

# It Comes From The Heart

## Teaching Entrepreneurship in British Columbia

by Kathleen Costello and Kathleen Elliot

*Cet article trace un bref portrait de certains programmes pour chefs d'entreprise de la Colombie britannique. Les auteures examinent l'importance accordée à l'intégration de certaines habiletés et comment celles-ci varient selon les programmes.*

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In 1991 one-third of all British Columbia businesses were owned by women. That means that in 1991, 77,000 women in BC were self-employed. At the current rate of growth it is estimated that women will own half the businesses in Canada by the year 2000 (Ministry of Small Business, Tourism, and Culture). What does this mean for economic development? The answer is largely unknown. What is known is that 80 per cent of the women who own businesses still earn less than their male counterparts, and that women are less inclined to treat their businesses like venture opportunities. Can these inequities and attitudes be changed by teaching entrepreneurship?

Can entrepreneurship be taught? The debate surrounding this question is abating. The question has traditionally focused on the belief that entrepreneurs are born not made. The issue has been whether or not it is possible to teach the creative thinking, intuitive understanding, and risk-taking behaviours which have been considered to be personality characteristics of entrepreneurs. Research published within the last ten years indicates that entrepreneurs *do not* display a unique set of personality characteristics. They exhibit a discrete set of skills. "Entrepreneurship is a new academic discipline," says Connie Marie Gaglio of the University of Victoria's School of Business.

*Thanks to research that has been done over the past ten to fifteen years, we now understand that entrepreneurs are people who function differently than small business owners. They are people who express different behaviors, not different personalities.*

Defining and teaching the skills that support this behavior is becoming the focus of business education programs.

This article provides a brief review of some of the

entrepreneurial programs available in British Columbia. It is not representative of programs in the province as a whole. Of the nine business educators interviewed for this article, three gave a description of entrepreneurial skills. All three of those educators are connected with universities or post-secondary technological institutions. There was agreement among all those interviewed that entrepreneurship could be taught as part of business education courses. The majority of students were described as mature adults, people with workplace experience, and the drive to succeed in a business of their own. There was, according to these educators, no real difference between the men and women in their classes. There was some mention of the fact that men tend to think big while the women, who often have excellent ideas, do not think big. There does not seem to be any recognition that the different skills women and men display in business management might effect entrepreneurial skills, or that these differences may require different teaching and learning strategies.

Gaglio says entrepreneurs are individuals with a distinct market place function. "Entrepreneurs enter into high growth ventures, they re-define the market, they network to acquire the resources they need, and they create jobs". She notes that entrepreneurs use critical thinking skills and try to market their products or services in ways that have never been done before.

*Entrepreneurs create needs, set a standard, then they go into overdrive implementing what they've developed. They look to the future and try to determine how they can grow their business, to make it so successful that they can go public with it, then sell it and move on to another venture.*

Raphael Amit of the Enterprise and Venture Capital Research Centre at the University of British Columbia says entrepreneurs are very motivated. They know how to negotiate, and they are willing to engage in a new direction, to be innovative and adaptable.

*Entrepreneurs apply creative thinking and commitment to their vision, to their enterprise. They organize, control, focus and execute, and they do it with high energy and clear, direct communication.*

"Entrepreneurship is a process" says Randy Vandermark of the Marketing program at the British Columbia Institute of Technology.

*It involves five key components: persuasive communication patterns, the capability to negotiate for what is needed, networking, a conceptual ability to think in blocks of space and time, and time management/organizational skills. If business education programs include these skills, then entrepreneurship can be taught.*

A summary of these perspective indicates that entrepreneurial skills encompass the following:

- Networking: expanding contracts to include services the entrepreneur does not offer and building a team to support this venture.

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- Persuasive communications: creating a market for new ideas and products and adapting the function of the market place to support high growth ventures in new areas.

- Conceptualizing the future in blocks of space and time: using concrete terms and critical and creative thinking to grow a venture to the point of going public and moving on to other ventures.

- Negotiating skills: developing support for new and innovative behaviours and attitudes.

- Time management and organizational skills include the ability of an entrepreneur to deliver on their own expectations, to organize, control, focus and execute. Time management for entrepreneurs is the swing into overdrive, the push to market, to create needs and set standards. (For women it is often an extension of their way of life, of the juggling of home, family and business requirements.)

It is apparent that the understanding and incorporation of entrepreneurial skills varies widely among programs. Of the nine programs reviewed, five actively incorporate entrepreneurial skills, but only the three academic programs title them as such. A quick review indicates the differences in these programs.

