Inspirational Tales: Propagating the entrepreneurial narrative amongst children.

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ABSTRACT.

Many entrepreneurial narratives act as *inspirational tales,* propagating *valued stories* at an ideological and mythological level. By participating in them we expose others to the inspirational power of the narrative and encourage the process of emulation. Potential outcomes include the perpetuation and regeneration of core ideological elements. Exposure to narrative is a process of *social construction* and *re-construction* that begins in childhood. Yet, entrepreneurship is essentially an adult paradigm. Consequentially, children may be channeled into individual occupations whereby few emerge as entrepreneurs. Unless one is exposed to the power of the entrepreneurial narrative, as a result of *familial fables*, or by being raised in an *entrepreneurial family* then by the time one makes a choice to pursue an entrepreneurial career path - life styles and alternative career paths are already established. The *entrepreneurial narrative* thus eludes the children. This is obviously detrimental to both society and the individual. This paper describes action-based research to address the problem.

INTRODUCTION.

This paper evolved from an appreciation of the *entrepreneurial narrative* as a common theme underlying many papers presented at the 2001 Babson Conference. The finale of this thematic stance was the paper presented by Meeks, Neck and Meyer (2001) which stimulated intense debate about the entrepreneurial narrative. It is fitting the conference concluded with the principle topic of discussion being story-telling *per se.* There is also a growing appreciation of the link between entrepreneurship and the ability to tell stories. Indeed, many successful entrepreneurs are also fabled raconteurs. Recently, Anita Roddick (2000:4) stressed that every entrepreneur is a *"great storyteller"*. Entrepreneurs may perpetuate stories but storytelling is but one feature of narrativity.

This paper is an exploration of story telling and entrepreneurial narratives setting into context an appreciation of the power and influence of this narrative as an inspirational tale. It builds upon McClelland's (1961) seminal *"tales of achievement"* as *"N-ach"*, and explores the phenomenon of the *entrepreneurial narrative* and the *familial fable* in relation to children. Many families have such stories about a relative cast in the role model of the fabled heroic entrepreneur. Research by Storey (1994) indicated that such children are ten times more likely to pursue an entrepreneurial career path than children not exposed to such influences. Contemporary research by Schindehutte, Morris and Brennan (2001) relating to the *entrepreneurial family* confirms this. These privileged children absorb the values propagated within the entrepreneurial family unit, and can be regarded as being *entropegenic* in the same way the criminal family is *criminogenic*. This has important societal implications because the former is an obvious counterfoil to the

latter. Storytelling is a traditional method of passing on values. However, as a method of storytelling such fables have their limitations, because the entrepreneurial narrative as it exists is almost exclusively an adult phenomenon, often not encountered in childhood outwith the family context. It is evident that the *entrepreneurial construct* is a serious one. For instance there is an obvious dearth of children's stories specifically written to expose them to the power of entrepreneurship. Also Smith and Anderson (2001) note the dearth of *entrepreneur jokes*. This may explain why entrepreneurship, despite being a multi-faceted boundary spanning activity, is seldom a serious career choice for children.

This paper examines the impact of the entrepreneurial narrative considering alternative ways to propagate it effectively. An underlying theme of this paper is the effect of semiotic and linguistic mechanisms on our understanding of the entrepreneurial construct. Two research questions are explored, namely (1) *What effect do familial fables learned in childhood have upon future entrepreneurial actions*?; and (2) *Can such fables be replicated within an alternative mechanism for propagating the entrepreneurial paradigm amongst children who lack a family entrepreneurial role model to emulate* ?

The research follows three strands. (1) A literature review exploring the construction of the entrepreneurial narrative by comparing and contrasting the academically and fictionally constructed entrepreneur, enabling specific components to be unpicked and developed into themes. (2) An exploration of the content of the actual familial fables of a number of entrepreneurs interviewed specifically to examine the first research question. (3) To address the second research question an exploration was made of children's stories. Thereafter, using the knowledge gained from this exploration and also the common themes identified in the literature review process, the author wrote a children's storybook entitled *Ernie the Entrepreneur* based upon a fictional entrepreneurial hero, to introduce primary school children to the complex concept of the entrepreneur. Using *Action Research* the story was then presented to children, to measure the effects it had upon their entrepreneurial awareness. This inspired the creation of another alternative narrative entitled *Elise* about a female entrepreneur.

