



Review Article

Counseling and supporting the parents of the young entrepreneur¹

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Abstract

There are many parents of young talented and gifted children or adolescents, who insist on the traditional path of studies both for their sons and their daughters. In many cases these parents had been good students who had completed their educational track successfully which had helped them achieve satisfying professional positions. Such parents tend to believe, that the educational way they had gone through is the only one ensuring the materializing of the children's potential. However, the traditional way is not always better than any other, especially not for young entrepreneurs. According to Shavinina (2009), the entrepreneur "usually learns quickly and often operates in the absence of formal education" (p. 793). Though not perceiving formal education as a condition of being a successful entrepreneur or innovator, Shavinina (2013) "admits" that "there are some exceptions", such as Bill Gates or Jeff Bezos (p. 58). Ferrante (2005) is more traditional in his view. According to him: The most robust empirical finding of this paper is the positive link between entrepreneurial ability and the level of formal education, whereas experience, in contrast with the conventional wisdom, does not seem to play any role (p. 170). In cases parents strongly believe in the "traditional" way, of getting good grades in school, learning in a high prestige university department and working in a well-paid, respectable jobs, they usually insist that their children, especially the gifted, on mathematics and science – including computer science in school, getting high grades, and dedicating a lot of time to school assignments. Gifted children in such families find it quite hard to become young entrepreneurs, as they have to delay any non-formal professional development to a much later than high school stage of their lives. I will hereby demonstrate, through three stories of two boys and one girl, all in their teens, several alternative ways to success. These case studies will show that parents who embrace such ways, support and encourage their children who wish to try a new, challenging way rather than walking the old one, might not only be financially rewarding but also contributing to child-parent relationship.

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Introduction

In this work three adolescent entrepreneurs, one girl and two boys, who were 17-18- year old in 2023 will be introduced and described. At the time of writing the girl was 17, still a minor according to the Israeli law; the boys have just turned 18. Though parental permission to publish data about children is required only for minors, I asked and was granted such permission from all parents, as well as from the children involved. Due to length limitation some important details of these adolescents' live will not be presented; I hope that all crucial ones are to be included. Their stories are to start from the point each of them had made her of his first steps towards becoming an entrepreneur; it will go on describing the way each of them had gone through in order to actually become an entrepreneur. But unlike when publishing full case studies (e.g. David & Wu, 2009), I left out some family details, such as parents' age, friends and siblings info, etc. In an enlarged version of this work wall these details will be added (e.g. David, in preparation).

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On the term "entrepreneur"

Here is a confession: I do not like the term "entrepreneur". No, it is not because of its French origin. I even like this language, which was the third language I had chosen to learn in high school. But I feel that by using the term "entrepreneur" we leave out an important part of the process involved in the way an entrepreneur goes through until their work has a financial value. This way starts with a new idea, a new tool, a new concept or a new way of doing things the inventor, or the person with the idea, or the developer of the tool thinks about. Until the final stage of marketing it there is a long way to go. In order to complete the process, the inventor must have high motivation level, "positive" energy to go through all obstacles, persistence, patience, sometimes even stubbornness, until their invention is ready for the market. Even at this almost last stage, in many cases the marketing of a new invention, an innovative idea, or tool, or an upgraded of already existing process is far from being trivial. However, the marketing of the invention is much easier when assisted by others, so the entrepreneur must have good social abilities in order to be able to work in a team. However, the core of the work essential for the entrepreneur is the initial idea.

Gifted entrepreneurship: The state of the art in research

Shavinina (2009) is very explicit in her statement regarding the state of the art of gifted entrepreneurship: "scholars have not yet studied gifted entrepreneurs" (p. 793). Thus, it has not been a surprise that the most detailed case study of entrepreneurs published in the next 5 years after the publication of this statement (as described by Sellers, 2014) dedicated long paragraphs to explaining and defining the term "entrepreneur".

Harper (2014) focused on the financial aspect of entrepreneurship. His examples of the 10 entrepreneurs are money related, but two are exceptional as they opened a new market, the first, Pope Sixtus IV, opened the market of the dead:

Sixtus gets the nod for realizing that the "wages of sin" meant more than unpleasant repercussions. There was money to be made in damnation, and Sixtus mined it by opening up a new market -- the dead -- [...]