#### **British Columbia Institute of Technology School of Business, Marketing Management Program**

The focus of the Venture Program is on technical businesses which are hard to start. Through three months of intensive immersion participants are given direct support for starting a business and are actively taught the entrepreneurial skills of persuasive communications in business management, networking as a way to build business and industry contacts, and product and market-

match development to support future planning.

#### **University of British Columbia, Entrepreneurship and Venture Capital Research Centre**

The research centre offers degree and non-degree programs. Students are given the opportunity to explore innovations and new business formation in both independent and corporate settings. Student participation in the Entrepreneurship Experience Program helps with the integration of theory into practical applications. Students are given hands-on experiences and direct training in both emerging and ongoing entrepreneurial ventures. Extensive theory and research opportunities are available at the graduate level.

#### **University of Victoria School of Business, Entrepreneurship Program**

Traditional entrepreneurial courses, such as the Principles of Entrepreneurship, Financing Entrepreneurial Ventures, New Product Planning, Development and Marketing, Management of Growth Oriented Business, and Managing Change and Innovation are being re-designed to include practical application of the essential entrepreneurial skills. The new programs will balance practice with theory and give students more direct learning experiences.

#### **Lambrick Park High School, Entrepreneurship, International and Cooperative Program**

This innovative one-of-a-kind program offers selected students in grades eleven and 12 a twenty week course on entrepreneurship. The course focuses on networking, problem solving, and future thinking. While in the classroom they learn basic business, research, financial, and marketing skills. Students connect with two mentors, one who shares their business interests and one who will evaluate their business plan from the perspective of a financial institution. Each summer their instructor, Berne Neufeld, takes eight students to Malaysia to work in banking, investment, and import/export situations.

#### **Camosun College Community Education: How to Start a Small Business**

Suzanne Dane, the instructor for this course, identifies the entrepreneurial components of her course as what is learned through relationship marketing. “Entrepreneurs recognize that they are not building up a business for a one time sale, they are building ongoing relationships with customers and the market place. These people are creating a win-win situation, they know that if they can’t do something for a customer they need to find the supplier who can. Their goal is to keep customers happy.” Dane helps students identify the processes for long and short-term marketing, assess the timing of what they are

doing and determine what their futures should look like.

#### **Comosun College, Enterprise Development Program**

The Enterprise Development Program, according to Co-ordinator Marilyn Drews, is intended to support small business development, not entrepreneurship. There are, however, two entrepreneurship courses offered. One focuses on the venture creation process and includes future planning and an understanding of the attitudes and values of an entrepreneur. The second course states that

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students will learn about the “make-it-happen” approach, but it seems intended to develop operation skills rather than innovative approaches.

#### **University of Victoria, Continuing Studies Business and Management Program**

Program Director Rhordon Wikramatilkee says they have no specific focus on entrepreneurship in this program but he notes that entrepreneurial skills become a part of the teaching of the marketing and managerial courses. He identifies his students as adult learners who will use their personal business experiences as case studies, and their general work experiences as opportunities to reflect on what they are being taught. He points out that entrepreneurs create value as opposed to just running a business, and that teaching entrepreneurial skills is a matter of helping people who have ideas for better and more useful products to find a way to market those value added products.

Educators in all nine areas recognized the need to teach entrepreneurial skills. Some were not sure how they could be taught, while others felt they were included in their programs by intent if not specifics. All of the programs, with the exception of the Venture Program at British Columbia Institute of Technology had a slightly higher percentage of female than male students. Instructors did not seem to feel that one gender performed better than the other. But some did comment that women asked more questions and researched more thoroughly. Unfortunately no records have been kept of business start-up rates for graduates, and no longitudinal information on success/failure is available.

Two of the nine programs are specifically for women.

#### **Programs from the Office of the Businesswoman's Advocate**

The primary function of the Office of the Businesswomen's Advocate is to offer advice, information, referrals, and support to women entrepreneurs. As a program area in the Ministry of Small Business, Tourism and Culture, the Advocate is responsible for supporting women in all aspects of entrepreneurial development. These skills are supported through research and information bulletins and by education programs offered in partnership with the Federal Business Development Bank (FBDB). The Advocate plays a major role in the promotion and participation of British Columbia women in the Canadian Women Entrepreneur of the Year Awards. The conference and workshops that are part of the awards presentation ceremony give women entrepreneurs a unique networking opportunity. The publicity and recognition that accompany these awards often create new growth and venture opportunities for participants.