The storytelling element allowed research data to be collected, and in particular - (1) An exploration of the depth of understanding or pervasion of the enterprise culture within children aged 7-11. (2) The impact of the story upon the children. (3) Establish whether they view the story as true life and a credible reflection of reality. (4) Explore any obvious effects it has upon them. (5) Assess how they respond to the story e.g. do they see themselves as a future entrepreneur? (6) Test if the story is an effective teaching aid in raising entrepreneurial awareness. (7) Allow a comparison between the familial fables of individual entrepreneurs and the stories of Ernie and Elise. (8) Highlight whether any other interesting research issues are raised? The main thrust of the research explores the effectiveness of a new mechanism for propagating the entrepreneurial narrative amongst children who lack a familial entrepreneurial role model to emulate.

1. EXPLORING THE CONSTRUCTION OF ENTREPRENERIAL NARRATIVES

The first strand of this paper is a literature review exploring the construction of the entrepreneurial narrative by comparing and contrasting the academically and fictionally constructed entrepreneur, enabling specific components to be unpicked and developed into themes.

1.1. The Academically Constructed Entrepreneur

The academically constructed entrepreneur despite several decades of intensive research remains an elusive character that reflects what Abercrombie *et al* (1980) refer to as the *Dominant Ideology Thesis*. The dominant paradigm of the classic entrepreneur figure remains that of Weber's (1904) heroic *parvenu* figure, although the entrepreneur as a villain is an accepted counter paradigm. To condense the extensive body of research literature on the subject the academically constructed entrepreneur, mirroring reality is statistically that of a male, middle class person from a professional or managerial background and likely to begin an entrepreneurial career path in their 30's to 40's. This alternative entrepreneurial paradigm was most recently reconstructed in a report entitled *"fear of flying"* commissioned by the Abbey National and debunks the myth of the parvenu. Since empirical research suggests that children are influenced by culture and gender specific role models, it is unlikely that the amorphous body of aging professional male entrepreneurs, will inspire many children (particularly female and under achieving children) to emulate them. Biddulph (1998) in questioning the macho structure of manhood, discusses five central precepts of manhood, namely (1) The notion of the self-made man; (2) Action; (3) Competitiveness; (4) The quest for approval [legitimacy]; and (5) Hard Work. Is it mere coincidence that these precepts are also central to the entrepreneurial paradigm? The male entrepreneurs can be macho and thus entrepreneurial theory must recognize the influence of manhood. To inspire children it may perhaps be necessary to present them with gender and age specific role models.

The literature specifically pertaining to narrative in relation to entrepreneurship is minimal. This is perhaps surprising given the association of the *spirit of enterprise* with such works as "*Self-Help*" by Samuel Smiles (1958) and the fictional works of Horatio Alger. It is also embedded in the writings of Benjamin Franklin. Indeed, Smiles (1958:351) was influenced by Franklin's writings and in particular how a good example of enterprise "*propagates itself through future generations in all lands*". McCLelland (1961) who posited his seminal "*tales of achievement*" continued the theme, exhorting people towards entrepreneurial action. Brockhaus (1987) identified the existence of *Entrepreneurial Folklore* and Covey (1989) studied the literature on success over two centuries emphasizing the importance of the "*character ethic*". His work is extremely important in relation to the entrepreneurial narrative because it is perhaps this dominant character ethic that makes the classic entrepreneurial narrative so popular in the eyes of the public. Having nothing makes values important and builds character. Character types are formed in childhood and remain fairly stable throughout one's lifetime. Thus it is evident that in seeking to propagate the entrepreneurial narrative one must follow Covey's advice and seek to project inherent values and character traits. Steyaert and Bouwen (1997) in their paper "*Telling stories of entrepreneurship*" identified the importance of the storytelling process. Nicolson (2001) argues that sense-making tools, like myth construction are rarely applied to entrepreneurship despite the role of

mythology in the construction of social reality. She identified various repetitive themes in the narratives relating to entrepreneurs in newspapers. Thus it can be seen that narrative is an emerging theme in entrepreneurship. The entrepreneurial construct is composed of two particularly strong complimentary sub-narratives, namely (1) Success and (2) Morality. These pervasive and recurring themes have become embedded in the texts. Other related narratives are the *Entrepreneurial Dream*, *The American Dream* and the *Gangster Dream* - all of which contain elements of the success and morality tales.

As a result of a literature review of classic entrepreneurial narratives, for example Casson's (1982) Jack Brash, combined with readings from the biographical life stories of entrepreneurs common themes were identified and extrapolated as demonstrable components of the narrative. Namely - The entrepreneurial child prodigy figure; The classical narrative of the poor boy made good; The heroic entrepreneur; The villainous entrepreneur; The entrepreneur as an outsider; The entrepreneur legitimized; The entrepreneur castigated; The criminal entrepreneur; The invisible entrepreneur; The socially conscious entrepreneur. Three biographies that contain the themes are those of Tony O'Reilly (Fallon 1994); Kjell Inge Rokke (Gibbs 2001) and Sir Richard Branson (Jackson 1994). These themes are propagated with frequency suggesting the existence of a formulaic structure to the entrepreneurial narrative. Variations of these themes are also replicated in newspaper articles, media material and fictional novels. See table 1 below.

