

At the end of 2020, the educational landscape in Flanders (Belgium) was altered by the introduction of entrepreneurial thinking in the final objectives ('eindtermen' in Dutch) of the first and second grade of secondary education. This has not been the first time entrepreneurial thinking was encouraged to be taught in schools, but this time encouragement to do so was far more explicit.

Facts

Since 2006 the European Union has stated that entrepreneurial endeavour is important for European citizens and in 2016, the Entrecomp: The Entrepreneurial Competence Framework, was created (www.ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/entrecomp). It is a framework in which the different skills needed to be considered 'entrepreneurial' are defined.

"It proposes a shared definition of entrepreneurship as a competence, to raise consensus among all stakeholders and to establish a bridge between the worlds of education and work".

Additionally, the entrepreneurial competence has been identified as one of the lifelong learning competences.

The framework uses the following definition of entrepreneurship: (first introduced by Danish Foundation for Entrepreneurship & Young Enterprise) (www.ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/entrecomp):

"Entrepreneurship is when you act upon opportunities and ideas and transform them into value for others. The value that is created can be financial, cultural, or social".

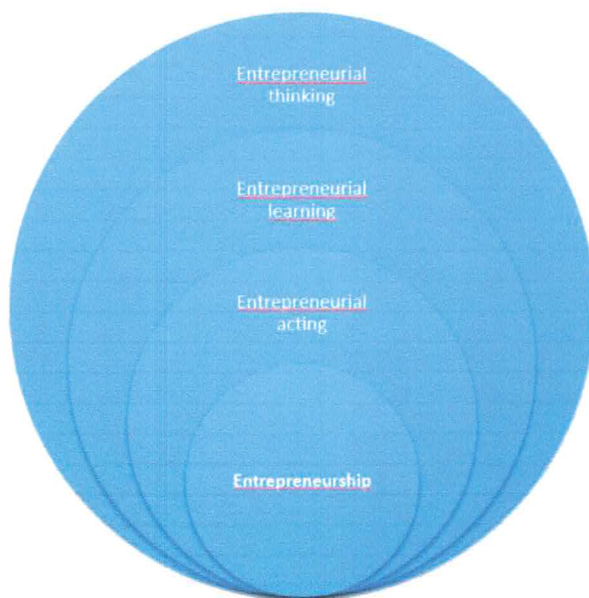
In 2010 there were 163 student-entrepreneurs identified in Flanders, in 2018 there were already 4.817 of them (data retrieved from www.vlaio.be). Entrepreneurship is clearly something young people value. For the last 3 years, the Flemish government has supported entrepreneurship among students by allowing entrepreneurial ecosystems to exist: an entrepreneurial environment was created between local organizations, the students and the universities. In addition, the government allows students to start their business with administrative facilitations, helping them to ease their start.

Are entrepreneurial thinking and entrepreneurship then the same or just linked? Although the European framework and the government's intentions are clear, it is not always clear for schools and higher education institutions how to build an entrepreneurial thinking environment inside their organization. That is mainly based on a few mental blocks/bricks that are perceived as major problems. As we are wondering whether to build an entrepreneurial environment, let's use the analogy of the brick to represent these issues. Besides the bricks, a wall also needs mortar to withstand all weather circumstances. So let's have a closer look at four common bricks and the mortar that builds the wall of entrepreneurial thinking.

Bricks & mortar

Brick #1: What does it mean to weave entrepreneurship into my teaching subject or in my organization?

Mortar #1: First of all, you - teacher or school leader- are not supposed to weave



entrepreneurship into your subject, or introduce entrepreneurship into your organization. Entrepreneurship is just one possible outcome of entrepreneurial thinking, as a result of acting, learning and thinking in an entrepreneurial way. Even entrepreneurial acting is not necessarily equal to entrepreneurship. There are many intrapreneurs, acting in an entrepreneurial way inside the organization they work for,

and not being an entrepreneur for themselves.

