

Entrepreneurial narrative and a science of the imagination

William B. Gartner *

Spiro Center for Entrepreneurial Leadership, 345 Surrine Hall, Clemson University, Clemson, SC 29634-1345, United States

Abstract

This article is an introduction to a special issue on entrepreneurial narrative that provides theoretical and empirical links between scholarship in narrative and entrepreneurship as well as demonstrates how theories and methods in narrative may be applied to the study of entrepreneurship as a phenomenon. A conjecture that narrative perspectives might lead to a “science of the imagination” is offered.

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1. Executive summary

This article is an introduction to a special issue on entrepreneurial narrative. A simple definition of narrative approaches is: an analysis of the stories that people tell. The special issue consists of seven articles. The first article is Terry Allen’s story, told in 1984, or how he started a toy store, in Rutland, Vermont, in 1965. The *Toy Store(y)* serves as the basis for six articles that apply narrative approaches.

The goal of the special issue on entrepreneurial narrative is to provide theoretical and empirical links between scholarship in narrative and entrepreneurship as well as demonstrate how theories and methods in narrative may be applied to the study of entrepreneurship as a phenomenon. Narrative approaches and narrative methodologies are

* Tel.: +1 864 656 0825; fax: +1 864 656 7237.

E-mail address: gartner@clemson.edu.

reflexive, that is, in the process of analyzing other people's stories, we, as researchers, are also looking into the mirror of our own stories of how and why our research is conducted. To describe how and why the articles in this special issue analyzed a particular story told by an entrepreneur, from a reflexive point of view, a discussion of the evolution of this special issue is offered, and reasons are provided for why the *Toy Store(y)* in particular, serves as the focus of these narrative analyses.

This introduction is not a summary of the articles in the special issue. Rather, the introduction points out three broad insights that seem to characterize all six narrative analyses: (1) Stories are never complete, in and of themselves. Stories are told in a particular context, to particular listeners, by a particular story teller, for particular purposes. When a story is subject to various narrative approaches, a variety of insights can be gained as to what is really being said and why, as well as what wasn't said which might be. (2) Stories are told in the larger context of other stories and ideas: "larger voices." To listen/read a story offers an opportunity to engage in how a story interrelates to other "larger voices" that readers/listeners bring with them. To call upon these "larger voices" through narrative approaches has value analytically and creatively. (3) Narrative approaches come with their own epistemology, theories, and methods that must be met on their own terms. As this occurs, narrative approaches will play an increasing role in entrepreneurship scholarship.

Readers of the six entrepreneurial narratives might be skeptical of articles where, at points in their development, there is an allowance for "fiction." That is, when there are "unknowns" in the knowledge of specific "facts as given," the authors of these narrative analyses are likely to provide "facts as made." There might be a fear that narrative approaches might lead to taking normative paradigmatic scholarship down the rabbit hole of treating all knowledge as "fiction." This is not actually the case, and rather than setting up a struggle of either/or between paradigmatic approaches and narrative approaches, their inherent similarities are recognized as ways in which knowledge is gained through the application of skill.

The label, "science of the imagination" is suggested as another promise for what entrepreneurship (and specifically, entrepreneurial narrative) might offer as a contribution to scholarship. The narrative of entrepreneurship is the generation of hypotheses about how the world might be: how the future might look and act. The articles in this special issue not only probe how entrepreneurs generate and modify their visions of the future, the scholars in these articles generate and modify alternative visions of the future, as well. There is a skill here, in these six entrepreneurial narratives, that is subtle, but very critical for understanding how the imagination works.

This article concludes with a suggestion that narrative approaches offer ways for both scholars and practitioners to "tell back" entrepreneurial stories. The process of "telling back" surfaces the models we use to talk about entrepreneurship. Narrative approaches not only uncover the models we currently use to talk about entrepreneurship, they give us new ways to talk this phenomenon, as well.