1.2. The Fictionally Constructed Entrepreneur

It is possible to establish the continuation of the themes posited above by an examination of the entrepreneur in fiction. The fictional entrepreneur is an even more skewed construct than its academically constructed sibling because he is generally portrayed in a historical, romanticised context. Notwithstanding this fiction serves a useful purpose for propagating the entrepreneurial ideology and has been used to good effect in entrepreneurship texts – the classic example being Casson's (1982) fictional hero *Jack Brash*. Fiction is useful for explaining difficult concepts without fear of libel. It is also often one of the first forms of narrative encountered by children and may inspire them and thus influence their future life choices. It is possible that a child may encounter the entrepreneur for the first time in fiction.

The formulaic themes identified in the previous section combine to form a compelling story. Certain social constructs make more interesting subjects for storytellers than others. Entrepreneurs, as heroes or villains make compelling characters/genres for storytellers. Entrepreneurs must conform to the basic tenets of a good story i.e. the entrepreneur must be virtuous – the criminal villainous, and the story must have a moral or a purpose. Thus the virtuous entrepreneur having struggled to achieve legitimacy receives a knighthood, becomes a philanthropist and endows the less enterprising amongst us with an institute of learning. However, since many entrepreneurs may genuinely have a fatal flaw in their basic human characteristics, or merely because as readers we crave alternative endings, the irreverent entrepreneur must receive hubristic payback. The entrepreneur who has dared to be Godlike and failed has only one way to

fall - downwards. Perhaps the years of marginality and childhood privation have left a legacy of social coldness on the adult persona, or perhaps he merely dreamed a dream too far and thus overreached himself. In the alternative ending the poor boy despite having made good may variously - lose his fortune and live in penury; die of unrequited love; be exposed to treachery or chicanery from trusted colleagues; or simply go insane.

To test for the presence of the common entrepreneurial themes, four fictional entrepreneurial narratives were chosen as examples covering a range of literature types [1] namely - Millhouser (1999) "*Martin Dressler: The Tale of an American Dreamer*"; Caldwell (1972) "*Captains and the Kings*"; Fast (1983) "*Max Britsky*"; and Broat (1982), "*The Entrepreneur*". These novels were subjected to a content analysis for story lines conforming to the themes identified in table 1. The results are detailed in table 2 below.

The fictional entrepreneurs appear to conform to the formulaic themes identified in table 1. To be accepted as an entrepreneurial narrative, it would appear that the material contained within the story must conform to the formula. It is difficult to decipher whether this aspect is true of all stories or is it merely a manifestation of the circularity of reinforcement of narrative by repetition of stories? It is thus common to begin an entrepreneurial narrative with examples of poverty and marginality heroically overcome in childhood. We expect a fairy tale to begin with a line such as "*Once upon a time*" and our *entrepreneur stories* to begin in a familiar format. It is significant that these narratives also read like fairy tales. We are also socially programmed to expect the tale to end with the hero either being accepted or rejected. After all a story must have a beginning a purpose and an end. The entrepreneur in fiction is not allowed to pass sublimely into old age or oblivion, as do real life entrepreneurs. Yet these tragic figures are hardly likely to inspire children to emulate them. With the exception of Martin Dressler they provide little evidence of the influence of familial fable as principle motivator. This role traditionally goes to a streetwise male entrepreneurial role model.

2: THE FAMILIAL FABLE AS AN INSPIRATIONAL TALE.

A *familial fable* is a eulogistic narrative relating to the exploits of a specific named individual acting in the manner of a parable embodying the themes of success and morality to inspire other family members to emulate them as role models personified. The purpose of the second strand of this paper is to discover the content of actual familial fables and to explore the research question – "What effect do familial fables learned in childhood have upon future entrepreneurial actions". To facilitate this the author interviewed four entrepreneurs and four small businessmen. The entrepreneurs were regarded as such, because when operating they had more than one business venture ongoing, whereas the small businessmen had only one venture ongoing. They were interviewed in a semi-structured manner, being asked what had inspired them to go into business. Their verbal responses were recorded and subjected to a content analysis. Interestingly, it was found that their entry into business was facilitated by three mechanisms – namely (1) Familial Fables (F.F); (2) External Mentor (E.M) and (3) Benevolent External Mentor (B.E.M). The following table, table 3, serves to document

their personal history and to classify them into these basic inspirational typologies. In the table, E 1-4 refer to entrepreneurs and SB 1-4 refers to small businessmen.