The second is Benjamin Siegel, "contributed" massively to the world of gambling:

Known as "Bugsy" to his friends, Siegel was a notorious mobster with a touch of the visionary. Legend has it that he single-handedly invented Las Vegas, and that's a stretch.

According to Sellers (2014), "entrepreneurs do more than manage a business and bear risk; they also use capital to make more capital". As can be seen from Harper's examples (2004); this might, but not necessarily be true.

Without undermining the financial part of entrepreneurship, I believe that the main focus of the entrepreneurs' work is their *passion*. They have a drive to create, a drive to leave their fingerprint in the world. To do something that will be remembered, that will be always there. Something that is the equivalent of a work of art, a new story, play, a musical piece, or a weapon that might change the world's balance of power resulting either in contributing to peace or to war.

The frame of the work

Many case stories of young entrepreneurs in the field of computers are well known, especially those of the inventors of the greatest inventions of the third millennium that have changed the educational, familial and financial situation of hundreds of millions – if not billions of people. The first in this line of computer entrepreneurs was Bill Gates, the co-founder of Microsoft along with his childhood friend Paul Allen.

Gates wrote his first software program at the age of 13. In high school he helped form a group of programmers who computerized their school's payroll system and founded Traf-O-Data, a company that sold traffic-counting systems to local governments ("Bill Gates", 2023).

Another example is that of Mark Zuckerberg, who was born in 1984. Zuckerberg had also started his career in his teens. Zuckerberg is known as the founder of Facebook, at age 19, along with his two Harvard friends: Dustin Moskovitz and Chris Hughes ("Mark Zuckerberg", 2023). He is also known for dropping out of Harvard, a move that in retrospective can be defined as a very clever one.

But Zuckerman did not start his career at Harvard; while still in junior high school, and later, in high school, he created at least 4 major inventions. The first was ZuckNet: at age 11 Zuckerberg thought of connecting all members of his family, as well as his father's dental clinic that was in the basement of the family house. Randi, Mark Zuckerberg's sister defined this invention as: "the first example of when he started building things-and he never stopped." (4 things Mark Zuckerberg created before Facebook, 2014). The second was a Synapse Media Player: at age 16 Zuckerberg wrote "a computer program that used machine learning to determine a user's music listening habits and recommended more music based on the genre, artist, taste, which was pretty much like what Last.fm does today" (ibid). The next two inventions of Mark Zuckerberg were created when he was already 18. CourseMatch, which helped the students at Harvard in choosing and register to the semester courses, and FaceMash, which is said to initiate the beginning of Facebook. It presented the user with two pictures of either male or female students at Harvard and asked them to choose the better looking one.

Many other sources tell about famous entrepreneurs. For example: "5 people who started young and made it big before 30" (2014). But of these case studies only David Karp started while still a teenager:

He was 17, when the Manhattan teenager decided to move to Tokyo, where he spent the new few weeks fine-tuning his computer skills and toying with the idea of building robots. It was during this period that he decided to become an entrepreneur and started Tumblr, the blogging platform that is known to bring WordPress, Youtube and Twitter together, at 21 from his mom's apartment located in New York (5 people who started young and made it big before 30, 2014).

Of the 10 examples Harper (2004) suggests as "the greatest entrepreneurs", only two started their career during their teens. The first is Thomas Edison, the man "who gave the world the electric light, the phonograph, talking motion pictures and more than 1,300 other patented inventions" (ibid); the other is Henry Ford who left home at age 16 to work in the automobiles industry, after starting being interested in it a few years before (ibid).

The role of the family

Cardella et al. (2020) conducted a quantitative study, using three databases, in which they found 92 articles, published in 1989-2019, in order to identify the main issues in the study of the relationship between family role and entrepreneurship. Here is the summary of them:

A cluster analysis shows five main areas of literature development: (1) cultural dimension and gender issue; (2) family business and succession; (3) parental role models and entrepreneurial intentions; (4) entrepreneurship and self-employment; (5) family support and women entrepreneurs. Findings also show how this is a relatively recent field of study, with a multidisciplinary character (p. 1).