2. Introduction

The aim of this special issue on entrepreneurial narrative is to provide theoretical and empirical links between scholarship in narrative and entrepreneurship as well as

demonstrate how theories and methods in narrative may be applied to the study of entrepreneurship as a phenomenon. I believe that embedded in this aspiration is a sense that narrative approaches surface tensions in “how things are currently done” in entrepreneurship scholarship. I will also suggest that narrative perspectives in the study of entrepreneurship might also lead to the genesis of a science of the imagination. The aim, then, of this special issue is rather far reaching and hitting this target requires a certain amount of deftness, not only on the part of the authors writing for the special issue, but, of our readers, as well. Given that a variety of readers may encounter this special issue (i.e., experts in narrative with little knowledge of entrepreneurship, experts in entrepreneurship with little knowledge of narrative, experts in narrative and entrepreneurship, and novices in both entrepreneurship and narrative scholarship), it was a challenge to select papers and engage authors in revisions that met these multiple goals.

I believe that much of the tension in reading the articles in this special issue will be due to the inherent conflict between “insiders” and others, that is, between expert specialists in specific intellectual domains and those less knowledgeable (Davis, 1971). Demonstrating knowledge and expertise to one group is often irrelevant or obvious to another. One of the major strengths of the *Journal of Business Venturing* has been its constant admonition to scholars to translate theories and results based on insider expertise for a larger domain of individuals (both practitioners and scholars) with less know-how. Yet, in practice, this has meant that both sides must stretch: the novice to undertake an effort to learn aspects of a scholar’s insights and methods, and, the expert to let go of a certain precision, nuance and language that only insiders can see and appreciate. Otherwise, I sense, there is dissatisfaction from each end of the continuum, and not much learning. It behooves readers, then, to bring along fewer expectations and more alertness to the ideas, methods and insights offered in these articles.

The remainder of this article will describe: the evolving logic for how this special issue came to be; highlight from my perspective, some of the insights and ideas posited in the articles in this special issue; and offer some speculations about how the study of entrepreneurial narrative might provide the basis for a science of the imagination.

3. From a story to a narrative analysis

It is very easy to complicate the scholarly area that is connoted by such terms as discourse, narrative, and story (Grant et al., 1998; Rhodes and Brown, 2005). I will offer this rather simplistic description of what narrative approaches do: they involve analyzing the stories that people tell. Hosking and Hjorth (2004: 265) offer a more elaborate description:

- “Story construction is a process of *creating* reality
- in which self/story teller is clearly *part* of the story.
- Narratives are relational realities, socially constructed, not individual subjective realities.
- Narratives are situated — they are con-textualized in relation to multiple local–cultural–historical acts/text.
- Inquiry may articulate multiple narrative and relations.
- Change-work works with multiple realities and power relations, for example, to
- facilitate ways of relating that are open to possibilities.”

There is much discussion about what a story or narrative consists of, whether all stories are narratives or whether all narratives are stories, and any number of other conundrums that scholars in this field can quickly mire themselves in (Grant et al., 2004). Be-that-as-it-may, without getting quickly lost in what are, actually, important semantic issues involved with the labels narrative scholars use to describe aspects of these types of research, narrative approaches provide some very powerful tools for exploring what entrepreneurs (or others) say about what they do.

If there seems to be one archetypal characteristic of narrative approaches and narrative methodologies (e.g., Boje, 2001; Gabriel, 2004; O'Connor, 1997) that permeates this perspective, it would be their reflexivity (Fletcher, 2007). That is, in the process of analyzing other people's stories, we, as researchers, are also looking into the mirror of our own stories of how and why our research is conducted on these other people's stories (Czarniawska, 1997). To describe how and why the articles in this special issue analyzed a particular story told by an entrepreneur, from a reflexive point of view, then, requires some discussion of the evolution of this special issue. While this discussion might seem egocentric, it speaks to the spirit of recognizing the importance of the context in which narrative analyses take place.

First, it is worth noting the difficulty of describing the origin of this special issue “after the fact.” Writing now, about the evolution of an idea that was not, at the outset, labeled as “entrepreneurial narrative” to this outcome as a set of articles on entrepreneurial narrative in the *Journal of Business Venturing*, is much of the difference suggested by Bourdieu (1977) between *opus operatum* — sense making about the process after it is over, as a finished task, and *modus operandi* — sense making about the process while one is still in it. This description is *opus operatum*, with much of the messiness, wrong turns, waiting, ambiguity, and my own stupidity, ignorance and confusion-missing. Since Fletcher (2007) also writes about how this special issue evolved, it may be well worth comparing these two accounts.

