particular story emerges in the scene (Boje *et al.*, 2004; Anderson, 2005).

Videotapes offer specific advantages in terms of the richness and permanence of data, for example (Bottorff, 1994). However, the process of converting the video into text brings certain challenges: for example, the transcriptions may contain too much information, or some of the information may be lost in the transcription (Nyström and Lauritzen, 2005). Hence, it is important to document the process of transcribing accurately.

There is no single right or most appropriate way to analyse qualitative data. One way of thinking about the processes of having ideas is to conceptualize them

through abductive reasoning (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). According to the logic of abduction, a researcher moves iteratively between the theory and empirical data in the research process. This approach permits empirical research to take a more central role; there is an interaction between existing ideas, previous findings and observations, new observations and new ideas.

Both authors selected certain scenes for in-depth analysis. The aim was to identify particularly powerful events from the scenes for further analysis. The purpose was not to present a 'typical' narrative, but rather to gain a rich picture of the particular, and then, by relating it to a broader context, to account for the phenomenon (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). The challenge, of course, lay in selecting and presenting the findings and the analysis concisely. Our solution was to illustrate specific actions through vignettes that focused on the enactment of different experiences through drama. Thus, by taking notes on what happened, we focused on some issues and omitted others. A story is never the whole story, but there are multiple stories (Gartner, 2007).

Findings

In the following paragraphs, we will present and analyse short vignettes focusing on the different types of enacted entrepreneurial experiences in the drama workshops. Through these vignettes, we illustrate our interpretation of how entrepreneurs enact entrepreneurial experiences. Three features of enacted experience are addressed: being a competent businesswoman; experiencing the worst nightmare – failure; and experiencing a meaningful present and an attractive future. We first present a verbatim outline of each scene and then provide an analysis of the enacted entrepreneurial experience.

Experiencing yourself as somebody else: a competent businesswoman

- Vignette: What does the guru say about your entrepreneurship?
- Facilitator: *What would the guru say about my entrepreneurship? What would she say about me as an entrepreneur just now? What would be her first lines? Her first sentence? Write it down but don't tell it to anyone yet. What is it that your guru would pay attention to?*

The participants sit at tables in silence and are given a couple of minutes to compose the sentence.

F: *This is our stage. (The facilitator presents the space by walking around the floor.) Now move somewhere you'd like to stand on stage, but don't say the sentence yet. I'm going to walk around and when*

I stop in front of you, you will say the lines. You should say them with the same intensity and interest as your guru would. (Everyone gets up and takes a place on stage. The facilitator walks from one to another.)

The participants say their lines:

- *Believe in your dreams.*
- *It's really nice to see an open and positive 'Beartown'¹ person.*
- *Damn Ruth, you should make yourself more noticeable.*
- *Be brave, believe in yourself.*
- *That's great, how interesting!*
- *Have you thought of expanding [your business]?*

In the second scene, the facilitator asks the participants to exchange the piece of paper containing their sentence with someone else. The participants are asked to move to a new place on stage and to say the sentence they have just got from someone else when the facilitator stops in front of them. They are not allowed to say whose sentence it is. The facilitator again walks around from one to another and each one says someone else's lines.

F: *How did it feel... the sentence of a stranger?*

All stated that saying the sentence felt strange. They also said that their own lines expressed by someone else sounded somehow strange. The facilitator explained that this exercise revealed the effect of expressing thoughts that are not your own but those of someone else. The participants are asked to take their own sentence and move back to their own place on stage. This is the cue for the start of scene three.

F: *And what will you answer to the guru? What is your spontaneous comment on the lines of the guru?*

The participants move back to their own place to think through their answer. They are thinking quietly and look quite serious at this point. The facilitator circulates once more, and each person offers her answer when requested.

- *Well, of course I believe in myself, I always have done.*
- *Thank you, it's really nice to hear that I look like one.*
- *Thank you for your support.*
- *That's what I'm trying to do.*
- *Isn't it? That's why I do it.*
- *Yes, I have.*

F: *Here, we have the first lines and the answer to it. This is the first dialogue between the guru and yourself.*

The rehearsal serves as a catalyst for an active conversation. The rehearsal concludes with each participant saying both her own line and the line of the guru.

