

# Identity work of academic teachers in an entrepreneurship training camp: a sensemaking approach

Teachers' identity  
work

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## Abstract

**Purpose** – This paper investigates how academic teachers engage in identity work and make sense of entrepreneurship and academia in an entrepreneurship training programme.

**Design/methodology/approach** – By employing a sensemaking approach, the paper inductively analyses materials from a business idea development camp organised for academic teachers.

**Findings** – In collective sensemaking during the camp, non-academic facilitators strongly influenced the reflection-in-experience via normative ideas of entrepreneurship and their othering of entrepreneurship from academic work. In their post-camp individual essays, the academic teachers reflect-on-experience and draw parallels between entrepreneurship and academic work constructing sameness.

**Research limitations/implications** – Longitudinal research is needed in identity work and sensemaking among academic teachers in relation to entrepreneurship.

**Practical implications** – Universities need to offer arenas for teachers and other faculty to support identity work and sensemaking.

**Originality/value** – This study generates new understanding of how academic teachers engage in identity work and make sense of entrepreneurship in training when interacting with others. It underscores the importance of time needed for reflection-on-action.

**Keywords** Entrepreneurial university, Entrepreneurship, Entrepreneurship training, Teachers, Identity work, Sensemaking

**Paper type** Research paper

## Introduction

Entrepreneurship education has expanded into teaching in many subject areas in order to introduce more students to the idea and ability of becoming more entrepreneurial (Hammon, 2018). This broad view to entrepreneurship education is not limited to approaches strictly associated with creating a new venture (Neck and Corbett, 2018), but is focused on instilling an entrepreneurial mindset, behaviour, and identities to all learners, regardless of context (Blenker *et al.*, 2011). Consequently, many universities offer voluntary training to teachers in non-business disciplines. This aims to support the teachers in exposing students from different disciplines to entrepreneurship through experiential entrepreneurial teaching and learning (see, e.g. Gibb, 2011; Teerijoki and Murdock, 2014; Penaluna *et al.*, 2015). Increasing

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the amount of entrepreneurship education is connected also to the development of entrepreneurial universities inviting all university members to engage in entrepreneurial activities (Hytti, 2021; Etkowitz, 2014; Foss and Gibson, 2015; Siegel and Wright, 2015). Accordingly, it is important to understand how academic teachers make sense of entrepreneurship and their own roles and identities in it (Wraae *et al.*, 2022) because teachers enhance entrepreneurship and inculcate the entrepreneurial culture for their students (e.g. Otache, 2019; Neck and Corbett, 2018).

Entrepreneurship education research often includes students (Henry and Lewis, 2018), for example to investigate how they engage in identity work in entrepreneurship education (Frederiksen and Berglund, 2020; Donnellon *et al.*, 2014; Hytti and Heinonen, 2013). These studies have contributed to our knowledge that identifying entrepreneurship as meaningful and achievable is not always easy or automatic, but requires identity work that “. . . refers to people being engaged in forming, repairing, maintaining, strengthening, or revising the constructions that are productive of a sense of coherence and distinctiveness” (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003, p. 1165). The need for identity work is high when people occupy multiple identities in tension with one another, such as those of the academic and entrepreneur (Karhunen *et al.*, 2017; Montonen *et al.*, 2017).

This paper investigates entrepreneurial identity work in the context of a 24-h business idea development camp open to all university faculty, especially teachers, in a Finnish university claiming to be an entrepreneurial university (Hytti, 2021). These teachers come from different disciplines and they are interested in embedding entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial behaviour into their teaching. By employing a sensemaking approach (Holt and Cornelissen, 2014; Maitlis and Christianson, 2014; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2015), we ask, “How do academic teachers engage in identity work and collective sensemaking of entrepreneurship in an entrepreneurship camp?” The paper contributes to research on identity work and sensemaking in entrepreneurship education (Frederiksen and Berglund, 2020; Donnellon *et al.*, 2014; Hytti and Heinonen, 2013), as well as for understanding university teachers as participants in entrepreneurship education (Gibb, 2011; Toding and Venesaar, 2018). Further, we help develop a new understanding of the entrepreneurial university from within (Peura *et al.*, 2021) and contribute to emerging research on entrepreneurship educators in non-business backgrounds (Wraae and Walmsley, 2020).

### **Entrepreneurship educators in non-business disciplines**

Previous research has focused on entrepreneurship educators within higher education, and pointed out the need to better understand the educator’s role, background, and personal attributes (Neck and Corbett, 2018; Wraae and Walmsley, 2020; Wraae *et al.*, 2022; Hannon, 2018; Henry, 2020). This research is mainly driven by the desire to enhance the quality and impact of entrepreneurship education as a distinctive business discipline. Simultaneously, however, it has been suggested that entrepreneurship education should be extended to and embedded in all disciplines (e.g. Gibb, 2011; Henry, 2020; Henry and Treanor, 2010). Yet, only a small number of studies include non-business teachers (see, however, Gibb, 2011; Wraae and Walmsley, 2020; Wraae *et al.*, 2022; Penaluna *et al.*, 2015; Teerijoki and Murdock, 2014; Zappe *et al.*, 2013; Wyness and Jones, 2019).