I believe that the origin of this special issue, did, actually, begin with this initial question: Is it the researcher, or the “data,” that makes for the generation of insights when undertaking qualitative research? If one, for example, looks at Pitt's (1998) analysis of interview material from two entrepreneurs, are the insights gained from his reading of these entrepreneurs due to: the source material the two entrepreneurs provided; Pitt's process of uncovering this source material; Pitt's analyses; or (“all of the above,” or “something else,” and/or...)? This question is, actually, a fantasy about viewing researchers separate from their research [i.e., “How can we know the dancer from the dance?” (Yeats, 1956)]. Yet, in my own neurotic way (Adler, 1917), I would treat both quantitative and qualitative information “as if” (Vaihinger, 1924/1952) they were sought, collected, interpreted and analyzed irrespective of the researcher. What makes this question “neurotic” is treating the fiction of “research separate from the researcher” as fact (that is, fact as “given” rather than as “made”).¹ Research (quantitative or qualitative) is not “fact as given,” yet, I continue to hold on to this neurotic fantasy that “data” is separate from the researcher and the research

¹ The author thanks Ellen O'Connor for her comments on this section and for offering Giambattista Vico's insight that the term “fact” in Latin is “factum” which means “made.” Yet, as she points out, we now, tend to think of “fact” as something that is “given.”

process. While I was generally aware of many scholars who had poked holes in this fantasy (e.g., Geertz, 1988; Hatch, 1996; Van Maanen, 1988 — I offer only a few citations rather than a comprehensive bibliography to signal my knowledge of mostly North American writers and their sensibilities), it simply is, for me, hard to let go of this fiction. I tend to believe that the quantitative data in the Panel Study of Entrepreneurial Dynamics (Gartner et al., 2004) is “fact as given” rather than a fairly complicated social construction of the beliefs of over 100 scholars submitting questions for a questionnaire, phone survey specialists probing for responses, respondents interpreting these survey questions (e.g., “What does completing a business plan ‘in my head’ mean?”) and scholars selecting questions for analysis and interpreting their results. It was not hard for me to segue from my fantasy that quantitative data (i.e. the PSED—that can be studied by many scholars with the assumption that this research is separate from the researchers who created this data and analyze it) to considering this question: What would happen if a variety of scholars studied the same qualitative “data”? If the qualitative “data” was held constant, would we see variation in the insights generated? If so, would the differences in insights be due to theories, methods, or other issues idiosyncratic to the scholars, themselves?

While Hillman (1983: 111) suggests that: “To be sane we must recognize our beliefs as fictions, and see through our hypotheses as fantasies,” I couldn’t let go of this goal of getting a number of scholars to look at the same qualitative data. My background is strongly influenced by what might be labeled as the “Harvard approach” (Contardo and Wensley, 2004) to analyzing qualitative data as represented in the case method (Barnes et al., 1994; Naumes and Naumes, 1999), and with many years of both creating and using cases for teaching, and with experience with case competitions (as a writer, judge, and team sponsor), the idea of taking qualitative data and comparing how scholars analyzed this material, seemed an obvious and valuable exercise. And, while the *Harvard Business Review* in the “Case Study” section of their magazine offers a comparative evaluation of case material from the viewpoints of a variety of practitioners and scholars, I had not seen an academic journal attempt to publish a series of scholarly articles analyzing the same material. This concept, therefore, seemed worth pursuing.

While I was attending the first “Movements in Entrepreneurship” workshop in Sweden, in June 2001, I mentioned this idea (about having a number of scholars look at the same qualitative data) to Denise Fletcher, and suggested that I had a transcription of a story that an entrepreneur had told me that I thought could serve as the basis for the “data” to analyze. She indicated that the idea and story sounded intriguing, and to send her the transcript. I did.

Now, what the previous paragraph just omits, is my recollection of another, larger dialogue occurring between us on: the “problem” of qualitative researchers publishing their work in North American based academic journals; the issues of validity and reliability in case research that quantitative-oriented journal reviewers seemed to have with manuscripts that didn’t have numbers; and the general lack of knowledge and interest of most North American scholars in the history and philosophy of the science embedded in qualitative entrepreneurship scholarship. I was, then, completing a special issue for the *Journal of Business Venturing* on qualitative research with Sue Birley (Gartner and Birley, 2002), and the above issues seemed most salient based on this insight from that experience: The knowledge and skills of many European entrepreneurship researchers in

the area of qualitative scholarship were far and ahead of their North American counterparts. My sense was (is) that North American scholars who are not steeped in the rich European traditions and methods of qualitative scholarship simply lack clues to the kinds of significant contributions that qualitative scholarship can make.

