Innovation and Discourse: Integrating the Liberal Arts into Engineering Entrepreneurship Education

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Abstract - Entrepreneurship and innovation continue to serve as key terms in political and economic discourse, and it is no surprise that universities and colleges across the country have begun to take advantage of this momentum by building programs and courses. Unsurprisingly, the focus of many of these programs is on the technical side, and the role of the liberal arts remains underdeveloped. Through a discussion of social construction, communication, and metaphor, this paper aims to illustrate a few ways the liberal arts tradition can contribute to engineering entrepreneurship education. As a result, it provides a shared vocabulary for starting conversations that will build truly interdisciplinary endeavors.

1. Introduction

With entrepreneurship and innovation serving as key terms in political and economic discourse, it is no surprise that universities and colleges have begun to take advantage of this momentum, with programs and courses popping up at institutions across the country. Within this growing educational movement, a number of foundations and pedagogical approaches aim to cultivate future entrepreneurs. Many of these programs, like the Kern Family Foundation's Kern Entrepreneurship Education Network (KEEN), seek to graduate not only future entrepreneurs and business professionals but also students who are entrepreneurially minded, real-world engineers and innovators across a wide spectrum of industry and skill levels.

Because of their broad appeal to the virtues of thinking entrepreneurially, these programs are also well positioned to take advantage of the ever-growing calls for cross-disciplinary approaches. As Kriewall and Mekemson (2010) note, “Non-engineering disciplines, like business and humanities, have much to offer to the entrepreneurial mindset. They bring different lenses through which students may see the world along with different experiences that may create opportunities for engineers to understand problems, solutions, business and customers in new ways.” Yet most entrepreneurship programs exist in specific technical or business departments and offer courses, minors, majors, and certificates that reach only those students who choose to pursue a specific path. This means that Kriewall’s and Mekemson’s view that “innovation occurs at the intersection of disciplines” often fails to be fully institutionalized. The failure to make entrepreneurship programs and courses truly interdisciplinary not only decreases opportunities for technical knowledge to overlap, it also decreases the opportunities for non-technical disciplines (i.e., the liberal arts) to add important value to the entrepreneurship education. This paper argues that for engineering entrepreneurship education to be fully successful, it needs to take full advantage of the value of the liberal arts.

Unfortunately, the task of connecting the liberal arts to entrepreneurship education comes with two challenges. Those championing this approach may not always see what the liberal arts have
to offer and those in the liberal arts may not always identify with the values of an entrepreneurially focused education because these principles threaten to shift the pedagogical value of their courses and programs. The task of this paper, then, is to address both of these challenges. First, by reminding those who champion the entrepreneurial mindset that much of the way entrepreneurship is studied today is based on theories of social construction and, critically, language, this paper aims to demonstrate how concepts, theories, and methods drawn from the humanities and liberal arts deepen understandings of entrepreneurship and innovation within organizations and add real, significant value to students’ understanding of entrepreneurship. Second, it describes how the role of language and the theory of social construction can be mobilized as an appeal to faculty who might not see how their teaching and research are relevant to entrepreneurship. Here I explore the relevance of metaphor. As a result, through an appreciation of the role of language in successful innovation, entrepreneurship programs will not only acquire a richer picture of the ways that entrepreneurship is understood by those who study it for a living, they will also secure the leverage necessary to move those in the university who might be reluctant to discuss or teach entrepreneurship. But most importantly, they will critically advance their educational mission to produce thoughtful, creative innovators.

2. Social Construction: The Focus on Language and its Relevance for Entrepreneurship

Following Berger and Luckmann (1967), who continue to serve as touchstones for these sorts of definitions, social construction (or, often, simply "constructivism") is best described in terms of epistemology (i.e., “knowledge” or what we know) and ontology (i.e., "reality"). On the epistemological side, the broad frame of the "sociology of knowledge" recognizes that "human 'knowledge' is developed, transmitted, and maintained in social situations" (Berger and Luckmann, 1967). This view counters more traditional (i.e., Cartesian) philosophical views that argued for an objective reality separate and distinct from human attempts at understanding. The implications of this theory mean that the modern hope of true, objective knowledge is replaced with postmodern, subjective and inter-subjective constructions based on social interactions and inflected by cultural norms. In short, what counts as true is measured not against reality but is constructed by individuals working together. Consequently, on the ontological side, because the understanding of what is real is based on knowledge of the real, once that knowledge is set on the slippery rock of social and cultural interactions, reality itself becomes a construction as well. In their discussion of the epistemological foundations of entrepreneurship, Alvarez and Barney (2010) draw on Berger and Luckmann to make this point efficiently: "The constructivist view asserts that social actions, institutions, and conditions that are presented as an objective reality in realist and critical realist perspectives are, in fact, not objective phenomenon but, instead, are constructed through the interactions and interpretations of people" (564). For the purposes of this paper, what is meant by "interactions and interpretations" can be summed up in essentially one word: discourse.¹