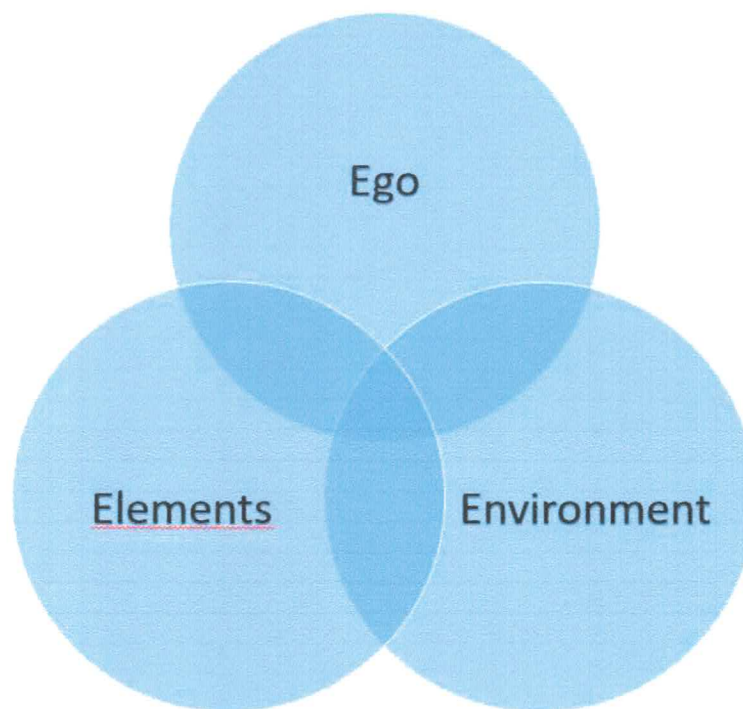
What the authorities ask you to introduce in your subject or to get your colleagues acquainted with is entrepreneurial thinking.

Is there a difference between entrepreneurship and entrepreneurial thinking then? As Bacigalupo et al. state (<https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/publication/eur-scientific-and-technical-research-reports/entrecomp-entrepreneurship-competence-framework>)

“Entrepreneurial Thinking is not necessarily bound to entrepreneurs (to be); it is an essential skill for ‘strengthening human capital, employability and competitiveness’”.

Entrepreneurial Thinking is about attitude and beliefs, and as such it is an essential skill to be taught if we want more autonomous thinking and responsible citizens in our future societies.

If entrepreneurial thinking is not equal to entrepreneurship, let's then have a look at what entrepreneurial thinking really means. It exists at the intersection between the Ego, the Environment and the Elements.



C.Chisu – 3 E Model (2020)

The Ego is the awareness, the consciousness, our mental and affective skills. The Elements are different processes accumulated through experience, passion and work. The Environment is the first element to trigger the Ego in order to activate entrepreneurial thinking and is as such the fundamental reason for doing things. Without Environment, no triggering of the mind towards solutions, and no triggering towards action when the solution is developed.

Brick #2: Teachers and school leaders don't want to put pressure on all students to become entrepreneurs.

Mortar #2: As entrepreneurship is just one possible outcome of entrepreneurial thinking, it is important to investigate what the different parts of entrepreneurial thinking are.

In the Ego, quite a few mental and affective skills are present; some of them are consciously taught in different subjects, others aren't. What is important here, is to teach these skills so that the learner (be it a young or less young one) is encouraged to expand her mind.