Two of the entrepreneurs and one of the small businessmen were inspired by exposure to familial fables. Two of the entrepreneurs, who had no prior exposure to business were instead influenced by a network of external mentor figures. This mirrors the findings in the fiction section above. In relation to the small businessmen, two were practically gifted their businesses by benevolent mentor figures. These mentors appear to have acted so because they had no suitable offspring who could perpetuate their business and were thus prevented from perpetuating familial fable. Instead they chose to propagate their life work in what can only be described as a process of *benevolent entrepreneurial transference*. It appears to be a *fairy tale* manifestation of propagating frustrated familial fables. The external mentor figures also generated fables, which were perpetuated by the recipients of their benevolence as opposed to within their immediate family.

At another level of analysis the originators of the familial fables were all charismatic, enterprising individuals who generated stories in abundance. These stories frequently pertain to stories of success in the face of adversity and embody the twin themes of success and morality. They were inspirational at two levels, having (1) acted as role models and (2) acted as dispensers of practical business advice. This advice was packaged in the manner of moralistic "*couthy, pithy wisdom*" or sensible folklore. Examples of the advice include "*They don't shoot you if you go bust*"; "*Dinnae be a thief, but take your profit*", "*Make a profit, everyone expects it*". They inspired others by virtue of their basic honesty, character; kindness and by propagating the work ethic by personal example. The fables are replete with examples of stubborn pride, of hardship faced in the early years e.g. searching jacket pockets for money to pay bills on time, of facing hunger rather than create the impression they could not pay a bill, of overcoming financial losses. They are tales of morality and success. Interestingly, the advice dispensed by the external mentor figures also mirrors the "*couthy*" advice provided by the propagators of familial fables. Their nuggets of advice are reminiscent of classical parables or proverbs.

The strongest example of the familial fable in action relates to E1. Having been raised on stories of familial fables he too passed them on to his sons and will undoubtedly have propagated a few stories of his own endevours in business. However, self-deprecation appears to have prevented him from narrating them. Perhaps it is too early in the cycle of story telling for these stories to be propagated. Also E4 generates stories aplenty of his trading prowess and is affectionately known as "*Arfur*", because he is a proverbial Arthur Daley figure. The most significant inference to be drawn from this section is that the decision of the respondents to enter business was influenced by exposure to familial fables or other mentor figures. The power of the familial fable lies in its ability to inspire. It became apparent that the essence of the familial fable could be replicated in the format of fictional narratives.

3: CONSTRUCTING INSPIRATIONAL TALES.

The purpose of this strand of the paper is to address the second research issue – namely, "Can such fables be replicated within an alternative mechanism for propagating the entrepreneurial paradigm amongst children who lack a family entrepreneurial role model to emulate". This necessitated a study of the role of story telling in inspiring children. The construction of stories for children to demonstrate salient academic points is not a new phenomenon e.g. Callahan and Elliott (1996) asked students to write stories for children to simplify their argument, without recourse to excessive written explanation.

3.1: Inspiring Children Trough Story Telling

Piaget (1952) shaped our understanding of the thought processes of children. Children search for reason and frequently ask questions related to causality and justification. This is important in relation to the formation of individual entrepreneurial constructs because children generally do not encounter it during their formative years and consequentially never ask the important how and why questions. There may be benefits in stimulating such questions at an earlier age and encourage children to think about the schematic role of the entrepreneur in society. Nutbrown (1994:11-13) discusses the role of schemas (repeatable patterns of behaviour, speech, representation and thought) in the education and socialization of children. Many children are never exposed to the entrepreneurial narrative *per se*, and thus never develop an appropriate schema relating to the entrepreneur. The concept may elude them. Storytelling is of vital importance in expanding the intellect of children exposing them to ideology and values. Storytelling traverses all cultures and is a venerated activity, whereby the ability to tell stories may enhance one's stock of social capital. Nutbrown (1994:99) remarks on the role of story telling in passing on the history and values of a people, using pattern, repetition and information intended to equip the listener with guidance for life. She discusses story telling in relation to Pueblo Indian culture stressing its symbolic function as a method of propagating and perpetuating culture. Clay models depict storytellers with their mouths wide open, surrounded by children.

Nutbrown (1994:98-9) acknowledges that traditional stories arise from real-life experiences that listeners relate to. In modern society books are the most common method of propagating and perpetuating stories. Yet, as Clark (1997:55) notes, children become interested in information prior to exposure to books. Meek (1988) stresses that books contain more than words, having two or more stories, different layers of text, illustration, with the story being continued in the illustrations. Books offer an excellent medium for propagating the entrepreneurial narrative. It is generally regarded that there are two basic types of narrative, the progressive and the regressive. We appear to be socially programmed to mistrust the progressive narrative as being too good to be true. The classical entrepreneurial *rags to riches narrative* is a prime example of a progressive narrative regarded as being too good to be true. Given the identified lack of narratives for children specifically relating to entrepreneurs and a desire to create alternative narratives about entrepreneurs the author decided to redress the imbalance by writing them himself.