As Fletcher (2007) describes in her article, there was email correspondence about: the history of the transcription of the entrepreneur's story of the founding of a toy store, which in these articles, is labeled as the "Toy Story," the "Toy Store" or the "Toy Store(y)," and the reasons for why I thought this story might be of value for scholarly analysis. And, subsequently, she wrote a manuscript about this story and sent it to me. The arrival of this manuscript was the inflection point for knowing that there were other scholars who would take the risk of analyzing the story of the "Toy Store," and, that the story seemed to be sufficient for a "Call for Papers."

Starting with the knowledge that Denise Fletcher and I had of which scholars might have some interest and capability to explore the *Toy Store(y)*, I began to contact individuals to ascertain their willingness to develop a manuscript that would be considered for presentation at the Lloyd Greif Symposium on Emerging Organizations, which was an event that I held at the University of Southern California. In addition, besides their manuscript submissions to the symposium, both Chris Steyaert and Daniel Hjorth provided numerous connections to qualitative researchers who might have important contributions to make. From this variety of contacts, manuscripts were submitted, some were selected (decisions were made by the special issue editor), and authors of those selected papers met in February 2004 to present and discuss their work. This special issue then took form as papers were reworked and revised.

A number of reasons (in the retrospection of *opus operatum*) can be offered for why the "Toy Store(y)" was selected as the focus of the analyses in this special issue. First, the story is a transcription of an entrepreneur's presentation told in a classroom setting, similar to the format in many university entrepreneurship courses where entrepreneurs serve as "living cases." Second, the story is, I believe, typical of the genre of stories that entrepreneurs tell in classroom settings, and, it would not be out of the ordinary for a successful entrepreneur to tell a story based on a distant experience that reflected how the entrepreneur underwent a "rite of passage" from a naïve to sophisticated entrepreneur (Smith and Anderson, 2004). Third, the story is typical of the structure of an entrepreneur's story that would end with explicit "lessons" of the kind "Do what I say, not what I do" yet, much of the insights that can be gleaned from the story capture implicit and tacit knowledge about what the entrepreneur actually does. Fourth, there are a number of situations described in the story that are rich in their implications about the values, ethics, character, thoughts, motivations and behaviors of the story's protagonists. Fifth, there is, as in many Harvard-type cases, a "trick" or insight in the story where the application of a bit financial acumen would likely lead a reader to a different conclusion as to the financial straights the entrepreneur tells us he is in [see Baker (2007) for an exploration of this insight]. And, finally, the story, from my perspective, was engaging, and, it seemed that part of the reason I sought to have the story explored was to better understand why it was engaging. So, all-in-all, there seemed to be enough material in the *Toy Store(y)* for other scholars to work with that could likely lead to some keen insights about the nature of entrepreneurship. If you have not already done so, I suggest that you read *The Toy Store(y)* (Allen, 2007) in this issue before reading anything

further in this article or any of the other articles. *The Toy Store(y)* article serves as the “data” upon which all of the other articles are focused.

4. The possibilities of narrative

It would be hubris on my part to make claims that I have substantial expertise in the scholarship of narrative and its application to entrepreneurship. I believe the articles in this special issue are exemplars of the richness, complexity, and depth of narrative scholarship as applied to the entrepreneurship field. I believe that my contribution to this special issue, and to entrepreneurship scholarship, as a whole, is in my role as an amateur (as in the Latin root “lover of”) of entrepreneurship (Gartner, 2004). I am interesting in the phenomenon of entrepreneurship, in whatever form and manifestation (Gartner, 1985, 1993). The implication of this, then, is that I am devoted to looking at the phenomenon of entrepreneurship, at hand, and open to gaining whatever knowledge and skills necessary to make sense of what is within my grasp, and the stories that entrepreneurs tell about their ventures is more often in my day-to-day experience, than not. To explore the story that an entrepreneur tells about the creation of a business, puts me into the scholarship of narrative, but not as one who seeks to use an already gained expertise in narrative ideas and methods.

The review process, then, for the development of these articles, involved sending the manuscripts out to all of the participants in the symposium, as well as to other colleagues I thought might help provide me with insights, with the goal of encouraging these authors to provide better clarity and understanding of narrative approaches for “non-narrative” trained scholars. As mentioned earlier, the ability to write an article that both speaks to scholars in narrative, as well as to outsiders to this tradition, is a challenge that these authors have met.