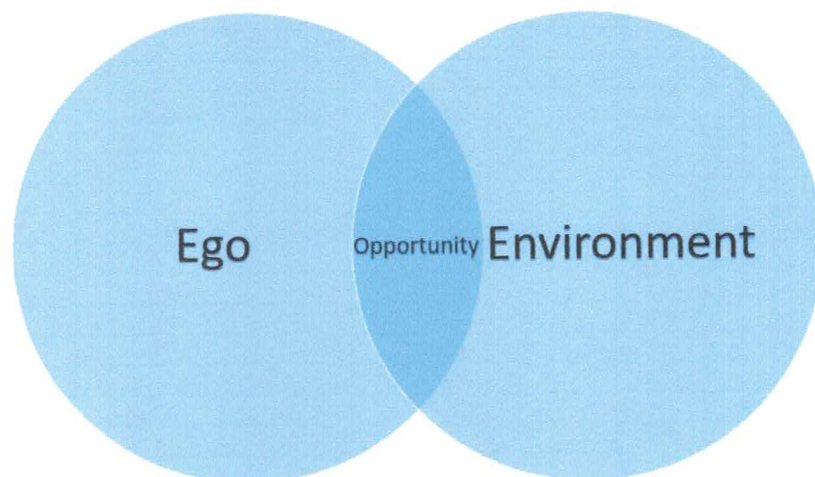
'A mind, once stretched by a new idea (and in this case by a new skill), never regains its original dimensions' (Oliver Wendell Holmes)

So, are you putting pressure on the students to become entrepreneurs by teaching entrepreneurial thinking? Absolutely not! It might of course occur that some of your students get the hang of it ... but that's just collateral damage in a way.

And are you, as a school leader, pushing your colleagues to be entrepreneurs? Not at all, at worst, some colleagues become intrapreneurs, taking more initiative than others inside your organization. And isn't that exactly what you would hope for?

Brick #3: Identifying opportunities is part of entrepreneurship (entrepreneurial thinking) and it remains a mystery how it is done. Only successful entrepreneurs were able to identify the 'gap in the market' as an opportunity.

Mortar #3: Here is some good news: identifying opportunities is not mysterious at all. It is what our Ego interprets to be the triggering element from the Environment, called a problem. Instead of seeing the problem as such, our developed mental and affective skills make us interpret the problem as an opportunity we can think about, develop a solution for and jump into action on. The more we develop these mental and affective skills (present in the Ego), the more we will see opportunities instead of problems.

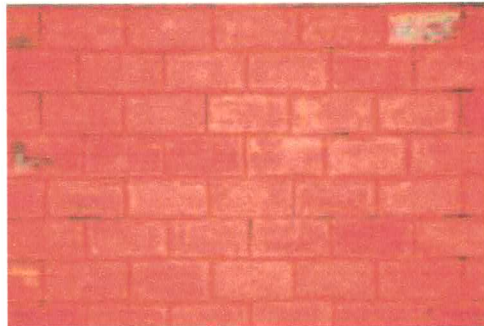


There is even more good news: if identifying opportunities can be learned, it means it can be taught! And that then means everyone can learn it, no matter what age, background, education or anything else you have (or don't have). It also means any teacher or school leader can learn this thinking style and pass it on to someone else.

Brick #4: Alright, I will teach entrepreneurial thinking. But how will I be able to evaluate students who already have their business?

Mortar #4: As you go through the different skills that constitute the Ego in more detail, you will come to the conclusion that it is all a question of chunking the big skill into partial skills. Again, you're not required to evaluate entrepreneurship, rather entrepreneurial thinking. Now you know the difference, you understand you *can* evaluate it!

And if you are a school leader who is supposed to introduce entrepreneurial thinking into her organization, you will certainly find your ways to evaluate (if necessary) the entrepreneurial endeavours of your colleagues.



 21st century skills

Entrepreneurial thinking synthesizes the most important skills the World Economic Forum has identified as the top 10 skills employers will need from their employees in the coming years: critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration, ... It is a form of complex thinking constituted by three big domains, namely the learning person's Ego, the processes the learner already knows or will learn (Elements) and the Environment the learner evolves in.