Having identified children's stories as a feasible mechanism for propagating alternative entrepreneurial paradigms amongst children it was necessary to explore

Children's books as a genre, to avoid obvious pitfalls. The task of constructing narratives for children incorporating the ideology of entrepreneurship was a daunting one, necessitating preliminary research. From this research several interesting factors emerged that may perhaps explain the absence of the entrepreneur from traditional children's stories. Entrepreneur narratives include obvious satirical elements, irony and pathos and as such are perhaps not suitable material for young children being more applicable to teenage or adult readers. Clark (1997:64-6) identified a prevailing ethos of being over protective in children's books to prevent premature exposure to controversial experiences. The entrepreneur is often portrayed as a controversial character. Also, Clark (1997:67) notes that, it has become a cliché for children's stories to end happily. The apparent societal preference for an unhappy ending in many entrepreneurial narratives makes them unsuitable subjects for children's stories. Eyre (1991:13) astutely identified the relationship between the age of the child and the books they read and that (1991:14) they are exposed to adult life much earlier than hitherto e.g. they read the same newspapers and magazines and watch the same television programmes. He (1991:14) refers to this as the *contracting childhood*. Perhaps to previous generation of children the entrepreneur was just too complex a paradigm. In addition, in writing children's stories the author was mindful of not violating the accepted conventions of writing for children, namely to (1) write with integrity; (2) avoid being patronising; (3) take cognisance of political correctness; (4) avoid value laden messages; (5) avoid stereotyping and stress shared humanity and common attributes. Notwithstanding this it was difficult to implement points four and five since entrepreneurship is a value-laden concept, traditionally associated with male dominance.

In seeking to propagate the entrepreneurial narrative to children it was necessary to choose the correct literary medium to achieve the desired transformation of values. Eyre (1991:11) acknowledges that many children's stories are written to a formula and that story lines are prone to commercial influences. He discusses the etymology of the accepted sub-genres of children's books e.g. *Puritanical Goodly Books; Fairy Stories; Picture Books*; *Adventure stories* and the *Teenage novel*. Using Eyre's etymological structure table 4 was constructed highlighting the benefits of these narrative typologies.

Whilst taking cognisance of the history of children's narrative the challenge was (1) to create a children's story that included the best elements of all the genres described herein; and (2) to create morally impeccable tales of action, of educational significance to socialise children into accepting the entrepreneur as a role model worthy of emulation at an earlier stage. The author chose to recreate the classic picture book as the mechanism through which to communicate the set of vales embedded in entrepreneurship. This format was chosen because the entrepreneur is a classic timeless concept; it is a story with a purpose; and has something of value to communicate. The classic entrepreneurial "rags to riches" is essentially a simple tale. Puritanical goodly books were rejected because of their dated and overtly religious nature. Fairy tales were rejected in the interests of realism. Adventure stories and the teenage novels were considered

inappropriate for the targeted age group. The picture book allows the incorporation of specific elements from other genres.

3.2: Constructing Inspirational Tales for Children.

Having researched the literature pertaining to the entrepreneurial construct and extracted the basic formulaic themes; reviewed the construct of the fictional entrepreneur and examined real-life familial fables it became necessary to choose a communicational medium for propagating the entrepreneurial paradigm to children. After careful consideration, it was decided that story telling was the most useful method for propagating the entrepreneurial narrative amongst children, because children love stories and the books in which they are imbedded. Children's books are an excellent medium for accommodating reality and fantasy.

Although entrepreneurship has been described as fantasy a conscious decision was made to perpetuate the entrepreneurial formula identified for fear of causing confusion. The author wrote the first version of a children's storybook entitled *Ernie the Entrepreneur* incorporating as many of the identified themes as possible. The basic plot revolves around a fictional entrepreneurial hero intended to introduce primary school children to the complex concept of the entrepreneur. It is a progressive narrative that encompasses the entrepreneur as a child prodigy; as a hero; the poor boy made good; as an outsider; the entrepreneur legitimized and finally castigated. The concepts of the entrepreneur as a villain or criminal entrepreneur were considered too confusing for an introductory story. This traditional element of morality versus immorality was addressed by the introduction of a gangster figure. The genesis of *Ernie the Entrepreneur* began when the author considered ways in which to project the entrepreneur as a serious role model to children, whilst mirroring reality without recourse to intense dialogue. This necessitated resorting to symbolism and semiotic projection encased in illustration. The illustrations were created by the author's daughter from a list of obligatory characteristics and artifacts provided as a template. Ernie emerged as confident, youthful looking, irreverent individual, who wore jewelry and flash clothes. Interestingly, in animating Ernie and writing the text the author subconsciously found himself being over-protective as argued by Clark above. The first casualty of this was semiotic - Ernie was not allowed the comfort of that symbolic masculine prop of success – the cigar, as it could be construed as propagating bad habits. Thereafter the aim was to make a complicated story simple.