In addition to research, advice, referrals, and support, the Businesswomen's Advocate directly supports entrepreneurial skills development through the coordination of regional conferences and workshops which support a variety of networking and business development opportunities; and the coordination and publishing of fact sheets on networking, marketing, financing, and time management.

#### **Educational opportunities with the Federal Business Development Bank**

The Federal Business Development Bank offers a series of business education programs. In partnership with the Businesswomen's Advocate, they have provided programs on entrepreneurial skills development, including the *Step Up* program on business expansion for women which supports venture development and increases entrepreneurial activity; and the *Step In* program which provides women with training and counselling to build entrepreneurial skills.

Most of the activities of the Businesswomen's Advocate and of the women's programs at the fbdb focus on developing entrepreneurial skills. These programs are the result of businesswomen identifying gaps and stating where they need support and how it would be most accessible for them. These programs build on and enhance the existing skills that women bring into business. They are practical programs not theoretical lessons.

Women's success in business is generally attributed to the fact that they research, plan ahead, take courses, seek advice, have realistic expectations, and are committed to their businesses (Lynn and Gray). Even though women are more successful, they tend not to expand their business into huge entrepreneurial ventures. It is interesting to note that women's business skills bear a strong resemblance to what academics now identify as entrepreneurial skills, yet

these skills are not mentioned, recognized, or incorporated into courses or theories in business education programs. The discrepancy between women's business skills and entrepreneurial skills and the reasons why women do not build their businesses into high profit ventures are areas that would benefit from research. These gaps in knowledge may provide a key to some valuable learning opportunities.

In summary, all of the instructors interviewed believed that entrepreneurial skills could be taught, but only three of them identified entrepreneurial skills as a part of their core business education programs. None of them mentioned the difference in women's business skills and abilities as being important to understanding aspects of entrepreneurial skills. There also seems to be a major discrepancy between the way entrepreneurship is identified by academics and by those delivering more direct community programs. In addition to differing definitions of entrepreneurial skills, there also seems to be confusion about ventures and small business. Can small business be entrepreneurial ventures? What's the difference, is there a difference? The semantics can be confusing. This entire area of education, and those trying to get some guidance through this area, might benefit from clearly defined and universally agreed-upon definitions.

## **SIMON FRASER UNIVERSITY**

### ***Department of Women's Studies***

The Department of Women's Studies at Simon Fraser University invites applications for a tenure-stream position at the rank of Assistant Professor. A PhD or equivalent is required as is evidence of research related to Women's Studies. Evidence of teaching experience should be submitted; teaching experience in Women's Studies or interdisciplinary studies would be an asset. We are interested in candidates in the areas of cross-cultural studies, race and ethnic studies, social or cultural studies. In accordance with Canadian immigration requirements this advertisement is directed to Canadian citizens and permanent residents. Simon Fraser University is committed to the principle of equity in employment and offers equal opportunities to qualified applicants. This position is subject to budgetary approval. Applications, including three letters of reference, should be sent to:

Mary Lynn Stewart, Chair  
Dept. of Women's Studies  
Simon Fraser University  
Burnaby, British Columbia  
V5A 1S6

**Deadline: January 15, 1995**

It is important to note that the only direct support for women's unique business skills and needs, and the only programs directed at women, were from the Office of the Businesswomen's Advocate and the FBDB. The authors of this review are curious as to why the strengths that women bring with them to business development are not used as the base for encouraging entrepreneurial skills.

As we move into the twenty-first century will we find that our understanding of women's business skills has been limited by the same outdated information that kept identifying entrepreneurial skills as personality traits instead of teachable skills? Is the increasing responsibility that women are taking for developing and supporting our economy being supported by research and education in the area of entrepreneurial development? Should more of this research focus on women, considering the unique aspects of women entrepreneurs?

Perhaps it's time for business educators to focus on women's identified strengths and to evaluate those specific skills as core components of entrepreneurship training. Women's differences do make a difference.

*This article was researched and written by Kathleen Elliot with advice from Kathleen Costello.*

*Kathleen Costello was appointed to the non-partisan position of Businesswoman's Advocate in 1991. Over the past 20 years, Costello has bridged many of the barriers women face in the world of work. Since 1986 she has been actively involved in developing and delivering provincial programs for women in the community; her primary focus over the last four years has been women in business. Costello's work with community groups, inter-ministerial committees, provincial agencies, and national organizations has created a variety of entrepreneurial programs and support services for women.*

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