Existing research has focused on educator development models (Gibb, 2011) and pedagogies (Penaluna *et al.*, 2015; Zappe *et al.*, 2013), role identity perceptions (Wraae *et al.*, 2022), and the impact of teacher training on teaching approaches, entrepreneurial mindset, and interest in teaching entrepreneurship (Toding and Venesaar, 2018; Teerijoki and Murdock, 2014; Penaluna *et al.*, 2015). The research concludes that, because embedding entrepreneurship into non-entrepreneurship discipline is usually voluntary, it requires an initial interest and a perception of its positive impacts among teachers. Importantly,

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participating teachers should perceive entrepreneurial teaching as being feasible for themselves and see the connections between their disciplinary teaching and entrepreneurship teaching (Teerijoki and Murdock, 2014; Penaluna *et al.*, 2015; Wyness and Jones, 2019). Furthermore, teachers' own personal beliefs and values, as well as interpretations of what entrepreneurship means, may cause them to either reject or accept it (Zappe *et al.*, 2013; Wraae and Walmsley, 2020; Wraae *et al.*, 2022; Wyness and Jones, 2019). Consequently, more information is still needed regarding the role of teacher training in forming these beliefs or role identities (Wraae *et al.*, 2022).

This study is conducted in Finland, where entrepreneurship is embedded in all levels of education and should be promoted in all subject areas (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017). The university can emphasise the importance of embedded entrepreneurship education (Teerijoki and Murdock, 2014), but teachers independently decide the curriculum content, pedagogical decisions, delivery modes, and the intended learning outcomes. Despite this, teachers may lack power when implementing changes in university curriculum beyond their own courses (see also Gibb, 2011). Thus, there are boundaries for teachers that are expected to be "entrepreneurial;" to seize opportunities and be creative in their teaching (Hannon, 2018; Joensuu-Salo *et al.*, 2021; Penaluna *et al.*, 2015), and within their profession, in general (Gibb, 2011).

### **Identity work of teachers as participants of entrepreneurship education**

Introducing entrepreneurship in non-business teaching represent changes in higher education and identity expectations posed for academic teachers (e.g. Kalfa *et al.*, 2017; Ylijoki and Ursin, 2013; Frederiksen and Berglund, 2020). These changes may cause tensions that call for identity work in order to form, maintain, repair, strengthen, or revise academic teachers' personal and social identities (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003). Identity work enables the participant to maintain or adjust her identity meanings and structures to resolve any tensions created between the existing and expected identity (Brown, 2019).

Previous research demonstrates that entrepreneurship education forms an arena for identity work (Frederiksen and Berglund, 2020; Donnellon *et al.*, 2014; Hytti and Heinonen, 2013). In entrepreneurship education, participants are guided through learning events that resemble the real-world context in which entrepreneurs operate (Pittaway and Cope, 2007b; Gibb, 2011). The content and pedagogical decisions are designed to direct the participants towards desirable identity outcomes associated with entrepreneurial behaviour. Specifically, entrepreneurship education can contribute to participants self-identifying as entrepreneurs (entrepreneurial teachers) and transforming their view of themselves (Harmeling, 2011). However, education does not fully determine the processes of an individual's identity construction, but can give birth to negative experiences that prompt resistance and rejection of suggested identities (Frederiksen and Berglund, 2020). The different experiences prompt identity work and constant renegotiation and reshaping of identities (Peura *et al.*, 2021).

We understand that identities are not fixed; they are changing and renegotiated in interactions. Individuals may also have multiple, sometimes conflicting, identities (Radu-Lefebvre *et al.*, 2021). Whilst identity is subject to change over time or context, there must still be a degree of *sameness* (Chandler, 2000). This suggests the need for identity work in which identity is continuously produced (Alvesson and Robertson, 2016; Brown, 2019). The heightened need for reflexivity and identity work has been found among individuals, who cross the boundaries of academia and entrepreneurship (Hytti and Heinonen, 2013; Karhunen *et al.*, 2017). Furthermore, academic teachers representing different disciplines can be expected to maintain identities anchored to different types of values that either accelerate or

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impede the adoption of suggested entrepreneurial identities (Teerijoki and Murdock, 2014; Wraae *et al.*, 2022).