It was then decided that the most appropriate research technique to propagate the story was the under used phenomenon of *Action Research*. The first draft of *Ernie the Entrepreneur* was tested in a primary school by being read to five classes, primaries three to seven. In parallel ten educationalists involved with the school were asked to personally critique the story. Of these, eight stipulated that they would use the story if it were available commercially, two stipulated that the story was either not suitable for their age group or would require minor amendments. The consensus of opinion was that it worked well as a story and was informative. Criticisms were that Ernie was not true to life and

was just too good to be true. All were unanimous in their praise of the illustrations. Yet it was apparent that there was a dichotomy between the illustrations' and the level of the text. A glossary was added and the reaction to ruin and poignancy of the ending were singled out for praise. The sexual stereotyping was also commented upon. The lessons thus learned resulted in amendments, namely two *Ernie the Entrepreneur* stories targeted towards specific age groups. To redress the sexual stereotyping issue and the perception that the meteoric rise of the entrepreneur was too good to be true, the author wrote another inspirational tale for children, entitled *Elise* to provide a more balanced perspective. The story line represents a regressive-progressive narrative and relates to a girl who wished to remain invisible and nearly succeeded until fate led her astray. She fell from grace until rescued by serendipity, becoming a famous entrepreneur.

The revised *Ernie the Entrepreneur* and *Elise* stories were retested in four other primary schools allowing research data to be collected from approximately 100 respondents. The method used was to write the word entrepreneur down on the blackboard and then administer a short three question pro forma to test prior knowledge. They were then provided with copies of both stories, which were also read to them by the author. The results compiled from the data collected are compiled in table 5 below.

4: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.

This section discusses the three strands posited, to identify important points. From the first section it was established that there were two contrasting entrepreneurial narratives (1) the classic entrepreneur as a hero figure and (2) the less visible entrepreneurial villain figure. These and other common themes were found in the academic literature and repeated in fictional narratives. The paper thus provides tentative evidence of a formulaic master theme for constructing entrepreneurial narrative.

In seeking to answer the question "What effect do familial fables learned in childhood have upon future entrepreneurial actions" one must be mindful of the fact that very few children appear to be exposed to such fables. Those that are, are obviously privileged, being endowed with a precious form of social capital, exposure to which may inevitably influence their future career choice. However, given the elongated gestation period for the average entrepreneur, it would require a longitudinal study to do justice to the question. It must also be borne in mind that the familial fable although a wonderful method of propagating tales of morality and success is only one type of entrepreneurial narrative, the others being *external role models* and *fictionally constructed narrative*. External entrepreneurial mentor figures also generate stories to be perpetuated by others. Indeed, successful entrepreneurs appear to generate fable around their deeds. All these fables share one common denominator in that they are inspirational. From examining the familial fable it appears there are two discernable pragmatic mechanisms of propagating entrepreneurs, namely the familial role model (via familial tales) and the master - apprentice type external role model. Notwithstanding this it can be inferred that familial fables learned in childhood do impact upon future entrepreneurial actions. It is possible to answer the question "Can such fables be replicated within an alternative mechanism for

propagating the entrepreneurial paradigm amongst children who lack a family entrepreneurial role model to emulate". Clearly, the fictional narratives written for this research demonstrate that such fables can be replicated as stories. The positive response of the children to the stories was overwhelming and proof of the inspirational nature of the stories. Given the tentative, exploratory nature of the research no extravagant claims are made that exposure to these stories will propagate the entrepreneurial narrative.

This research is part of a rich vein of work currently being pursued by academics such as Hyrsky, Koiranen, Smith and Anderson and Nicolson whom appreciate the significance of linguistic mechanisms in relation to the entrepreneurial narrative. One day this may develop into a recognizable communication based theory of entrepreneurship. Until such time that the academic entrepreneurial community is ready to accept such a theory they will have to be content to propagate their own inspirational tales.

There are three main areas in which this research contributes to the contemporary research debate. Firstly, it explores an under researched area of the entrepreneurial paradigm. Secondly, it proffers an apparently effective mechanism for propagating the entrepreneurial narrative amongst children who lack a familial entrepreneurial role model to emulate. Finally, it will no doubt stimulate further research into the entrepreneurial narrative and communication based theories of entrepreneurship. If it helps achieve any of these objectives then it has succeeded as an *inspirational tale* in its own right.