My intention in this section of the article is to offer my sense of some of the important issues and ideas that are addressed in the articles in this special issue, as I have come to appreciate them. I believe this perspective will be of value to the “typical” reader of the *Journal of Business Venturing*: a reader who has knowledge of entrepreneurship scholarship, is more likely to be using quantitative methods for exploring the phenomenon of entrepreneurship, and, a reader who is likely to wonder about the value of narrative ideas and methods for entrepreneurship scholarship, as a whole. It should also be recognized that the articles speak for themselves, and that the few thoughts I offer merely hint at a cornucopia of insights that can be gleaned from careful study.

4.1. Not the “whole story”

My analysis of the *Toy Store(y)* accepts this story, “as is” — this is, as a story told by Terry Allen: nothing more and nothing less. Yet, in every analysis in this issue, scholars challenge this “as is” assumption. Indeed, Steyaert (2007) begins his article with “I can safely assume that this is not the whole story...” The narrative approach recognizes that a story is never the whole story. Any story is embedded in a context which involves recognizing: when and where the story was written (e.g., how might this story be influenced by the time period of 1965, by the location of the story in Rutland, Vermont in 1965); who is telling the story (e.g., what do we know and don’t know about Terry Allen, the “author” of this story, and, what about other characters in this story, such as John Simmons, the other

entrepreneur, or the wives, or the banker, or the toy supplier, or...), what is in this story (e.g., what information does the author of this story provide, what is omitted, what else could the story say, and why wasn't it said?); and why the story is being told (e.g., what are the author's intention's in telling this story, what were the intentions of the special issue editor in having this story told, rather than another?).

Each of the articles in this special issue both explores and challenges the context of the whole story of the *Toy Store(y)*. As O'Connor (2007) posits, "We want the real goods," beyond the literal and superficial level of the story "as is." Her article provides an overview of the problems of the using the Harvard Case Method approach which assumes a reliable representation of events and an assumption that events depicted in cases are the "facts" rather than interpretations or assumptions. The *Toy Store(y)* is of a genre, a type of writing, that has its own format and logic that is followed by both the author and the reader, and that the genre cannot, as a format, be able to contain the "whole story." I find that O'Connor's analysis of Terry Allen's own lesson of the toy story "I don't know what we learned from this thing, except that if you don't know anything it pays to be absolutely lucky" very perceptive in how she demonstrates that Allen did learn during the events of the story about how to make money from the genesis of the toy store idea. To talk about luck is to place this story in the genre of other entrepreneurship stories where both Allen and the reader not only assume luck, but, also fail to devote the effort to pursue paths to elucidate how entrepreneurship does occur. Insights into how Terry Allen gains this knowledge does not come easily without narrative methodologies that can parse out the interlocking logics this escapade offers.

Fletcher (2007), through the use of the narrative approach of reader response theory, explores the context of the *Toy Store(y)* itself, as products of: the author, Terry Allen; the special issue editor, Bill Gartner; and the article author, Denise Fletcher. As readers, we expect that there is a way in which stories will be told, and, we embrace a story about entrepreneurship that satisfies certain assumptions and beliefs. Fletcher (2007) offers the idea of the "stretchiness" of entrepreneurship, in that stories "stretch" beyond an author's own telling into a larger social construction that is based both on the author's story and on what others bring to their reading of this story, as well. The "whole story," then, must recognize the social, political, philosophical, and inter- and intra-personal context of the story and how it subsumes this story into something else that is no longer just the author's story, alone.

Both Baker (2007) and Ahl (2007) suggest other stories that could be told in conjunction with Allen's story of the *Toy Store(y)* as a well of capturing more of the "whole story." While Ahl's narrative analysis is grounded in a post-structuralist feminist perspective, and could be viewed as, primarily, an exploration of gender issues in entrepreneurship research and education, I see the value of her analysis in exploring this question: "Who else should be speaking?" I find her observation that all of the men in Allen's story have names, and the women do not, as a critical example into Ahl's feminist perspective that men in Allen's story have, through their implicit identification, more value and importance than the women. Yet, the women have a critical story to tell, not only as co-investors in this venture, but also as partners and managers of the store's operations. Issues of gender, then, are also issues about how power and influence are exercised and described, which then implies that some individuals may be more privileged to both tell stories and to be listened to.