- *Believe in your dreams. – Well, of course I believe in myself, I always have done.*
- *It's really nice to see an open and positive 'Beartown' person. – Thank you, it's really nice to hear that I look like one.*
- *Damn Ruth, you should make yourself more noticeable. – Thank you for your support.*
- *Be brave, believe in yourself. – That's what I'm trying to do.*
- *That's great, how interesting! – Isn't it? That's why I do it.*
- *Have you thought of expanding [your business]? – Yes, I have.*

This time the participants say the lines with less intensity than in the previous scenes. The facilitator sums up the rehearsal by stating that this is how the guru understands 'my' world and how 'I' react to it.

Analysis of the vignette. The participants were empowered by the exercise. The women were given the opportunity to see themselves through another's eyes. It may be that that alone may help us to put things into perspective. By externalizing our position from the inside to the outside we may understand that the other is not able to see and know all the things that we know about ourselves; the other is not able to grasp our full identity, but is exposed to the projected image of us. Moreover, since this other is not just anyone, but a guru and a role model, it further amplifies the experience.

In reality, the women did not consult any business gurus and could not know what the gurus thought about them, but they were allowed to imagine what they wished them to say and then to say that aloud themselves. By voicing this comment and point of view, it became 'real'. The exercise continued a step further when the women participating responded to their gurus. This can be interpreted to have reaffirmed the first experience: if I respond to her, it becomes a real conversation between two equals – two female entrepreneurs. We assessed this exercise as helping the women to gain self-confidence as entrepreneurs.

Previous research has emphasized the use of experienced entrepreneurs and business people as facilitators and mentors in entrepreneurship training programmes (Calado and Cagica, 2009; Ibrahim and Soufani, 2002;

De Faoite *et al.*, 2003). Their role is to provide an example, but also to reassure the participants of the abilities and skills required to achieve their goals. Our interpretation is that the enacted experience contributed towards this end. Even though the role models were not physically present in the scene, first the process of selecting a guru and revealing the reasoning behind the choice and then ‘communicating’ with the guru helped the participants to reflect on their own capabilities as entrepreneurs. The role models were well known successful entrepreneurs, and the spur to associate themselves with well respected people increased the self-confidence of the participants.

Experiencing the worst nightmare – failure

- Vignette: The person is dead as an entrepreneur.

The workshop addresses how to resurrect an entrepreneur who is apparently dead. The facilitator presents a dramatic portrayal of his own career as an entrepreneur and asks the participants for assistance. He gives his CV to the participants and asks them to read it. He poses some questions that will help the participants work on his career dramaturgically.

F: The person is dead as an entrepreneur. Why is he dead? Is it possible to resurrect him? What should happen to be able to resurrect him? You will ask him what has happened and why he is lying out there.

In the first scene, the facilitator is lying on the floor with a white sheet over him. The participants come into the room and sneak towards the ‘corpse’. They are shocked to see a dead body lying on the floor. All look quite anxious and even frightened. Beforehand, the participants were advised not to say anything to begin with. No-one says a word, and the atmosphere is like that at a funeral. Then one of the participants kneels down and the others follow her. They all sit on the floor around the dead body.

Participant: Did your father push you down while you were working with him in his company?

(In one of the previous drama workshops, the facilitator had spoken of working with his father.)

F: How would you start constructing the future of the dead entrepreneur?

In the second scene, the participants come up with many ideas on how the facilitator could resurrect his entrepreneurial career: he could, for example, start a consultancy business or perhaps something totally different.

F Will the person return to life as an entrepreneur?

- *Yes, he will return, but in some other field.*
- *Yes, he will. He will make use of his existing competence and fill a market niche.*
- *He will continue as an educator.*
- *He will become an entrepreneur if only he wishes to.*
- *A phoenix will rise from the ashes.*
- *No, he will not return as an entrepreneur, but he will start in some area connected to creativity. He will work on projects.*
- *It takes time...bubbling. A background figure is of importance.*
- *He will be resurrected and keep his eyes and ears open. It will be a project type of entrepreneurship.*

Analysis of the vignette. The facilitator plays the role of the dead entrepreneur. This is visualized in the drama workshop by a ritual that we associate with death, the body being fully covered with a white sheet. This symbolism of the ritual is acknowledged by the participants, who are apparently outside their comfort zone, anxious, frightened and initially speechless. The scene continues with the discussion of how to resurrect this dead entrepreneur, how to bring him back to life.

In the discussion following the scene, the participants see him alive again, either as an entrepreneur or in a new field of activity. This rebirth does not take place in the same field but in a new one. He will be a phoenix born again from the ashes. The imagery surrounding the phoenix is also very strong and mutually shared.