Underlying the identity work is sensemaking (Weick, 1995), i.e. how people appropriate and enact their reality (Holt and Cornelissen, 2014; Maitlis and Christianson, 2014; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2015). Sensemaking refers to a “process through which people work to understand issues or events that are novel, ambiguous, confusing, or in some other way violate expectations” (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014, p. 57). Hence, the individuals are making sense, not only of the events, but also of themselves in relation to others (Brown, 2019). Accordingly, this study regards sensemaking as a collective process that takes place in the interactions between academic teachers and camp facilitators (Maitlis and Christianson, 2014; Sandberg and Tsoukas, 2015), supported by pedagogical decisions in the social context (Frederiksen and Berglund, 2020). Academic teachers make sense of themselves and events by socially negotiating and mutually co-constructing the subjective meanings related to entrepreneurship (Siivonen *et al.*, 2020). Teachers are redefining themselves as members in the academia in relation to entrepreneurship (Ylijoki and Ursin, 2013).

## Context, materials, and methods

### *Context of the study*

This study is conducted in the context of a 24-h business idea development camp that a university organised (Bager, 2011) as part of a series of short entrepreneurship trainings for teachers. These trainings are voluntary and have multiple aims. The first aim is to aid the participants in planning and delivering entrepreneurship education (Gibb, 2011; Teerijoki and Murdock, 2014; Toding and Venesaar, 2018; see also Penaluna *et al.*, 2015). The second aim is to develop positive attitudes towards entrepreneurship (Packham *et al.*, 2010) or serve as an inspiration for understanding entrepreneurship, thus legitimising it among university faculty (Fayolle *et al.*, 2016). The third aim is to aid the participants in identifying possibilities for intrapreneurship within the university (Antoncic and Hisrich, 2003). The 24-h camp is the first of three 2-ECTS modules in the faculty training. Since 2016, approximately 40 teachers from different disciplines have participated in the camp. The research materials in this study include one cohort and camp facilitators, totalling ten individuals.

The camp model was adapted from the Junior Achievement (JA) programme. This model was initially intended for school children, so the exercises were adjusted to better suit the target audience. The camp was run by five non-academic enterprise facilitators from JA and other non-profit organisations supporting entrepreneurship education. Pedagogically, the camp reflected the experiential learning approach that includes hands-on action and utilisation of social learning with and from others (Pittaway and Cope, 2007a). It centred on the learner’s experiences to maintain “that learning is the process of creating knowledge through the transformation of experience” (Kolb, 1984, p. 38). The approach also combines the constructivist and social constructivist learning paradigms where learners are considered (co)constructors of knowledge (Kyrö, 2015). Hence, learners interpret and accommodate knowledge based on their own experiences, but also those of other learners and teachers (Tomkins and Ulus, 2016). In the camp, multidisciplinary teams with different areas of expertise were purposefully formed.

The camp was organised outside the university campus in a mansion with lodging for the participants in order to distance the learning environment from the class-room environment (Bager, 2011; Lepistö and Hytti, 2021). The programme was intensive and engaging. It consisted of short introductory lectures and group assignments through which the participants developed business ideas. The social programme was integrated into the learning process; part of the exercises took place in a sauna building near a lake. The camp was intended to allow opportunities for entrepreneurial behaviour, i.e. stimulate

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entrepreneurial thinking. For example, in order to simulate an entrepreneurial environment, the participants received little information before the camp. Additionally, instructions given during the camp were vague or incomplete in order to create uncertainty and ambiguity (Neck and Greene, 2011; Pittaway and Cope, 2007a). The approach gave precedence to practice and action over theory and motivated the participants to seek personal meanings to entrepreneurship (Gibb, 2011). Some of the assignments included debriefing led by the facilitators (Hägg and Kurczewska, 2016; Kolb, 1984; Pittaway and Cope, 2007a). In addition, an optional, written post-camp assignment was designed to aid the participants in reflecting on their own experiences by using Wood and Mckinley's (2010) article.

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### *Materials and methods*

Our methodological approach to study identity work in social interactions is inspired by an ethnography (see also Frederiksen and Berglund, 2020). In ethnographic research, the focus is on observing “how people interact with each other and with their environment in order to understand their culture” (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2015, p. 138) by, for example, spending time in the community and documenting observations and experiences in field notes (Coffey, 1999). Ethnography closely scrutinises social situations, actors in those situations, and actions. It offers a different avenue to understanding the camp compared to, for example, retrospective interviews with the participants (Silverman, 2017), and aims to convey an experience of “being there” for the reader. The results are presented in vignettes (Eriksson *et al.*, 2008) that serve a key element that consist of focused descriptions of events that are emblematic to the case. Thus, the ethnographic approach and the vignettes' validity should be determined by the richness in description of concrete details and whether they allow the reader to become a co-analyst of the study (Eriksson, 1986).