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NOTES

[1] An extended search of the fictional genre confirms this formulaic hypothesis.

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Table 1 – Common Themes in Entrepreneurial Narratives.	
Narrative Themes	Thematic Descriptions.
The entrepreneurial child prodigy figure	A dichotomous narrative in which the child is either blessed with a special gift or conversely has to overcome learning difficulties (such as dyslexia) or societal prejudices. Sub themes include overcoming marginality, poverty, race discrimination etc. A classic but optional entrepreneurial paradigm.
The classical narrative of the poor boy made good	This category is central to the construction of entrepreneurial narratives being rooted in reality. It involves the mythical element of the *hegira* – the flight from oppression in its many formats. A sub theme is serendipity. A dominant entrepreneurial paradigm.
The heroic entrepreneur	The entrepreneur eulogized. Sub themes are the entrepreneur succeeding against all odds, the entrepreneur taking on the establishment, and the development of hubris. During this stage the entrepreneur creates new value or organizations. Sub themes are

	empire building and a change of stature. It has become a dominant paradigm.
The villainous entrepreneur	This is the traditional narrative of the likeable rogue or rascal. The entrepreneur is frequently cast in this role. Sub themes include empire building and a change of stature. An alternative entrepreneurial paradigm.
The entrepreneur as an outsider	This category includes such demographic elements as class, marginality, ethnicity etc. It is the broad societal category for differentiating all those entrepreneurs who do not achieve legitimacy or heroic status. A classic entrepreneurial paradigm
The entrepreneur legitimized	Sub themes are - becoming immortalized, achieving a change in stature to tycoon, magnate or baron; philanthropic acts, societal recognition e.g. knighthoods or acceptance into fraternal orders etc. The homecoming is also part of this process. This dominant entrepreneurial paradigm invariably involves a return to where it all began.
The entrepreneur castigated	Sub themes are hubristic payback, a general fall from grace [The Icarus narrative], a decent into madness, betrayal by significant others or overstretching ones capabilities or a debilitating scandal. It is a peculiar form of *schadenfreude* – where the public takes pleasure in the misfortune of others. This is a preferred paradigm.
The criminal entrepreneur	A new entrepreneurial narrative containing traditional elements of association between the entrepreneur and nefarious activities. An extension of the entrepreneur as a villain.
The invisible entrepreneur	Usually associated with the paradigm of the female entrepreneur. Yet, many entrepreneurs regardless of race/ethnic origins prefer to adopt the cloak of invisibility.
The socially s entrepreneur.	An untapped emerging paradigm of the social and the socially conscious entrepreneur.

Table 2 – Content Analysis of storylines to identify common themes
A. Martin Dressler: A Tale of An American Dreamer. This classic fairy tale narrative is told without recourse to the word entrepreneur. Martin Dressler is the child prodigy; the poor boy made good albeit he was exposed to familial business influences. A hero who surprisingly has no villainous traits. A classic outsider, his parents being of European Jewish extraction. Initially legitimised by success he becomes rich. However in the end he is castigated for his hubris. Other themes include empire building and an inability to form meaningful relationships. He overstretches his credibility and begins a descent into madness. He had dreamed the wrong dream, one that others did not wish to follow.
B. Captains and the Kings. A narrative of the American Dream. Joseph Francis Xavier Armagh is a childhood prodigy figure; the classic poor boy made good; the hero who struggles against massive odds to overcome the death of a parent, poverty, marginality and discrimination. An outsider of Irish Catholic extraction he pretends to be a Scot. He is a villain having set out to become a nefarious entrepreneur. He is a criminal entrepreneur engaged in bootlegging and gunrunning rubbing shoulders with ruthless entrepreneurs, gamblers, thieves and criminals. Initially legitimised by wealth and success. Other themes include empire building, overcoming educational disabilities and failing to form meaningful relationships (madness/melancholy affect all around him). Serendipity and networking are evident. Mentored, he became a Tycoon and Robber baron. Finally he is castigated for his hubris by an establishment that regard him as a dirty shantytown Irisher. They thwart his dream of projecting his son as president by assassinating him.
C. Max Britsky: This narrative of the American Dream is told without using the word entrepreneur. Max Britsky is a teenage entrepreneurial prodigy; the entrepreneur as hero; the poor boy made good; and outsider. Of poor Jewish stock, raised in marginality he initially becomes a thief. Under the inspirational tutelage of a mentor he develops an entrepreneurial propensity, becoming a Cinema magnate and Rich Tycoon in the Cinema Industry. Other themes include empire building and an inability to form meaningful relationships. Initially legitimised he is castigated for his hubris firstly by failed familial relationships and secondly by a conspiracy between competitors and the establishment who never accepted him for being inarticulate. Ironically he died of a heart attack in one of his former cinemas.
D. The Entrepreneur. A rags to riches fable perpetuating the love/hate relationship between the establishment and the entrepreneur. Alex Carradine is the entrepreneur as hero; the poor boy made good; and outsider of humble origins. He builds an empire starting as a second hand car salesman becoming a property tycoon. Initially legitimised by success and wealth until castigated for his hubris by an establishment conspiracy. Facing financial ruin he contemplates suicide.

