

Volume 10 Issue 2
06 / 2012
tamarajournal.com



Exploring a More Creative Space in Entrepreneurship Research: A Research Note

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I am surrounded by a pile of files and data; emails, documents, field notes, scribbles, profit and loss accounts and general publicity material. I have spent several months visiting the company, the people and recording their everyday events. I now have to create some order and process the data.

A narrative inquiry involves sifting, organising and sensemaking. The analysis of what people do and say offers a remarkable insight into the everydayness of being entrepreneurial. Narrative can inject us into many under researched cavities of entrepreneurial activity; like binoculars that allow you look into a forest to see the colours and textures of a particular tree.

On narrative approaches, Clandinin and Connelly (2000) explore narrative inquiry and capture the richness of identity, events and experiences through discussion of their extensive studies. Gartner (2007) explores the “Science of the Imagination” in the introduction to a special issue which hosts a pluri analysis of an entrepreneurial narrative. In doing so he suggests that there is extensive “craft and scholarship” required for an effective narrative analysis. Rae and Carswell (2000), Rae (2002), and Cope and Watts (2002) apply narrative approaches in entrepreneurial learning contexts using narrative as a sensemaking instrument. Narrative works with language and approaches can include content analysis, discourse analysis and storytelling all as a means of sensemaking.

In this short article the focus is on stories, the language and the application of creative writing. Boje suggests “Stories are to the storytelling system what precedent cases are to the judicial system. Just as in the courtroom, stories are performed among stakeholders to make sense of an equivocal situation. The implication of stories as precedents is that story performances are part of an organization-wide information-processing network”.

Storytelling is by no means a contemporary activity; stories have been representing life events for centuries as images on stone and on valued artefacts. However, stories can also occupy a space that connects research with literature; as in Bojes work the organisational story offers lessons learned, precedents set and information captured. My curiosity for this space has driven me to explore creative writing.

I was fortunate enough to attend a few creative writing workshops led by Scottish poet and playwright Liz Lochhead. The experience of literature in this context led me to think that there might be some validity for researcher expression especially in the storytelling genre of narrative. Writing a story is more often than not based in fact and to form the basis of a story, writers will often draw on their experience perhaps something they saw or heard. Liz encouraged us to pinpoint events that we could strongly associate with a sight or a smell and create a story around that sense. The story must engage,

in other words we need to express ourselves in a way that the reader can believe they are experiencing that same experience. By drawing on the senses we can enrich the language, describing colour, smell, using pictures and images we can take the reader into the story.

At this point we should address the subject of fiction. Both storytelling and creative writing, the two are inextricable linked, does not necessarily mean fiction, made up, elaboration or even abstract. It is fundamentally a form of communication. It is an expression of what we know or feel. It can be an expression of what we heard and experienced. Denning (2005), reveals storytelling very effectively within leadership practice. Denning lays out 8 different types of story; stories that carry meaning, stories that warn of danger, stories with learning to name just a few. There is of course a writer responsibility. The writer in this space must be very clear about the purpose of the story, and the evidence behind the story. Creative writing will enrich the expression of the story. The reader responsibility is to interpret the language, the punctuation and the communication. This is indeed an interesting space, and in terms of what it might contribute to entrepreneurship research then we must explore further.

I will suggest that storytelling and its friend creative writing is a very social activity. It is about communication and it is about informing and sharing an event, an experience or even a message. Storytelling is the expression of the researcher experience and subsequent analysis. It strikes me that storytelling serves a purpose to share academic research with diverse and social groups especially in our societal future which will feature entrepreneurship. It can contribute to learning and education and it can contribute to commerce and business as practiced by Denning.

As a researcher often in the research field there are so many experiences recorded in a scribble but lost to a complex analysis. Creative writing is an opportunity for the researcher to express what was seen and heard. It is the richness and creativeness of the expression that provides insight and unlocks the researcher experience. The story can indeed carry that research and when creatively written it can enrich the wholeness of the research as it reaches out to the five human senses, both writers and readers.

So, along with my stack of raw data that still has to be sorted and analysed there is a human file of field researcher experience. Perhaps the stories from the field research and the events recalled by the senses might contribute a new dimension to the research. If I write them well you might see what I saw and even hear what I heard.