Our interpretation is that this experience contributes to the participants facing their worst nightmare, that of failure, being dead as an entrepreneur. The facilitator of the drama workshops has chosen to import strong imagery and rituals to help the participants to face this idea, of being physically dead, not just having failed. Perhaps for this reason, he decides to play the key role himself, allowing the participants to view this as outsiders, and not themselves. However, the main thing here is not about dying and being dead, but coming back to life. After facing failure, it is possible to be reborn, not the same as before, but as something better and more interesting. Death is not an end but a new beginning.

Entrepreneurial failure carries a strong stigma (Cope, 2011). It may deter most people from entering entrepreneurship in the first place and it may limit the activities of existing entrepreneurs. Not trying anything new, by not taking even the slightest risk, may circumvent failure. On the other hand, it may also impede success. Visualizing the failure in a very strong metaphor, but equally evoking the bright future that emerges from failure, is a powerful tool for the entrepreneurs to use to reconsider the meaning of failure.

Experiencing your meaningful present and attractive future

- Vignette: A dramatic catwalk

The focus of the drama workshops was on female entrepreneurship and how it could be interpreted in a performance. The metaphor of a catwalk was used. The catwalk usually refers to the platform along which models walk in a fashion show. First they walk towards the end, then stop and turn around, and then walk back. The performance therefore consists of three phases. It begins with the past then moves to the present and proceeds to the future. The participants picked up the episodes for their scenes from the life story narratives. Next, we describe the catwalk scenes of two participants.

- *Sarah's catwalk.* Sarah walks slowly across the stage towards a high tower (made of footstools piled up on a table). The Finnish national anthem is playing loudly. On the way to the tower, Sarah moves heavy obstacles (represented by more footstools) to the side. She stops in front of the tower, and tries to reach a baton on top of the tower. She cannot reach it. She then takes a few steps backwards and joins hands with others (the participating women) who help her up. Sarah climbs higher and higher, and grasps the baton. She then turns around and brandishes the baton with an expression of triumph. She comes down and walks across the stage back to the other end of the stage. Martial music provides the accompaniment to her movements.
- *Helen's catwalk.* Helen is building a composition of the pictures that the participants bring to her. 'Try this one! This might be a good one for you!' Pleasant classical music is playing in the background. The music changes, and Helen starts moving the pictures on the wall. She tries this way and that way, and turns them around. She does not look satisfied with the work. She looks at it for a while. Then she takes one more picture, a crumpled one, out of her pocket and places it at the empty spot in the composition. It is done! Helen looks at the composition for some time, before turning to the audience and with a broad smile on her face and pointing to the resulting composition.

Analysis of the vignette. These two examples in the third vignette demonstrate the life stories of the participating women enacted in two episodes. In Sarah's performance, the future is visualized as struggling for a tangible thing – a baton lying out of reach, and briefly

unreachable, without the help of others. For Helen, an attractive future is shown as a pleasing composition of pictures. The vignette also illustrates how choices made in the present do have an impact on the future, and both actors make a lot of effort to reach a result that will satisfy them. Sarah moves heavy obstacles from her path and climbs up to reach the baton. Here, a baton is also seen as an artefact of the task to be accomplished. In Sarah's case, support from others made it possible for her to reach the goal. Helen, in turn, rearranges the pictures to arrive at a pleasing composition. The composition demonstrates the harmony – an attractive future – that is attainable when one is engaged.

The exercise is intended to bolster the participants' self-confidence and self-efficacy. By inviting them to imagine themselves living through an attractive future, an image of the meaningful present will be reinforced, and this will be the reason for the wise choices they made in the past (Morris *et al.*, 2012).

Furthermore, using the setting of a catwalk might implicitly offer the participating women new insights into themselves. A catwalk usually launches a model's career and raises the model's status in the fashion world. Here, it gives the women an opportunity to portray their life on a catwalk, or on a pedestal. The catwalk connects the performance of the participants to the realm of glamour, publicity and hype. It is hoped that this experience of seeing themselves as important players in business will empower the participants to develop courage and self-confidence (Rae, 2005).

To sum up our analyses, the first vignette illustrates how an entrepreneur may acquire self-confidence by imagining herself as a competent businesswoman. The participants voiced the points of view of the gurus and their comments to the gurus. The dialogue came to resemble a real conversation between two equals: two female entrepreneurs. The second vignette shows how visualizing failure through the metaphor of a dead entrepreneur contributes to the participants facing their worst nightmare, that of failure. The death or failure is not an end but a new beginning. The third vignette is illustrative of the possibility of constructing an attractive future and a meaningful present by reflecting on important events in one's life, showing how the events are linked to each other and then making the episodes real by enacting them.