Table 3 - Personal History of respondents divided into inspirational typologies.		
E1	F.F	A Full time entrepreneur until recently. Inspired by familial fables regarding an enterprising uncle and by other familial business influences. Has propagated the familial fables to his sons.
E2	E.M	A retired full time entrepreneur with no prior business experience influenced by an external mentor. Having no sons he propagated his enterprise by selflessly tutoring a number of former employees to enter business.
E3	E.M	A solo – entrepreneur with no prior business experience. He is an inveterate net worker and was encouraged by other self-made men in the network.
E4	F.F	A part-time entrepreneur – inspired by his upbringing in his fathers business. He was thus socialized into the entrepreneurial ethic and practices it effortlessly in many sidelines.
SB1	B.E.M	Until recently a full-time businessman. He entered business late in life as a result of being

		bequeathed an ailing business from his former employer. He made a success of it.
SB2	F.F	The son of SB1 inspired by his father and is now on his way to becoming an entrepreneur.
SB3	B.E.M	A full time businessman who like SB1 was practically gifted a business by his former employer who having no sons tutored him over several years and sold him the business cheaply.
SB4	E.M	A retired full time businessman who had no prior familial business experience.

Table 4 – An Etymology of Children's Books, showing type, purpose and details		
Typology	Purpose	Details
Puritanical Goodly Books	To propagate the messages of morality and success.	This narrative type evolve din the 16th-17th century as determinedly moral stories and stories with a purpose. They were morality tales and morally impeccable narratives.
Fairy Stories	To entertain and educate	This genre includes folk-tales, fairy stories, fantasies, allegories, myths and legends. It is not a practical format for contemporary entrepreneur narratives because they are in the main set in a historical context and often require one to suspend reality.
Picture books	Stories with a purpose are instructional and excellent for communicating values. They are simple tales.	This classical narrative type evolved in the early 20th Century. They were primarily didactic in nature and suffered from a lack of realism being written by and for the middle classes. They often incorporated the determinedly moral stories and 'stories with a purpose' of the puritanical era. The illustrations accentuated the ideology of the text. Visual assimilation is achieved. Works well with timeless concepts. The picture book perpetuated fairy stories.
Adventure stories	To entertain whilst passing on basic ideological messages.	These imaginative stories were primarily without purpose or morals. Mass production placed an impossible strain on credulity as the age of the hero(ine) in the books reduced to match the age of the reader. They were often described as "tales of action". They often contained reference to criminals.
Teenage Novels	Escapism –Fantasy. Straight Narratives.	Saw the introduction of social realism and the struggle for reviving folk-tales, fairy stories, fantasies, allegories, myths and legends which combine to produce and escape from reality, or a turning to a simpler kind of truth. Prone to political correctness.

Table 5 - Results from data collected from children exposed to the narratives.	
The depth of the enterprise culture within children aged 7-11	Only 20 % of the children targeted in the age group had a vague prior knowledge of the concept and then only in general terms e.g. a rich man, someone who helps others etc. The sex and age of the children did not appear to influence the result.
The impact of the story upon the children	This was the most visible aspect of the research. Immediately upon being told that they were to engage in story telling activities the classes straightened their backs, settled down and paid full attention to the story. At the conclusion of the Ernie story the children sighed in unison and expressed their disapproval of the unfair treatment of Ernie. After the stories were read approximately 20 percent of the children were able to narrate that they had brothers, sisters, parents, or relatives who might be entrepreneurs. It is therefore likely that they had been influenced by familial fables.
Establish if they view the story as "true" life and a credible reflection of reality.	This was one of the most pleasing results of the research in that 85% of the pupils regarded the stories as being true to life. They related to the stories and considered the exploits of Ernie and Elise as achievable.
Ascertain what effect the story has upon them	The stories appeared to excite the pupils and inspire them. It is not possible to establish the long term effects of the story.
Assess how they respond to the story e.g. do they see themselves as a future entrepreneur	This was inconclusive. It was probably unfair to have included it in the first place given the impressionable nature of children. Yet children who had relatives in business immediately understood their significance.
Test if the story is an effective teaching aid in raising entrepreneurial awareness	It appears to be an excellent teaching aid and he respondents appeared to understand what an entrepreneur was by he conclusion of the lesson.