The Zhu et al. (2017) study examines how family support affects challenges and obstacles of entrepreneurs with exit intentions. However, the minimal age of an entrepreneur in the sample was 19; the oldest was 74, and the average age was 38. Thus, this study, though quantitative, does not contribute to the knowledge about young entrepreneurs.

Though the Suresh & Simon (2023) study is about young entrepreneurs, its sample is not high school adolescents, and certainly not children who started their first steps as entrepreneurs at about age 12.

Perhaps the most updated document about entrepreneurship is the annual Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM, 2022/23). However, it does not deal with high school age entrepreneurship, let alone gifted adolescents whose way towards entrepreneurship success started when still in junior high school.

Thus, it is my hope that the existing literature, quite meager both in theory and case studies of the first steps of gifted entrepreneurs will benefit from the 3 case studies that are to be presented.

In her monumental work about young entrepreneurs and innovators Shavinina refers to Richard Branson multiple times (e.g. Shavinina, 2006, the whole article; 2009, p. 793; 2013, p. 62). She describes him as "Neglect of academic subjects" (ibid, 2013); she even goes as far as stating that "Gifted entrepreneurs live in their own world of 'real practical' projects; school subjects do not make much sense to them. Many do not do well at school (Branson, 2002; Shavinina, 2013).

The gender aspect, which is one of the main issues of both entrepreneurship and innovation, is not to be discussed here. The gender gap among adult entrepreneurs has been mentioned by many (e.g. Ahl, 2006; Belghiti-Mahut et al., 2016; Blake & Handon, 2005; Chhabra & Karmarkar, 2016; Johansson & Lindberg, 2011; Nahlinder et al., 2012; Orji, 2010; Pablo-Marti et al., 2014; Pinkovetskaia, 2021; Ranga & Etzkowitz, 2010; Robb & Coleman, 2014; Steyn & De Bruin, 2020; Zuraik et al., 2020). However, this subject is beyond the scope of our presentation.

Definition(s) of entrepreneurship and Entrepreneurial giftedness

A formal definition of an entrepreneur is found in the Merriam Webster Dictionary. The dictionary states that an entrepreneur is “one who organizes, manages, and assumes the risks of a business or enterprise” (“Entrepreneur,” n.d.). According to this definition, an entrepreneur is simply an individual who owns a business and bears the risk of that business (Sellers, 2014, p. 6).

In my opinion, the best definition of **Entrepreneurial giftedness** is:

Entrepreneurial giftedness refers to talented individuals who have succeeded in business by creating new ventures (fulfilled entrepreneurial giftedness) with at least a minimal financial reward or who demonstrated an exceptional potential ability to succeed (prospective entrepreneurial giftedness). A gifted entrepreneur is an individual who successfully carries out new business ventures. He or she always starts with an idea and finishes with real products, services, or processes (Shavinina, 2009, p. 793).

There are many more definitions of entrepreneurship. For example: “[...] the scholarly examination of how, by whom, and with what effects opportunities to create future goods and services are discovered, evaluated, and exploited” (Shane, & Venkataraman, 2000, p. 2018), which requires readiness to implement”. Kurniaty et al. (2023, p. 527) embrace this definition, while adding to it: “[...] which requires readiness to implement”.

Short description of the common aspect of the three presented case studies

Even when establishing the fact that defining entrepreneurship is at least not easy, we can agree that entrepreneurs are easy to identify (Harper, 2014.). Some of the examples that are the “fruit of an entrepreneur’s labor” (ibid) are [...] “Starbuck’s coffee, the McDonald’s Big Mac®, or an item from the vast selection of the online super-store Amazon.com (Llewellyn & Holt, 2007).

All three case studies share the following in common:

- The entrepreneurs described were all teenagers, but they all started working on their businesses while still in their early teens, around age 12. According to Fraser & Greene (2006), entrepreneurs are usually more optimistic than employees, and optimism decreases with experience. Thus it is understood why the wish to become an entrepreneur is already there while still young; it is the role of parents and education not to put off the light
- They all did not follow the traditional school track, though each of them found their own way of high school education
- Though their parents were different from each other regarding the family support they supplied to their children, all three of them came in terms with the fact that their children did not push themselves as hard as they could for academic achievements while in school.