Baker, in his application of the idea of bricolage (Baker and Nelson, 2005) to the events of the *Toy Store(y)* suggests a series of other stories told by characters identified in Allen's story as a way to show that the intentions and processes of bricolage can occur outside the specific intentions of the entrepreneur. This idea of "network bricolage" (Baker, Miner, Eesley, 2003), and the stories Baker offers to portray this idea, provide another example of Allen's toy story as not being the "whole story." While Terry Allen offers a story that makes him the primary agent that manipulates other characters towards his goals, Ted Baker offers stories that make these other characters the primary agents who manipulate Terry Allen towards their goals. As examples to demonstrate the similarities and differences among bricolage, "resource seeking," and improvisation, Baker's use of the narrative approach provides a way to surface how the use of bricolage may often be unrecognized, and therefore, untold, by entrepreneurship scholars and practitioners.

4.2. "Larger voices calling"

While all of the articles in this special issue recognize a broader context of social, political, relational, institutional, etc. characteristics that envelop Terry Allen's particular telling of a business startup story, both Hjorth (2007) and Steyaert (2007) point to, what I would term, "larger voices" that inform us of deeper sensibilities and strategies in the nature of entrepreneurship. Hjorth (2007) uses the character of Iago, from Shakespeare's *Othello* to speak outside of managerial and institutional perspectives embedded in our normative views of what entrepreneurship is and how it occurs. Initially, I found the Iago/Roderigo dialogue somewhat incongruous with Terry Allen's toy story, yet, further meditation on Iago's words and Hjorth's exegesis of the drama of entrepreneurship, made apparent to me, how the comprehensive demands of narrative approaches offer an understanding of human nature, not just the nature of entrepreneurship. Rather than narrative approaches serving our normative rationality of thinking of narrative as data for the grist of management scholarship (e.g., Pentland, 1999), narrative approaches can fundamentally alter our world view of what entrepreneurship is vis-à-vis the whole person. By pointing out what Iago speaks, Hjorth yearns for what Allen leaves unspoken to the audience that expects the "enterprise discourse." I believe that Hjorth (2007) is right in his view that "For entrepreneurship the art, politics, ethics, aesthetics of organization creation is, I suggest, central."

Steyaert (2007) very subtly probes (through the use of the philosophy of Nietzsche, literary studies, the humanities, sociology and anthropology) issues about how the individual is construed in entrepreneurship scholarship. He suggests that "who is the entrepreneur?" is not the wrong question, it is a right question wrongly formulated." and crafts an approach to the individual using the narrative alternative. In order to use narrative approaches now (as in this special issue), Steyaert playfully recognizes what it would mean to have used narrative approaches then (Gartner, 1988), when one form of the discussion of the role of the entrepreneur in entrepreneurship was taking place. Entrepreneurial narratives are told in the larger context of a culture of personal narratives in which we all tell our stories in one form or another. "Larger voices" may inform us of the many ways of (who, what, where, why and when) of story telling, yet Steyaert (2007) asks us to consider narrative approaches as a way to "resign from analyzing and

interpreting stories too much and perhaps invest in completing them, playing along, rearrange them, etc.” Narrative approaches, then, not only have value analytically, but also, creatively.

4.3. “Attention must be paid”

As I suggested earlier, while one might consider the usefulness of narrative approaches in regards to how they might be applied to normative quantitative scholarship in entrepreneurship, it might be more appropriate to consider how narrative approaches are valid and insightful, in and of themselves. By implication, once one considers narrative approaches on their own terms, the “terms” of this scholarship, are indeed costly for the quantitative scholar to acquire. I find that the authors in this special issue grapple with the difficulty of bringing readers into their realm of expertise and insight, and, that competence in their areas is often broader, deeper, and more complicated than the foundations of quantitative scholarship. I have not, for example, read recently in a quantitatively based article how authors felt the necessity of explaining multiple linear regression and its various nuances and applications to an analysis of their data, yet, approaches to narrative, at least for now do seem to require more explanation. Given the format and genre of journal articles, this lack of the easy shorthand of common citations, methods, and terminology in narrative approaches might appear to put the publication of articles using narrative analyses at a “competitive disadvantage” to more easily understandable articles from a normative quantitative perspective. I am less inclined to believe this. My view is based less on whether scholars find some relative advantage in using particular qualitative or quantitative methodologies to enhance their ability to publish, and more on the insight that “attention must be paid” to narrative in entrepreneurship.