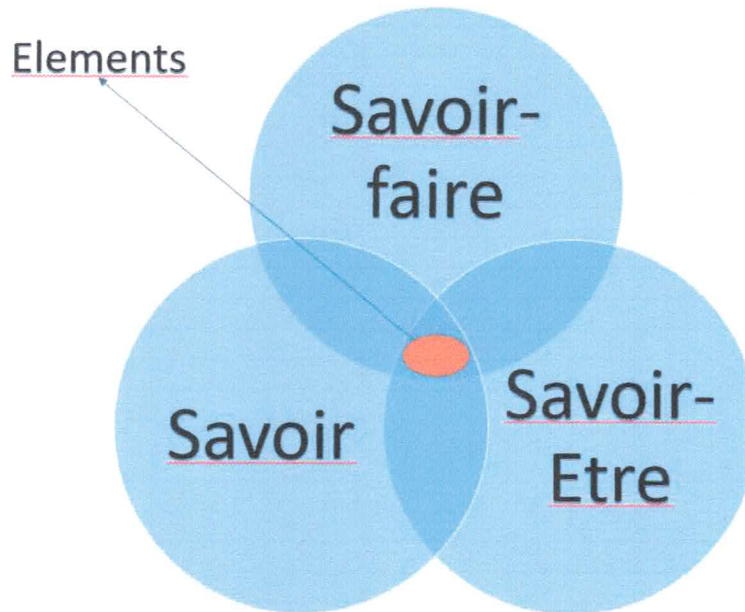
Ego



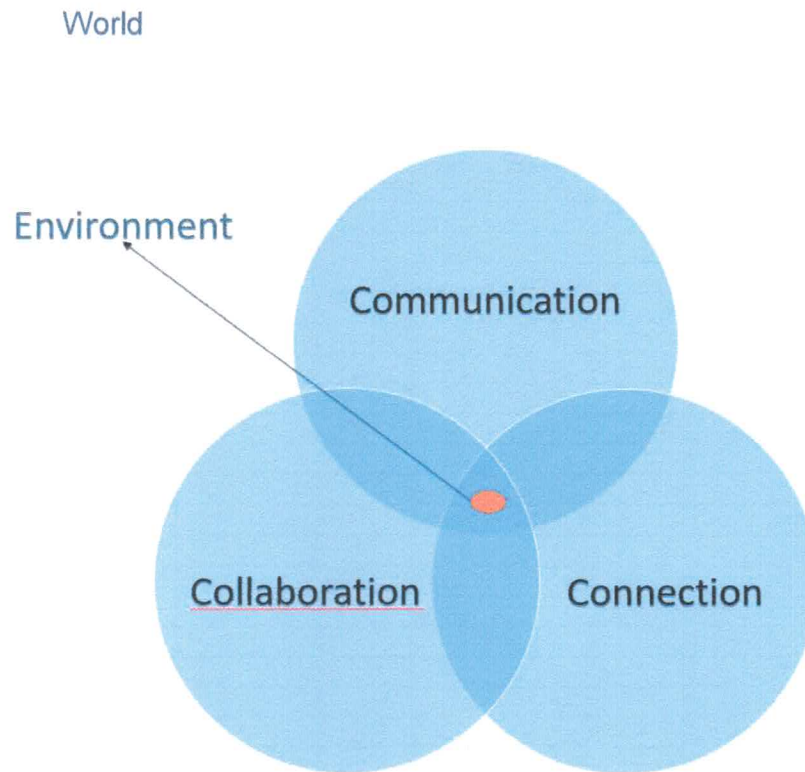
The Ego of the Entrepreneurial Thinker is made of different thinking and affective skills. *Critical Thinking, Effectuation* (S. Sarasvathy), *Risk-taking and Curiosity* can be looked upon as merely thinking skills, where *Perseverance or Grit* (A. Duckworth), *Intuition, Hope* (in the French sense of 'espérance', not 'espoir'), *tolerance for Ambiguity and Consciousness* can be understood as affective skills. *Creativity* is

understood as being part of both thinking and affective skills (as detailed by E.P. Torrance).