Learning languages

In my opinion, many gifted children should learn as many languages as possible, whether their passion is entrepreneurship or not. It has been shown in many studies that being bilingual enriches the gifted child; her or his verbal-, as well as the social and emotional development is not harmed by exposure to a second language at a mother tongue level (e.g. David & Gyarmathy, 2023; Peal and Lambert, 1962; Nicolay & Poncelet, 2013; Weissberger et al., 2015; Woumans et al., 2016). The ability to communicate with people from different countries, to live in different cultures, be exposed to a variety of beliefs and living life style is of a great importance to entrepreneurs who need to have as large market as possible, and constantly adjust to new markets. English as a second language is a must, actually, in Israel, my country, good English is a prerequisite to be a part of high technology (e.g. Lee & Schmidgall, 2020) considered

one of the best in the world (e.g. Israel innovation Authority, 2022). When a child or adolescent expresses interest, is able and motivated, it is recommended they should learn German, French, Spanish, Arabic, Chinese, or Russian. Though English is considered the international language, personal connections help in business in general and in marketing one's first inventions, creations and ideas in particular. Such connections are much easier to make maintain when speaking the language of the interested party.

The first case study: Rebecca

Rebecca, who has just turned 17, is already a successful photographer. I had met Rebecca for the first time when she was a 5-year old kindergartner. Her parents thought it was a good idea to seek my advice as she did not seem to be interested in children her age and made no social connections with her peers. Very soon I had realized that Rebecca was well developed emotionally, highly verbal, with many interests, mostly not considered "typical" for her age. She was perceived as a tomboy by her parents and the kindergarten teachers; as has been described in the relevant literature, both loneliness and having "male" characteristics are considered typical for gifted girls and many great women in history (see, for example, Landau, 1999; Ünal & Sak, 2022; Zorman & David, 2000). I met with Rebecca every week and with her parents every other week for a few years, mainly to help them give answers to the intellectual and artistic needs. During these years Rebecca developed her emotional abilities gradually, along with her cognitive performance in very many areas, her wide range of interests, and her artistic talent in music, dancing, sculpturing and painting. The gaps between her and her class peers widened quickly, and soon she was offered to skip a class. But this did not help so much either. Even after her class skipping her parents had to arrange with her teachers to allow her stay at home once a week; later it increased to twice and even thrice a week. But not only did Rebecca find common language with the girls in her class, who were mostly interested in net stars, shopping, etc., she could not relate to the boys either, as they were much more childish than her, even though a year younger...

Rebecca was identified as gifted by the ministry of education at age 8 (about the process of identification for giftedness in Israel see David, 2013, 2014, 2016). As she skipped grade 3 she started participating in the enrichment program for the gifted in her hometown at the beginning of grade 4. However, not only did she not make friends with her class peers, she felt that the gifted children who were a year older than her were not intelligent as she had expected. She told me that "I am used to non-intelligent people; I am also used to disappointments. But these children are so childish...". Rebecca made it through the whole year in the enrichment program; she was exposed to 6 new courses there but none was intriguing as she had hoped, and she had a feeling that the "tasting menu" the program offered did not satisfy her needs. She rather engaged herself with summer intense art classes, learning mathematics with a private tutor, reading everything she could find both in Hebrew and English, and painting, sculpturing and designing cloths for her family members.

Rebecca started her way of becoming a photographer between grade 4 and five – at age 9. She was accepted to a photography class for 10-12-years old; I wrote a recommendation explaining that though she was just 9, she went to school with 10-years old and was emotionally and socially very well adapted. She was the best student in that class; at its end her pictures were chosen as a part of the exhibition the instructor, a well-known photographer, had opened, and as examples of the on-line catalogue a few teachers/photographers shared.