While the exercises depict the enacted experiences of individuals in the workshop, they also involve the whole group. Some of the activities cannot be performed without assistance from others, but more importantly, the activities rely on the participants revealing their innermost thoughts, and hence contribute to the process of trust building for an effective learning community (Zhang and Hamilton, 2010.)

Discussion

This paper aimed to make sense of enacted experiences in drama workshops organized as part of an entrepreneurship training programme. The paper departs from the idea that entrepreneurs learn from experience, be it of the mastery, vicarious or social type (Erikson, 2003). Our findings suggest that there is a fourth type of experience, that of enacted experience. The participants in the drama workshops enact experiences by combining other forms of experience with the fictive and imagined. Hence, our main conclusion is that drama provides an opportunity to acquire different types of experience (mastery, vicarious, social and enacted experience) and to reflect on the meaning of those experiences for entrepreneurship. In addition, our results imply that drama can be used not only to help people deal with the particularly difficult elements of their personal experience, but also to apply the experiences of role models and peers to it. Our conclusion is that drama workshops are capable of provoking those emotional and affective processes of participants that are necessary for entrepreneurial learning to take place (Morris *et al*, 2012).

Previous research has emphasized the role of experience in entrepreneurial learning (Minniti and Bygrave, 2001; Westhead *et al*, 2005a, 2005b; Wiklund and Shepherd, 2008). In particular, the critical incidence of non-routine, especially challenging events (Cope, 2003; Deakins and Freel, 1998; Deakins and Wyper, 2010; Rae and Carswell, 2000) and of failures (Cope, 2011) has been shown to be critically important. Facing these challenges or problems is a powerful trigger for the process of learning (Deakins and Wyper, 2010).

In practice, the challenge of learning from failure may be that learning takes place too late and potential risks actually materialize – for instance, if the firm goes bankrupt. Such situations potentially force entrepreneurs on to a steep learning curve, while in the same period a great deal of resources may be wasted. The entrepreneur may be discouraged from starting again or lack the resources to do so. It has been suggested that better planning would help address this problem (Crick, 2011), but without the trigger of experienced challenges, problems or failure, planning is no easy task.

Our study provides support for the idea that drama workshops can be powerful tools to instigate such processes. For example, enacting the possibility of failure through the ‘death of an entrepreneur’ in a funeral-style setting could function as the necessary trigger for planning and preparation for such an event. Entrepreneurship training programmes offer arenas to gain new experiences and inculcate new mental frameworks in a safe environment, and that may facilitate effective learning and help to avoid unnecessary failures.

Future research should focus more acutely on the role of emotions, affective states and emotional experiences in entrepreneurship training programmes.

The identification of enacted experience that can be developed in a training context should be an important facet of future entrepreneurship programmes. They may strengthen the actual experience, but also compensate for experience that is lacking. It might be difficult to attract well known, successful entrepreneurs to the training programme, and in some rural and remote locations it may well be impossible (Kempster and Cope, 2010). In the training programme we observed, the participants selected their own role models – gurus – whom they studied. The participants then applied the knowledge gained in the programme. Our study demonstrates how even ‘virtual gurus’ can be effective role models for the participants.

The drama also allowed the incorporation of the theme of failure into the programme. Most people will be comfortable talking about their successes, but may find it difficult to talk about failure. Hence, recounting a story and experiences developed from bankruptcy is quite difficult for most people. Therefore, the enacted experience of failure may be needed to complement the stories of success recounted by visiting entrepreneurs.

Since this is not a longitudinal study aiming to map whether and how the participants applied their experiences in practice, it is open to criticism for focusing on experiences, and not really on experiential or entrepreneurial learning. While this criticism is valid, and further research would be required to analyse the power of *enacted experience* as a source of entrepreneurial learning, we believe that by demonstrating emotionality, the drama workshops elicited highly affective responses from the participants (Morris *et al*, 2012) and enabled us to understand their value and meaning to the participants (Down and Warren, 2008). As a result, we achieved our aim of making sense of how the drama workshops contributed towards generating new experiences for the participants.

Note

¹ This is a fictional name for the participant’s hometown.