But discourses are not simply individual, static texts; they are the wide array of texts that embody the unstated assumptions, rules, and resources on which other, future (even radically innovative) discourses are built. In this way, paying attention to language and discourse is ultimately about paying attention to the dualistic nature of social action: individual actors shape their discursive realms (and hence reality) while at the same time they continue to be shaped by other "socially constituted, self-regulating mechanisms" within the same realm. For example, the world is dramatically shaped by specific economic truths (e.g., market mechanisms or Marxist

¹ This is a narrowing, because these things can include so much more: actions, sites of production, practices, embodiments, images, etc. (Rutherford 2011).
mechanisms), but these truths are social, they are argued into place and fought over. Once in place, they continue to shape the limits of discourse and thus the limits of the world. In a socialist state, it is hard to escape the logic of Marxism and in the modern capitalist state it is hard to escape the logic of markets. It can be done, but the truth is embedded socially, it is calcified in discourse. The dualistic nature--the shaped and shaping aspects--of social action within social construction reflects the complex reality of culture and also the deep challenge of creating successful entrepreneurial endeavors, for the challenge of any successful innovation (whether commodity or culture change) must overcome an already shaped reality.

Theories of social construction embody and carry on a philosophical transition referred to as the "linguistic turn," wherein the problems of philosophy--those in epistemology and ontology especially--are reframed as problems of language: written, oral, visual discourses. The linguistic turn and its focus on discourses creates an appreciation of the way that language shapes and reshapes meaning, knowledge, and reality. Even in the second decade of the twenty-first century, we remain in the throes of the "linguistic turn" where folks like Derrida, Rorty, Foucault, Latour, Giddens, and a myriad of others continue to drive the scholarship on discourses in a wide variety of disciplines, from sociology to philosophy to anthropology and literature. In short, the turn to discourses that socially construct the world is a turn that underpins much of the scholarship in the humanities and liberal arts.

The effect of this way of looking at the world has been nothing less than radical. Everything from scientific, economic, natural, religious, and legal "truth" is now understood as the result of plays of discourse. Those with even a little philosophical experience will recognize in this basic definition more than a threat of relativism. While relativism is a very real concern and one that theorists within this tradition have spent much time discussing, the goal here is not to provide a philosophical rationale or justification for social construction or for the application of these theories to specific social phenomenon. Instead, this paper shows that social construction has already influenced deep understandings of entrepreneurship and thus can have important ramifications for how entrepreneurship is researched, taught, and engaged across disciplines.

The question might be asked: with regard to entrepreneurship, in what sense is the turn toward social construction a corrective? In brief, the answer is that a socially constructed view of entrepreneurship widens understandings of the forces at work in any innovative endeavor. This approach counters the individualistic, Schumpeterian concept of the "entrepreneur as hero" that creates what Clark and Sorensen refer to as the "cowboy image" of a Thomas Edison, a Bill Gates, or a Richard Branson who goes it alone to innovate an age (27). It takes the belief that an entrepreneur has some innate quality or spirit that is not teachable and replaces it with a set of perspectives, skills, and tactics that, while perhaps still difficult to instill, demystify the entrepreneurial experience. Thus, by treating technical knowledge (or the working widget) as necessary but not sufficient for success, the constructivist viewpoint situates the successful entrepreneur within a wide array of discourses, actors, technologies, and a confluence of political, cultural, historical and economic forces. For example, Xerox’s PARC did not fail technically to innovate the personal computer (their stuff worked) nor did Steve Jobs innovate it himself (he was inspired by what he saw at PARC). The development and diffusion and success of those innovations do not stand or fall on technical matters. Perhaps Jobs’s greatest innovation was not the iPhone, but the rock-star keynote presentation that sold those ideas to an eager public. Thus, more is going on than just technical proficiency. For effective diffusion to occur, these social forces must first be seen, then negotiated through a variety of discursive channels at a variety of levels. Theories of social construction illuminate these forces and orient innovators to these levels by saying, essentially, that innovation is a social process, and that entrepreneurial success occurs
either by accident (more often than might be admitted) or through the thoughtful, discursive navigation of the wider world.

This is not a new argument. For years entrepreneurship has been understood as a thoroughly social process. As a result, located within the field of entrepreneurship studies are two specific rationales motivating the case made here. First are the fields of organizational theory and organizational communication, which recognize that entrepreneurial activities constitute the grounds of future (or work within already existing) organizations and institutions. As Aldrich and Martinez (2003) note, "in a fundamental sense [...] entrepreneurship involves the social construction of new social entities" (359). Others like Jablin and Putnam (2001), Fairhurst and Putnam (2004), Putnam and Fairhurst (2001), and Phillips et al. (2004) capture this tradition thoroughly. Nevertheless, suffice it to say that both of these entities—organizations and institutions—are generally conceptualized as "social," and their development fundamentally discursive. As Fairhurst and Putnam put it, "scholars increasingly assert that organizations are discursive constructions because discourse is the very foundation upon which organizational life is built" (5). Offering a near mirror statement from an institutional point of view, Phillips et al. argue "that language is fundamental to institutionalization: institutionalization occurs as actors interact and come to accept shared definitions of reality, and it is through linguistic processes that definitions of reality are constituted" (635). Because entrepreneurs are in the business of producing, shaping, transforming, and sustaining organizations and institutions, the social construction at the core of these broader theoretical positions will also apply to the entrepreneurship process in general.