Soon enough Rebecca started being asked to take pictures in family occasions, such as birthdays, Bar- and Bat Mitzvahs, and anniversaries. At this stage Rebecca did not charge retribution yet; she was satisfied with being appreciated by so many. But when her father got a call from a neighbor who asked if Rebecca could take pictures of his sons' birthday, he said that Rebecca should be paid a certain amount of modest wages. Rebecca was 12 at that time and that was the beginning of her life as an entrepreneur. For the first two or three years Rebecca's father helped her by answering the phone and setting her appointments for her. He made sure she did not go to places suspected as unsafe, she was always home before 10pm, and never took more than two jobs per week, except for during school vacations. But when she was 15 she switched to homeschooling, and since then she took control both of her money and her schedule.

Unlike as in many other countries, where homeschooling is quite a well-known practice, and thus an even more common one for the gifted (e.g. Jolly et al., 2013; Conejeros-Solar & Smith, 2021), it is not common in Israel (e.g.

Guterman & Neuman, 2017; Neuman & Guterman, 2016; Pearlman-Avnion & Grayevsky, 2019). Studies about homeschooling for the gifted are practically non-existing in my country, though one of the issues many parents ask me about is the possibility of homeschooling their gifted children. Being homeschooled had caused additional difficulties to Rebecca's parents, but they had supported her through the whole path, and thus made it possible for her to choose an untraditional path, to be a successful artist who had left her fingerprints at such a young age while being a successful business woman.

The second case study: Guy

As many other children born in the third millennium Guy was interested in computers from a very young age: when 5 years old he started playing various computers games. His parents were not very happy about it; though belonging to "second generation users" (see, for example, David, 2022), they believed that "computers prevent the development of social connections". But Guy was very well developed emotionally and socially. He had managed to be liked both by teachers and peers, without being perceived as the "teachers' pet" or a "nerd" (e.g. Watts, 2022).

When Guy had his first computers' class in school he was already ahead of all students in his class. Soon enough he started helping the teachers whenever necessary – whether the main computer had connection-, picture-, hardware- or other problems, or one his classmates needed fixing something, finding a file or a program. Within a few weeks Guy became the school "fixer": all teachers got used of asking for his help, and he was happy to oblige.

Guy's "big opportunity" started with the covid-19 pandemic. When learning switched to zoom classes, he had practically no time to participate in his own classes, as he was asked to repair, or fix, or connect students or teachers, or to repair, or find presentations or any other file. The teachers, even those familiar with online teaching, could not take care of many students who were not always concentrated, and many more did not like this new way of learning. Guy was almost always available to fix problems; he was actually happy to practice his skills rather than adapt to the very slow learning pace dictated by his peers.

Little by little Guy started to get phone calls from students of all classes, their parents, siblings, and later their neighbors – everybody was happy with the good natured technician who though still a minor, was very responsible, charged fair and never missed an appointment. When school was resumed Guy could not answer the calls during classes, but during school breaks he returned to all his callers and did his best to make an appointment on that afternoon or early evening.

Guy's parents were not happy when they realized their very talented son preferred his work and did not choose any university courses, or an accelerated school track in math or science, as did many of his less-talented peers. Guy did very well in school, but, as he explained them, the experience he had gained, at such an early stage of his life, was more important to him than any physics or computers course he would be able to take some years later.

When Guy told me his difficulty of convincing his parents that his way was indeed not just legitimate but also recommended, I suggested to meet Guy and his parents for discussing this issue. During this meeting Guy was listening carefully to his parents' beliefs, relying on their own experience, as good students who did their best in the traditional track, and as a result had both good professional positions, steady jobs and financial security, while working in their chosen companies. Guy, on the other hand, gave them examples of people who "did it" in non-traditional ways, and promised not to neglect school but rather work in order to achieve a good matriculation certificate, even if not an excellent one. Since then Guy earned his parents support, and he kept on developing his business without being afraid it would harm his relationship with his family, which was very important to him.

When Guy was 17 he bought a motor-bike in order to get faster to his clients' houses. He was very proud about it, but it was just the first "investment" he made. During the year between the ages of 17 and 18, when in grade 12, he opened a saving account which was intended for hiring his first office: "Guy's computers repairs".