Prior to the camp, all participants and facilitators (see Table 1) granted permission for the first author—who also acted as the camp coordinator—to record the camp. The handheld camera was on at all times, except during the social programme in the sauna and some of the breaks. Videotapes made it possible to check what was said and how the participants really described things (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). In addition to the recording and field notes, the research materials consisted of post-camp reflective essays that four participants wrote.

The first author screened the materials to form an overview of the data by concentrating on the sections in which the participants make sense of entrepreneurship, academic work, and their own abilities. These sections were transcribed verbatim (the names of the participants were changed). In the first phase of the analysis, both authors read the transcriptions independently. Then, the second author made a first round of analysis guided by the research question. Attention was paid to sections in which either agreement or, alternatively, tensions, paradoxes, and ambiguity were detected when discussing entrepreneurship and academic work (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2015).

In order to illustrate the sensemaking during and after the camp, the second author took the initial role in writing vignettes based on the transcriptions complemented by the first author. The vignettes include both an ethnographic description and a more fine-grained analysis (Eriksson *et al.*, 2008). They help create a “holistic cultural portrait of the social group that incorporates both views of the actors in the group (emic) and the researcher's interpretation of views about human social life in a social science perspective (etic)” (Creswell, 1998, p. 60). This is similar to Van Maanen's (2011) impressionistic approach (also Eriksson *et al.*, 2008) in which only those periods considered most notable in terms of sensemaking are reconstructed while preserving “the chronological flow” (Miles and Huberman, 1994, p. 81). This gives the audience the opportunity to develop an understanding of the lived experience through the vignettes (Alexander, 2005), to evoke

Participant	Role in the camp	Background or field	Entrepreneurship experience
Hanna	Camp facilitator	Employed by the local entrepreneurs' association with extensive experience from working with schools on entrepreneurship education	No prior entrepreneurship experience
Kalle	Camp facilitator	Employed by the local student-led entrepreneurship society with extensive experience from coaching young entrepreneurs	Extensive experience of running a business
Timo	Camp facilitator	Employed by the local JA organisation with extensive experience from working with schools on entrepreneurship education	Extensive experience of running a business
Linda	Camp participant	Academic teacher in translation sciences (humanities)	No prior entrepreneurship experience
Peter	Camp participant	Academic teacher in biomedical sciences (medicine)	No prior entrepreneurship experience; experience in working in companies
Kati	Camp participant	Academic teacher in entrepreneurship (business school)	Experience of running a business
Nina	Camp participant	Academic teacher in psychology (social sciences)	No prior entrepreneurship experience
Lasse	Camp participant	Academic teacher in translation sciences (humanities)	No prior entrepreneurship experience
Mikko	Camp participant	Academic teacher in philosophy (social sciences)	No prior entrepreneurship experience
Katri	Camp participant	Academic teacher in educational sciences (education)	No prior entrepreneurship experience

**Table 1.**  
Participants in  
the study

in readers the feeling of being present in the situation (Van Maanen, 2011), and to become a co-analyst of the study (Erickson, 1986).

## Results

Next, short vignettes are presented to illustrate sensemaking, identity work, and reflection-in and -on-action (Hägg and Kurczewska, 2016) during and after the camp. The vignettes are presented in three themes that were identified in the analysis: *representation and legitimate script*, *conflict with the creative risk-taker*, and *appropriating meanings in individual stories*.

### *Theme: representation and legitimate script*

The introduction to the camp takes place in a large lecture room. The participants are provided with a picture of a clock face and asked to schedule three-minute appointments with one another in order to introduce themselves. Facilitators keep time and announce themes to be discussed in each appointment. One of the participants, Linda, and a facilitator, Kalle, discuss their most important life achievements.

Linda: Biggest achievement, I don't know . . . Let's say PhD; it's natural.

Kalle: Last summer, we tried climbing Mont Blanc; I didn't quite make it. My aim is Mount Everest. If somebody asks, "What's your Mount Everest?" I can respond "Mount Everest". (. . .) I'm currently seeking one greatest individual achievement; they make the best stories. What else do you have besides the PhD? Tell us something vaguer.

Linda: I've been a kind of leader in translation studies, inspired others, and developed them but it hasn't been my achievement alone; it's a collective achievement. We made it to the top five in a university competition for the most enterprising activities.

This vignette illustrates how academic achievements do not count in the entrepreneurial arena, as they are considered "too obvious" and "do not make good stories." Hence, Kalle suggests the importance of story-telling as an entrepreneurial skill (Martens *et al.*, 2007) as opposed to knowledge and skills obtained through an academic degree. He is not asking Linda to make analogies between a quest for a PhD and an enterprise, but to think of something else to push Linda to recognise resources, experiences, and learnings gained from other life arenas. Linda comes up with one collective, not individual, achievement. Still, the unclarity of the "legitimate script" (Frederiksen and Berglund, 2020, p. 281) leaves Linda doubtful if it constitutes what is expected from her.