Elements



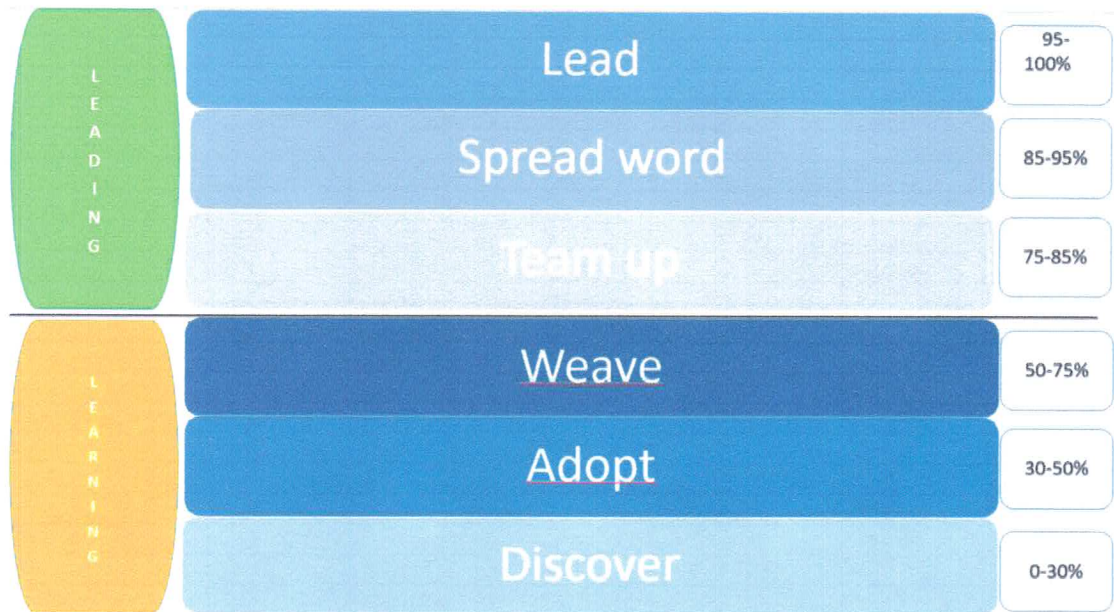
I deliberately leave the Elements model in French, because I find it elegantly describes what entrepreneurial thinking is in my definition: Elements is where Savoir (knowledge), Savoir-faire (expertise) and Savoir-être (know-how to be) come together. An entrepreneurial mind relies on these three process steps. The knowledge stands for the passion, the interest an entrepreneurial thinker has, which is frequently the basis for the expertise she has. They know how to do what they know. The know-how to be is the foundation on which everything within the process is built on. Although 'purpose' or 'design' of the entrepreneurial thinking could be thought of as part of the Ego as well, I prefer to introduce it here, as some entrepreneurial thinkers start with this part of the model in their thinking and doing.



The Environment is the reason of existence of entrepreneurial thinking AND action. It consists of interaction with that outside world through Communication, Connection (S. Le Dorner) and Collaboration. All three skills are to be further deepened in order to understand how they contribute to entrepreneurial thinking.

In the main model, there are also intersections: one between the Ego and the Elements – creative problem solving (Creative Problem Solving Thinking Skills Model by Puccio, Murdock & Mance) happens when the learner's self meets process; another intersection happens when the Elements meet the Environment through action as also between the Environment and the Ego. Without this intersection, the entrepreneurial thinker would not even have a 'problem' to chew on (recognised as an opportunity by entrepreneurial thinkers).

Now, at this point, let me introduce the Ladder of Capability in Entrepreneurial Thinking.



C.Chisu – Ladder of Capability in Entrepreneurial Thinking (2020)

It is built on two parts: the first one is about learning how to master entrepreneurial thinking yourself and the second one is on mastering how to lead others to master entrepreneurial thinking.

In the learning part, the first step is to discover what entrepreneurial thinking is, which are the different thinking and affective elements playing together in order to come to this complex thinking and learn more about it. You will realize it is not as new as you might think. You have already applied some of the elements in your current teaching, you weren't just aware of it. Thanks to this new awareness, you will be able to use it more deliberately and weave it into your teaching subject more. By the end of this step you will have achieved a level of 30% of mastering entrepreneurial thinking.