The third case study: Andrei

Andrei was born in Russia, but immigrated to Israel with his parents before he was 2. As he has no foreign accent in Hebrew and behaves like the "typical sabra", the Israel-born-and-raised Jew (see, for example, Almog, 2000; Ben Zvi, 2000), he finds himself explaining, time and again, the reason for having a Russian name... Guy is bilingual: though his parents speak Hebrew very well, they made sure he not only spoke Russian but also learnt reading and writing Russian before he started school. He communicates with his grandparents in Russian, and is familiar with both cultures equally.

Andrei's opportunity to start his business was at the beginning of the Ukrainian-Russian war. During the first weeks of the war Israel opened its gates to many Ukrainian refugees, mostly women who left Ukraine without their male partners, but in many cases with their young children. These women needed money immediately as they came with no living means, and they could not work in their professions as they knew no Hebrew – many did not know any English either.

Andrei's mother met one of these women at the local grocery store. The woman had difficulties finding some groceries; the shopkeeper did not understand her and Andrei's mother helped her. After a short conversation Andrei's mother offered her a cleaning job. When at the family's home, this woman told Andrei that many friends of hers were also interested in cleaning jobs. Andrei published add with his name and phone number in the local paper, and soon enough got many calls from people who needed help in their household; Andrei matched the family who called to one of the women.

Andrei was not just a mediator, in charge of making business connections: he accompanied each woman to the house for the first time, and took her back to her home at the end of her working day, making sure she was fully paid and nicely treated. He explained the women how to use public transportation, and if either the family or the cleaning lady did not know English, he showed both parties how to use google translator. He demanded the family to offer some food and beverage or, at least, give the cleaning woman a short break for resting, eating and drinking. Guy felt sorry for these women, some were highly educated, who had to clean others' houses rather than work in their more respectfully professions, but he also satisfied for doing something for their welfare.

Andrei's parents supported him right from the beginning. Andrei was tall and strong physically, so they were not afraid of his going to strange households while still only 17. They knew he would do well in school, and were not concerned so much about his future. Maybe their own experience – as immigrants to a new country without connections or property, but their own education and personality – taught them not to worry and let their 17-year old sculpture his own future.

Conclusions and Summary

This work, which summarizes the existing knowledge about gifted school age children who have become entrepreneurs, sheds light on entrepreneurship: a comparatively un-studied area of gifted education. It presents the stories of three gifted adolescent Israelis – two boys and one girl, which is, to the best of my knowledge, the first time that Israeli young entrepreneurs that do not belong to the high-tech community get a public stage. The literature review of the work is quite comprehensive, adding information about high school age entrepreneurs in other places than the US. The meagre literature about young entrepreneurs is even meager about those living in non-western countries; the studies that exist include mostly case studies of over 20-year old (e.g. Basuki et al., 2020). Israeli is considered a western country, but this work, though describing Israeli entrepreneurs, is unique as it is the first of its kind.

In addition:

- The cases described present two different homes of which these entrepreneurs come from: parents who are very supportive, even permissive, and parents who are authoritative (e.g. Dwairy, 2004; Hubbs-Tait et al., 2008; Pilarinos & Solomon, 2016; Uji et al., 2014).
- We are exposed, through the life stories of the three young entrepreneurs, to the lack of school influence on the professional track of gifted children and youths in general and gifted entrepreneurs in particular. This should motivate policy maker to initiate changes in the school curriculum in order to help enhance entrepreneurs – or

at least, not to interfere in their own, independent way they often choose chose in order to materialize their inspirations.

- Opportunity and luck are playing a role in the path of the young gifted entrepreneurs, but not solely. In the cases of Guy and Andrei is was the covid-19 and the Ukrainian-Russian was that accelerated their already fast track as professionals who were also very good with people, in the case of Rebecca she created the opportunity of being known, requested and paid for her work.

Limitations

All case studies share a common limitation: it is impossible to come to any conclusions from reading them. This study is not an exception. But as the literature about non-high-tech gifted adolescents who had become entrepreneurs is so limited, each case study adds something to the existing literature and sheds light on some dark angles, shaded corners of this huge topic. Length limitation has prevented me from offering the reader a full history of each of these youths; a detailed report of their background, as well as that of their families, the schools they had attended and the peers and other friends that had accompanied

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