Others also seek support for sensemaking. For example, during a short break, Katri, a participant, starts to discuss with Timo, one of the facilitators:

Katri: I've been thinking of this and if I've ever done anything like [entrepreneurial]; we've been making a textbook with our own risk, as nobody pays for it if . . . surely it's not an entrepreneurial activity . . .

Timo: Many teachers could try it. And if nothing comes out of it, it's creative work.

Katri: Yes, and you learn from it, you learn from the process of working on one's own work. I cannot see it in my bank account, but . . .

In this vignette, Katri is looking for analogies between her previous experience and being entrepreneurial. Timo supports her in thinking that writing a textbook may be a form of entrepreneurial creative work. Albeit first hesitant, Katri is quick to accept this interpretation and the discussion ends there.

*Theme: conflict with the creative risk-taker*

At the camp, the participants are offered ideas regarding entrepreneurship, but not all are accepted. For example, in one exercise, Timo, a facilitator, suggests that "in entrepreneurship, it's sometimes necessary to make decisions under uncertainty and with limited information," hence conceptualising entrepreneurship to include intuitive decision-making. Together with another facilitator, Hanna, they create a sense of urgency and facilitate an understanding that entrepreneurs do things on the go (Neck and Greene, 2011). The participants use Lego blocks to construct a house similar to a visual model presented to them. However, the teams do not know that some pieces are missing, and extra ones are included to complicate the task. The teams intensively focus on their own house, disregarding other teams. After the assignment, Timo and Hanna initiate a discussion on leadership and reactions when noticing that pieces were missing:

Peter: We operated within the deadline, following the timetable despite the result (. . .)

Kati: We certainly didn't think of looking around.

Nina: When you're given a task, we stay with the original task; we're not creative.

Peter: It's against the teaching situation. For example, in a chemistry class, you have some things on your table; you don't mix them, or it'll result in a safety risk.

Discussion continues and Timo suggests that sharing is now business-as-usual in entrepreneurship communities. Not all of the participants agree. Discussion about the purpose of the assignment ensues:

Peter: You [facilitators] don't have experience from the bio industry. There, you have this law of silence even in university–industry cooperation (. . .) It's a totally different world from what you described.

Hanna: In a large networking event, there was a big pharma company that's in your area, but they acknowledged the idea of the sharing economy. (. . .)

Nina: Was the idea of the exercise not to follow the original task rules?

Timo: You can decide yourself what to follow. I wanted to encourage you to look outside. If something's not said, it doesn't mean it's against the rules. (. . .) for example, Über has helped in some countries to change the laws. It's easier to beg for forgiveness than to ask permission. (. . .)

Hanna: Something old is destroyed so that something new can be created. Ones' own operating modes can be analysed in a different way. Let's continue.

These two vignettes illustrate a negotiation between facilitators and the participants about entrepreneurship and their work practices in academia. The facilitators produce fairly normative views of entrepreneurship and Peter challenges their ideas. Consequently, the facilitators acknowledge that there are differences between industries, but this alternative view is quickly downplayed.

Rules and deadlines are important practices in academic work and diverting from them is not always ideal. For example, even entrepreneurship courses do not expect students to modify the rules of assignments, and this may be even less welcome in other disciplines, such as chemistry. In the vignette, Über is an example of renegotiating or breaking the rules in entrepreneurship (Brenkert, 2009). The development of science could offer an analogy for entrepreneurship through creative destruction—new research that challenges the existing paradigm calls for the similar destruction of old knowledge (Tierney *et al.*, 2020)—but this analogy is not cultivated. Timo instead uses the famous quote, “it's easier to beg for forgiveness than to ask permission” from intrapreneurship literature (Hisrich, 1990, p. 221) to idealise behaviour where an individual acts upon their ideas irrespective of management.

The importance of rules comes in an exercise, where teams make a team SWOT. Linda, Lasse, and Mikko start to discuss their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats as a team:

Mikko: We're teachers and researchers; this could be a strength.

Lasse: Being analytical.

Mikko: Has any one of you been working outside the university?

Lasse: A long time ago.

Linda: We have tight connections outside; we're both translators.

Mikko: Are we too academic or too much of art scholars? Is it a strength or a weakness?

Lasse: It can be a strength, an incredible resource from where to draw . . . It's a weakness, if it's old-fashioned arts studies.

Mikko: Let's put it into the strengths; let's be bold here.

Linda: Somehow, being an academic can also be considered a weakness. We know how to follow the instructions; is it a weakness? We're set in our ways.