I find Bruner’s (1986: 11) idea of two modes of thought (i.e., “a good story and a well-formed argument”) particularly helpful in suggesting that a focus on narrative is not about narrative’s relative value to what Bruner labels as the paradigmatic or logico-scientific approach. The narrative approach is a comprehensive way of understanding the world. It is ontologically complete.

“The imaginative application of the narrative mode leads instead to good stories, gripping drama, believable (thought not necessarily “true”) historical accounts. It deals in human or human-like intention and action and the vicissitudes and consequences that mark their course. It strives to put its timeless miracles into the particulars of experience, and to locate the experience in time and place. Joyce thought of the particularities of the story as epiphanies of the ordinary. The paradigmatic mode, by contrast, seeks to transcend the particular by higher and higher reaching for abstraction, and in the end disclaims in principle any explanatory value at all where the particular is concerned.” (Bruner, 1986: 13)

Without belaboring the differences between these two modes of thought, the point I believe worth making here is that an understanding of the phenomenon of entrepreneurship begs for the narrative mode. Therefore, significant growth in the application and publication of narrative scholarship is inevitable.

5. A science of the imagination

One might be skeptical of a series of papers where, at points in their development, there is an allowance for fiction. That is, when there are “unknowns” in the knowledge of specific “facts as given,” the authors of these narrative analyses are likely to provide “facts as made.” It would seem, then, that a drift towards the recognition and use of narrative approaches places the entrepreneurship scholar in the solipsistic bind of reading “science fiction” (creating facts to serve a fiction) or reading “fiction science” (seeing the process of creating facts as a fiction). There might be a fear that narrative approaches might lead to taking logio-scientific scholarship down the rabbit hole of treating all knowledge as “fiction.” This, I believe, is not actually the case, and rather than setting up a struggle of either/or between logio-scientific approaches and narrative approaches, it seems more appropriate to consider their inherent similarities. Ormizton and Sassower (1989) point out that the word *science* comes from the Latin word *scientia*, which means “knowledge” or *scire* meaning “to know.”

“Scire has its roots in *skei*, which means “to cut” or “to split.” Knowledge, then, is understood as the ability, the skill “to separate one thing from another, “to discern.” In the Greek, such separation is related to *skhizein* meaning “to split” into many parts, which is the root for *schizo-* and *schism*. Thus, the ability to discern differences, or what Plato calls in *The Republic* a certain kind of “mindfulness” is related to another Latin root *skel*, which also means “to cut” but which is more directly related to a concept developed later in the Old Norse where *reason*, *knowledge* and *incisiveness* are comprehended by *skil*, a precursor to our contemporary term *skill*.” (p. 5).

The focus on the etymology of *science*, here, is to suggest to the logio-scientifically oriented scholar that all knowledge requires the acquisition of a skill to discern it. The skills of logio-scientific and narrative approaches are both, hard won, and both, not easily dismissed. To acquire knowledge about the nature of entrepreneurship is to be mindful of the phenomenon’s many parts.

I do believe that a focus on entrepreneurial narratives might actually provide a unique contribution to narrative scholarship, normative logio-scientific entrepreneurship scholarship, and to scholarship in science, as well. I posit that normative science tends to hold up as the culmination of the scientific method the standard of falsifiability (Popper, 1959): for an idea to be a scientific idea, it must be testable. I will risk this speculation that the scientific process obsesses on the selection of non-falsifiable ideas. In most cases, less concern is offered for how ideas are generated for falsifiable testing [Campbell (1987) being a significant exception]. Yet, in the Popperian world of falsifiability, the process of science requires the generation of ideas:

“Bold ideas, unjustified anticipations, and speculative thought, are our only means for interpreting nature: our only organon, our only instrument, for grasping her. And we must hazard them to win our prize.” (Popper, 1959: 280).

The process of how ideas come into existence, is, an inherent aspect of entrepreneurial narrative. To study Terry Allen’s story, for example, is to struggle not only with how an idea originates and becomes, but also with how narrative scholars struggle, themselves, with how ideas originate and become (in their study of how their own ideas originate and

become when reading Terry Allen's story). The reflexiveness of narrative scholarship speaks to a "double doubling" of idea creation as both subject and process, twice (both as the object of study, and in the study of the study of the object).