The next step is a bit more engaging, you might actually want to at least adopt some aspects of entrepreneurial thinking if not all. You also start enjoying the new way of

thinking, and you see some advantages not only for your students, but likely also for you in your own life.

Your mastery
will reach
ladder of



One step
respond to the

of entrepreneurial thinking
between 30-50% on the
capability.

further and you are able to
administration's

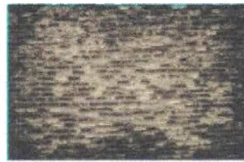
expectations (if you would have to respond to them), weaving entrepreneurial thinking into your teaching subject. You are able to invent exercises, turn your lessons around and make your teaching more experiential. You enjoy yourself and are able to entertain your students while they are learning AND your subject AND entrepreneurial thinking. Depending on the subject you teach, it will be easier or harder to integrate either one or another form of thinking, or all entrepreneurial thinking. The good news is that it is feasible.

Of course, you might have to be more inventive for one kind of thinking and have no effort whatsoever to make for other kinds of thinking. You will reach between 60-75% of mastery in entrepreneurial thinking, which is good enough to teach comfortably.

The more you will train yourself by looking for opportunities to challenge yourself or to find new opportunities to weave entrepreneurial thinking in your daily subject, the more you will feel comfortable and savvy at entrepreneurial thinking.

Now let's make the leap to the second part of the model, where you help colleagues in your own environment, in another environment, or even at higher departmental levels to master entrepreneurial thinking.

The first step you take is to team up with teachers within your own school, or to collaborate with teachers in other schools, through entrepreneurial projects. These can be 'enterprises' (as a very classical example of entrepreneurial thinking) or other, more innovative projects, targeting entrepreneurial thinking as a whole or the separate elements composing this complex form of thinking. Result? You master 75-85% of entrepreneurial thinking.



The next step in this part of the model is to spread the word by mentoring colleagues, helping them understand and mastering entrepreneurial thinking as well. You might do this by having informal conversations with them during the breaks, or mentoring them to weave entrepreneurial thinking in their subject as well by helping them to invent new exercises for their subject. You feel confident as you will know what your colleagues are going through, as you have been there before yourself. You will have your own stories to share and will be able to apply the concepts to new situations. As a result of that, you will master entrepreneurial thinking to a degree of 85-95%.

Finally, in order to master the full 100% of entrepreneurial thinking, you could take the lead in entrepreneurial thinking (and be an entrepreneurial thinker yourself) by organising conferences or exchanges on entrepreneurial thinking, or by creating other projects on entrepreneurial thinking. At this point you will expand your entrepreneurial thinking by entering the world of colleagues, maybe even civil servants, collaborators at the Ministry of Education; or parents or ... or ... who are not as savvy as you are (yet). As an ambassador of entrepreneurial thinking the sky is the limit. You start developing projects on your own and beyond your personal

teaching subject or your own organization. You feel very confident, as you are considered to be an expert by others who haven't been through the different steps (yet).

Conclusion

Entrepreneurial Thinking can be learned and therefore can be taught. Entrepreneurial Thinking is not necessarily leading the learner towards entrepreneurship, but strengthening the learner's thinking abilities, skills and beliefs in interaction with oneself and the environment, based on known processes.

Everyone can learn entrepreneurial thinking and teachers or school leaders are no exceptions to this. You can (easily) be trained to apply entrepreneurial thinking in your daily professional lives.

To learn more about the 3 days program **Weaving Entrepreneurial Thinking**, book a training or have Carine speak at your conference or event, email Carinechisu@gmail.com



About the author

Carine Chisu is an experienced international adult trainer with Master degrees in Romance languages, Creativity & Change leadership, Tourism Management, IT resource management and an International MBA in General Management. She is also holder of an academic teaching degree.

Her professional journey started in adult education and the passion for learning has never left her since. She held team leading positions in the private and academic sectors, and had experience as an executive search consultant. Since 2008 she has accompanied SME's and Higher Education Institutions in change and innovation, through her practice in coaching, facilitation and training.

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