Lasse: Yes, obedience is a weakness.

Linda: I'll write “following the rules.”

Lasse: It's the flipside of being analytical. Opportunities? Are we able to create anything new?

Lasse: Being an academic involves coming up with new ideas, but implementing . . .

Mikko: It's enough that it works in theory.

Lasse: Because in entrepreneurship, practicing a case means running it every day.

In this vignette, the team discusses if being an academic, especially in the arts, is a strength or a weakness with regard to entrepreneurship. Being analytical as an academic is considered both a strength and a weakness. Thus, the previous task and discussion of building with the Lego blocks have produced a shared identity that academics follow instructions and are obedient. This *construction of obedience* may not be the most prevalent idea of academics in other contexts (see, e.g. [Kalfa et al., 2017](#)).

However, arts disciplines are also understood as a resource for new ideas and creative thinking, so the team is "bold enough" to classify it as a strength. However, obedience—the flipside of being an academic—is assigned as a weakness. Then the same team aims to discover more strengths:

Linda: How about creativity? Are we creative? I'm not sure about myself . . .

Lasse: What's being creative other than inventing? One could just write that "I'm creative," but it isn't enough.

Linda: Do we have creativity as a team?

Lasse: Good question, because this "speed of work" is more stuff for these manufacturing firms; are we missing that kind of wild throwing of ideas?

Linda: Is it a weakness if it has to do with obedience?

Lasse: And the question is, are we missing, in that Lego task as a whole, you can see that . . . threat. "Do we have creativity?"

(The team writes this question as a threat.)

In this vignette, the team discusses creativity in entrepreneurship. The participants negotiate whether "inventing new things" (linked to academic work) is a form of creativity. They end up resorting to the Lego exercise, the "speed of things" (in manufacturing, but not in academia), and their shared identity of being obedient, and then assign the lack of creativity as a threat. Thus, the Lego exercise and need for making fast decisions based on intuition are revisited to mark the divide between academic and business creativity.

Teachers can be expected to be experts in education. The purposeful vagueness adopted in the camp (see also [Penaluna et al., 2015](#)) prompts reactions from them. They are particularly keen to have and follow instructions asking the facilitators how much time they have and how they should go about with the exercises. Hence, they adopt a role of an obedient student. Following rules reflect behaviour that the teachers themselves may find desirable. They also give feedback to the facilitators when instructions are unclear or when they disapprove the chosen pedagogy.

#### *Theme: appropriating meanings in individual stories*

A month later, Nina, Lasse, Peter, and Mikko send in their reflective essays, where they continue reflecting on the entrepreneurial and academic domains. For example, Nina continues to contemplate who is an entrepreneur. She has read a thesis where the personality of an entrepreneur linked to the growth of the firm is analysed with the Big Five theory. By using personality theories, Nina utilises her own background in psychology in sensemaking. Before the camp, she had some ideas about a business based on her expertise.

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I liked that the camp did not focus on taxation planning or any other nitty-gritty, but it encouraged dreaming. Only dreaming can give birth to innovations because too much rational thinking and careful progress stop creativity. (...) I had thought of setting up a traditional psychotherapy reception, but after the camp, I started thinking of the entire education, social and health industry more broadly from an entrepreneurial perspective. (Nina)

Nina is motivated to think her own business, in the context of national social and health care reform, is expected to provide many opportunities for new business entries. The notes are informative of the expected content in an entrepreneurship course—taxation planning—which is replaced by “dreaming.” Following the camp, Nina claims an ability to perceive entrepreneurial opportunities in her field more broadly and not just in a customary way to her profession.

Both Lasse and Peter focus on finding analogues between the scientific process and the entrepreneurial process:

Developing a concrete business idea with the help of the lean canvas model clarified to me how similar the entrepreneurial opportunity development process is to the scientific research process. Narrowing the problem and defining the potential solutions, as well as defining the value of the opportunity to different customer segments, are problem-solving processes that necessitate creative idea development, analytical skills and information searching (Lasse).

Peter also relates the traditional research process to the “discovery” process. He identifies some “constructive” elements in it and sees how entrepreneurship analogously can include both of these processes. Peter considers how idea thinking—what, why, for whom, and how—could be usefully adopted in research and, for example, in thesis work: “I’ve been involved twice in business in which we aimed to answer these questions. Now, I’ve got additional experience why this needs to be gone through.” The idea development process model that [Wood and Mckinley \(2010\)](#) provided gives meaning to past experiences of acting in businesses.

Lasse, unlike Peter, does not have business experience. However, Lasse has identified a specific role and competencies for himself in the team idea generation. Most notably, it has clarified his understanding of himself “as a creator of entrepreneurial opportunities.” Peter also finds value in the exercises. Initially, he questioned the objective to motivate faculty to implement entrepreneurship at the university as it is not rewarded in career advancement (see also [Kalfa et al., 2017](#)). Since the camp, however, he has found, for example, that the camp methods are “surprisingly useful” in a variety of contexts, such as in university courses or when cooperating with business partners.