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See Appendix overleaf

Appendix

Table A1. Description of the drama workshops

Session	Activity
1st drama workshop, 6 November 2009	The facilitator, a professional theatre director, outlines what they are going to do in the workshop sessions November 2009–December 2010. Watching a video of the play of a well known Finnish entrepreneur. The play was scripted and directed by the facilitator. Reflection. Physical warm-up exercises. Oral debriefings. Independent writing of psycho-biographies begins. The participants receive personal feedback from the facilitator.
2nd drama workshop, 18 November 2009	Each participant is asked to pick an event in her autobiography related to her childhood, and mime her story on the 'stage': that is, sitting on a chair with all the others sitting in a half-circle around her. The others have to guess what the story is about. Oral debriefings. Writing a biography continues.
3rd drama workshop, 15 January 2010	The facilitator tells a story about his own life and then asks two participants to play a role in the scenes he is going to direct. Then participants are divided into groups of three and everyone is asked to tell a story in an autobiography. Each group picks one story and agrees on the director and cast for the mini performance. Rehearsing scenes of the event. Three groups perform (2–5 minutes each) consecutively. After each presentation, all participants discuss the script and performance and can comment on and develop the idea. Others, for example, guide the actors to do something differently, and the facilitator supports the commentary round by prompting questions, etc. The same flow is repeated with each performance. Oral debriefings on rehearsal scenes.
4th drama workshop, 5 February 2010	Visiting an art exhibition and reflecting on the experiences of the visit. Each participant is asked to choose a business guru – a well known and successful businesswoman – and to research her before the next workshop. Independent writing of a narrated life story of the gurus starts. Writing a psycho-biography continues.
5th drama workshop, 12 March 2010	Presentations on the business gurus. Each participant in turn presents information on her guru from the 'stage'. Some read notes; some speak more generally on a businesswoman they greatly admire. Then the facilitator leads the discussion to the final performance taking place in December 2010. The workshop ends with a rehearsal of the 'guru' exercise. The participants are divided into groups of three and asked to think about what the guru would say about the entrepreneurship of each of them as it is at the moment. After rehearsing each participant's lines, the exercise continues with a new scene – 'How do you respond to the guru?' The third scene is about a guru's final lines to a participant. Rehearsals of this (fictive) conversation.
6th drama workshop, 9 April 2010	Exercises reflecting on business gurus. The participants work in pairs. They are asked to show and observe typical gestures and expressions of their gurus. The groups are then asked to imagine real-life situations – for example, a customer complaint – and to role-play how their own guru might solve them. Debriefings on the exercises.
7th drama workshop, 28 May 2010	The workshop takes place at the farm of one of the participants. 'The person is dead as an entrepreneur' exercise. The facilitator presents a dramatic portrayal of his career as a dead entrepreneur and the participants are asked to assist. Oral debriefings. The workshop concludes with the descriptions – a slogan-type statement – of each participant based on material the facilitator has chosen from each psycho-biography. The participants sit in a half-circle around the facilitator and each in turn is told her slogan. Others comment.
8th drama workshop, 20 August 2010	In the workshop, after a 10-week summer break, the participants reflect on their experiences of the training programme in general and expectations of the drama workshops in particular. The facilitator then turns the discussion to the final performance three months ahead, and suggests that the gurus should be invited to see the performance. This will not be accepted. No exercises at this session. Writing of both the psycho-biographies and the life stories of the gurus to be finished.
9th drama workshop, 1 October 2010	The facilitator presents his idea of a Dramatic Catwalk as a form of performance. Following the 'acceptance' of the participants, the facilitator guides them to create a composition of a catwalk. He shows three scenes of a catwalk, letting the participants direct his actions. Rehearsal of a new exercise, 'A bird stuck in a net', based on a story told by the facilitator. The director plays the role of a bird and the scenes are directed by the participants. The issue of the audience will be resolved by all agreeing to invite one important person to the final performance.
10th drama workshop, 10 October 2010	The participants present an artefact they were asked to bring to this session. Scenes from the 'A bird stuck in a net' exercise are worked on and rehearsed with input from all participants. One participant is asked to play the role of the bird. The scene is rehearsed several times. Debriefing on the exercise. The facilitator then guides the participants to work in groups and rehearse the scenes of their own catwalk presentations. The rehearsal takes 10–15 minutes. Each participant presents her own catwalk supported by the group members in predefined roles. After each presentation, all participants comment and develop the idea of each performance. The same sequence is repeated with each performance.
11th drama workshop, 12 November 2010	Rehearsals of each participant's performance continue.
12th drama workshop, 19 November 2010	The final version of each 1–2 minute catwalk in costume, with lighting and music, is videotaped. Rehearsals continue.
Performance, 10 December 2010	As a final show, a video recording of each participant's catwalk is presented. Each reflects briefly on her own. Some have invited a husband/partner or friend to the performance; some have not.