The label, "science of the imagination" is suggested, then, as another promise (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000) for what entrepreneurship (and specifically, entrepreneurial narrative) might offer as a contribution to scholarship. What I find intriguing about the Terry Allen story, is not only how the entrepreneurs constellate the toy store idea "as if" (Gartner, Bird and Starr, 1992; Vaihinger, 1952) it were an on going business, but also how these entrepreneurs suggest various permutations of the idea's manifestation: "What if?" There is, in Allen's toy story, an imagination of the future in most of the actions these entrepreneurs undertake: "What if" we start a toy store? "What if" we get toys on consignment? "What if" we rent a space... get a loan, buy more toys, corner the market on Marvel Mustangs...? The narrative of entrepreneurship is the generation of hypotheses about how the world might be: how the future might look and act. The articles in this special issue not only probe how entrepreneurs generate and modify their visions of the future, the scholars in these articles generate and modify alternative visions of the future, as well. "What if" the reader's knowledge and experience were taken into account in the reading of the toy story? "What if" the women or the banker told their stories of the toy story? "What if" we were to consider all of the paths not taken, and write these unlived lives, as lived? There is a skill here, in these six entrepreneurial narratives, that is subtle but very critical for understanding how the imagination works.

6. Conclusion

I had originally thought to end this introduction with the idea that entrepreneurship scholars face a "story deficit." That is, while we (academic entrepreneurship scholars) currently live in a world that offers a variety of stories by and about entrepreneurs, the arena of academic entrepreneurship scholarship seems to lack much recognition and discussion of entrepreneurship stories. Ask yourself, what stories do you call upon to talk about entrepreneurship? While I can name dozens of entrepreneurs, I doubt whether I could actually tell much about their stories. I have logico-scientific descriptions, explanations, categories, concepts, and hypotheses about entrepreneurs, but, frankly, I don't have many stories to tell. Maybe you do.

While it might be appropriate to surmise that narrative approaches might challenge us to collect more stories, I now believe that the issue is not a "story deficit" but a deficit in how entrepreneurship stories are told. The articles that comprise this special issue show us that there are a variety of narrative approaches that offer a multitude of insights into just one story told by an entrepreneur. I would conjecture there might be ten times the six articles in this special issue that could talk about Terry Allen's story. I hope that this special issue might encourage more scholars to engage in narrative approaches and work to surmount the difficulties of the journal publication process.

These special issue articles represent, in a more sophisticated form, Bruner's (1986: 6–7) idea of "telling back" a story:

"One gets a sense of the psychology of genre by listening to readers "tell back" a story they have just read or spontaneously "tell" a story about a "happening" in their

own lives. “Telling back” a Conrad story, one reader will turn it into a yarn of adventure, another into a moral tale about duplicity, and a third into a case study of a *Doppelgänger*. The text from which they started was the same...

But stories, in Paul Ricoeur’s phrase, are “models for the redescription of the world.” But the story is not by itself the model. It is, so to speak, an instantiation of models we carry in our own minds. An undergraduate seminar in which I once participated interpreted *Hamlet* as an account of the bungling of a Danish prince who had become ‘sword happy’ at his German university and who was so inept at killing the man he hated that he did in his wisest friend, Polonius, in the process. Yet, this student admitted, the play was a “tragedy,” but it was also a bungle (he was in engineering — with a passion.)”

And so, in these six entrepreneurial narratives, Terry Allen is “told back:” through a culture of personal narratives, confronted with the Harvard case method; within the interrelationships of a set of readers and writers; as a misogynist; as a bricolager; and mute vis-à-vis Shakespeare’s Iago. Every telling is an aspect, another facet, of a more multi-dimensional perspective on the nature of entrepreneurship.

And, the process of “telling back” is not only of value as a scholarly exercise. Denise Fletcher (2007) offers images of students’ readings of the toy story, as a way to stretch our imaginations of what narrative approaches might offer.

“At best, education can only be undertaken as an experiment — an attempt to engage others by recollecting – responding or reacting – to the constellation of textual phrasings or connections. The perpetuation of a specific tradition, or fostering disciplines, is not the issue.” (Ormizton and Sassower, 1989: 133).

I hope that this special issue engages you in new ways of knowing and talking about entrepreneurship.

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