I’ve had a fairly sceptical view of this process, but after the camp, I understand the idea of pitching rather clearly. The goal is to present the idea briefly in order to get into further negotiations with the financier. In fact, there is no difference from job application in which the aim is to get the reader to read and be interested in one’s application amongst the many—possibly hundreds of—applications. (Peter)

Mikko begins his essay with a short narrative from the sauna during the camp. As he could not take a swim in the sea because of ice, he rolled instead in the snow (to get a similar effect to dipping in the cold water). Mikko understands his behaviour as perseverance in entrepreneurship: “In creating entrepreneurial opportunities, it’s necessary to persevere and be tough. I think this is my strength.” Mikko returns to the Lego exercise and the fact that the team did not think of cooperating with other teams:

My way of developing new ideas is often too isolated. (...) The camp taught me that this is not always the most productive way to go about things. My hurdle is often to want and aim at finishing everything and only then expose them to the public. (...) One of my weaknesses is to be too afraid of different regulations. (...) I won’t get rid of this fear quickly, but maybe I’ve learned to reduce it.

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A few years ago, I participated in an entrepreneurship course at a business school, where the idea "It's easier to beg for forgiveness than ask permission" was presented. At the time, the idea seemed offensive, but now, I've started to understand it. (Mikko)

Mikko identifies strengths and personal weaknesses in relation to entrepreneurship. He draws from previous entrepreneurship courses and explains how this knowledge starts to make sense to him now.

## Discussion

Our study has been contextualised in an entrepreneurial university (Etzkowitz, 2014; Foss and Gibson, 2015) and in the need to understand how teachers, encouraged to extend entrepreneurship across universities, engage in identity work and make sense of entrepreneurship. In order to answer our research question, "How do academic teachers engage in identity work and collective sensemaking of entrepreneurship in an entrepreneurship camp?" we have analysed a 24-h business idea development camp (Bager, 2011) for faculty members.

Theoretically, this study contributes to understanding entrepreneurship education as a context for identity work and sensemaking for academic teachers (e.g. Donnellon *et al.*, 2014; Hytti and Heinonen, 2013). Our findings show that, during the camp, the participants engaged in identity work by negotiating about whether they, as academics, have entrepreneurial capabilities, skills, and stories relevant to entrepreneurship (Brown, 2019; Alvesson and Robertson, 2016). Accordingly, we have presented our results in three themes inductively derived from the qualitative research materials: *representation and legitimate script*, *conflict with the creative risk-taker*, and *appropriating meanings in individual stories*. These themes represent the most notable tensions that facilitated the identity work of teachers (Frederiksen and Berglund, 2020). These themes are not exclusive, but instead, overlap in ways they depict the ideas and action related to entrepreneurship and academic work.

First, entrepreneurship education has been suggested as a place for individuals to develop self-narratives and test out different identities. Specifically, it is a place where individuals may engage in entrepreneurial identity construction through "re-storying," i.e. developing and maintaining identities (Harmeling, 2011). Our findings suggest that re-storying is strongly conditioned by interactions in the educational context. Our study demonstrates this in the interactions between academic participants and non-academic facilitators and the ways the participants draw cues as to what ideas and behaviour the facilitators appreciate. Hence, while individuals are free to reject offered ideas and identities (Wraae and Walmsley, 2020), they are never *per se* "free" to form and reshape their identities.

Second, whilst the participants identify some strengths, the academic abilities of being analytical and careful are mostly considered hindrances to being entrepreneurial. The facilitators strongly push these ideas; they try, in several occasions, to uncover something *new* from the participants. Thus, the identity work takes place in the interactions between participants and facilitators (Radu-Lefebvre *et al.*, 2021). The facilitators emphasise normatively that entrepreneurship involves sharing, the continuous exchange of ideas and resources, and speed of (intuitive) action. They actively guide the construction of particular interpretations of entrepreneurship. Thus, the participants are not pushed to search for analogies from their work as academic teachers and apply them to the entrepreneurial arena. Instead, the invitation is about understanding the entrepreneurial and academic identities as being separate (Karhunen *et al.*, 2017). Participants accept this, hence, the academic identity is constructed and reinforced as separate from entrepreneurial. In our interpretation, this is about *othering* (Schwalbe *et al.*, 2000) as "the process by which a dominant group defines into existence an inferior group, mobilizing categories, ideas, and behaviours about what marks

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people out as belonging to these categories” (Bruni *et al.*, 2004, p. 257). The assignment with the Lego blocks became a powerful experience, as it coloured the discussions with references to obedience in the team as a shared, relational experience of the experiential learning (Tomkins and Ulus, 2016).

Third, our study confirms that individuals are able to appropriate meanings to fit their own purpose (e.g. Hytti and Heinonen, 2013). However, this requires time. The team exercises underline sensemaking as a collective process. In contrast, in the individual reflection essays, sensemaking shifts into an individual process. In these reflections, the analogies between academic and entrepreneurial work are renegotiated to be closer to each other than during the camp. This also supports the conceptual ideas that Hägg and Kurczewska (2016) developed, that reflecting-in-experience is not easy for newcomers, but reflection-on-experience is necessary. We also found that academics benefit from conceptual tools—in our case, the framework from Wood and Mckinley (2010)—to make sense of the experience in order to allow reflection-on-experience.

In the essays, the participants engage in identity work (Sveningsson and Alvesson, 2003) by identifying particular role identities in the entrepreneurial teams (e.g. Lasse) or extending their view on entrepreneurial opportunities beyond the customary practices of their profession (e.g. Nina). They are also able to revisit their own prejudices against entrepreneurship prior to the training (e.g. Peter) or give meaning to past experiences from other entrepreneurship courses (e.g. Mikko) or to their own entrepreneurial experiences (e.g. Peter). Their reflection focuses on their own potential future selves as entrepreneurs, but also about making sense of entrepreneurship and, for example, seeing how the exercises associated can be applied in their academic work. This way, the participants assign entrepreneurship meaning that is accessible for them (Donnellon *et al.*, 2014; Hytti and Heinonen, 2013; Frederiksen and Berglund, 2020), thus enabling the construction of *sameness* with entrepreneurship.

We conclude that identity work is a highly emergent and dynamic process, but it can be supported by training. The practical implications of our study suggest that different kinds of events, including also trainings, are needed, allowing for sensemaking when introducing entrepreneurship in the university. Alternatively, the entrepreneurial university or entrepreneurship is only available to the dominant group and, as such, becomes marginalised (see also Katila *et al.*, 2021). Second, while the focus of our paper was less on analysing the practical implementation and pedagogy of the camp, we make note that using facilitators from the university together with external facilitators is important. If the facilitators are not familiar with university work, their ability to guide the discussion in productive ways, e.g. by suggesting not only differences, but also parallels between entrepreneurial and academic work, is limited and inhibits a more multifaceted understanding of entrepreneurship to be created. Third, especially in a multidisciplinary university, there is a need for a variety of pedagogies and contents in events to expose teachers to entrepreneurship from different perspectives in order to facilitate authenticity and relevance (see, e.g. Hytti and Heinonen, 2013; Frederiksen and Berglund, 2020). Finally, it might be necessary to develop new camp models (Bager, 2011) designed specifically for universities to allow co-creation of knowledge (Lepistö and Hytti, 2021).

## Conclusions

This paper provides several contributions to emerging research on entrepreneurship educators (Wraae *et al.*, 2022) focusing on teachers in non-business backgrounds as a distinctive group of educators (Penaluna *et al.*, 2015; Teerijoki and Murdock, 2014). Theoretically, this study contributes specifically to understanding entrepreneurship

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education as a context for identity work and sensemaking for academic teachers (e.g. [Donnellon et al., 2014](#); [Hytti and Heinonen, 2013](#)) where it takes place in social interaction between the participants and facilitators ([Radu-Lefebvre et al., 2021](#)). Our ethnographic approach adopted to study the entrepreneurship camp creates new understanding of the dynamics at play compared to, e.g. interview research ([Silverman, 2017](#)). Accordingly, our findings emphasise the need for universities to create room for curious teachers to allow sensemaking and constructing “sameness” with their profession and discipline in order to enable them to “become” entrepreneurship teachers as and if they wish.

Our study underlines the challenges involved in extending entrepreneurship education across all disciplines, especially via academic teachers in non-entrepreneurship disciplines (see also [Henry, 2020](#)). While this struggle has already been accepted in some European universities (e.g. [Penaluna et al., 2015](#)), more information is still needed on how sustainable this approach is and what can be achieved with this embedded approach ([Teerijoki and Murdock, 2014](#)).

This study has some limitations. The research materials were collected from only relatively short, albeit intensive, training with ten research participants. However, with the theoretical lenses of identity work and sense-making, our findings complement and add to the existing, yet scant, research regarding teachers as participants of entrepreneurship education ([Teerijoki and Murdock, 2014](#)). Furthermore, it has opened up some of the dynamics involved in identity work in education. In the future, longitudinal research is needed to understand identity work and sensemaking in the university context of diverse university actors and different stakeholders (e.g. [Siivonen et al., 2020](#)).

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Teachers' identity  
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