The second rationale for seeing entrepreneurship through the lens of social construction comes from a number of scholars specifically arguing that it usefully explains how entrepreneurship really works (Lindgren and Packendorff 2009, Aldrich and Martinez 2003, Alvarez and Barney 2010). What these scholars wish to explode is the myth that the successful entrepreneur is a solitary genius working alone to patent a product that everyone needs. The sources of these arguments differ. Alvarez and Barney, for example, emphasize the importance of social constructionism by making an important distinction between critical realist (non-constructionist) and evolutionary realist (constructionist) perspectives. The former captures the epistemological and ontological world where the entrepreneur discovers and exploits an already existing opportunity. The latter, social constructionist, view captures the more accurate epistemological and ontological world where the entrepreneur creates the opportunity and the audience. For example, what websites like Kickstarter illustrate so well, is that often entrepreneurs do not simply find audiences; they mobilize written, oral, and visual discourses to create the very markets they hope to serve. Perhaps the best case of this is iPad owners, a social entity that emerged with the innovation of the “third screen.” Because a creation opportunity can easily be rewritten as a more simple discovery opportunity, these authors believe that teaching entrepreneurship as a social construction serves as an important corrective against what Lindgren and Packendorff (2009) call "a dualistic" and "much-simplified world" (28). In short, these authors use theories of social construction to complicate and thus more accurately describe the innovation process.

In a similar vein, Aldrich and Martinez's chapter on social construction in The Handbook of Entrepreneurship Research (2003) describes the ways organizations, populations, and communities contribute to entrepreneurial social constructions. Ultimately, theirs is a call for research that takes these processes seriously. Lindgren and Packendorff (2009) echo this call by outlining the research opportunities that emerge once entrepreneurship is viewed as a social construction. In short, not only has a focus on discourse and social construction helped to illuminate entrepreneurship at the theory and definitional level, it has also served as a call for
new, empirically grounded studies of the ways entrepreneurship actually occurs. The second half of this essay explores how some of these research projects create the opportunities to build bridges with other, not obviously entrepreneurial disciplines.

3. The Easy Appeals: Connecting Entrepreneurship to Courses in Theory, Method, and Practice

Whatever the ultimate philosophical validity of social construction, it has acquired a purchase by those who study entrepreneurship, organizations, and institutions that cannot be denied. Unfortunately, many programs have yet to fully recognize and incorporate it, and this handicaps their interdisciplinary, cross-departmental efforts to cultivate entrepreneurial-mindedness. For until they understand these theoretical positions, those appealing to faculty interests in non-engineering, non-business, and non-technical disciplines will fall short. But once a social constructionist, discursive-friendly approach is validated, two things happen. First, the program's own definition and understanding of entrepreneurship, innovation, and cultural change are secured on a broader theoretical footing. Second, the appeals to those other disciplines become inclusive, easier and more persuasive. After all, many of these programs do not seek to hijack or redirect the curriculum of an entire course, nor do they necessarily require new courses or new programs of study. Instead, their appeal to incorporate entrepreneurial principles into modules in already existing courses should be an easier sell. Unfortunately, it is not, for the reasons identified above. Hence, access to those courses will remain closed off and the powerful contributions limited until the appropriate appeal can be found. Social construction is one of those appeals, and it can be made in liberal arts courses linked to theory, method, and practice.

3.1. Theory: Sociology and Philosophy

The first connection is so obvious it hardly deserves mention: because social construction is a theory, built out of philosophy and fully developed within sociology, faculty discussing it and related theories in their courses might easily use case studies from the entrepreneurship literature to ground and illuminate the ways those and related theories work. Here the commitment is small, and if students are predisposed to it, the theories may come alive for them in a way that that abstract theories often do not. The variety of theoretical positions to which social construction is relevant, depending on the pedagogical approach, is quite large, giving faculty freedom to discuss, critique, evaluate, and apply different frameworks. Some starting points include Berger and Luckmann, Garfinkle, Mead, Derrida, Giddens, Fairclough, Goffman, Latour, Foucault, Heidegger, and Kuhn. Each of these (and many more) can illuminate and be illuminated through conversation with principles of entrepreneurship.

One criticism of this first appeal is that it results in students that know about entrepreneurship but who are not entrepreneurs. This criticism has legs only if all students are expected to become patent-holding small business owners (and perhaps not even then). In a program like KEEN's that seeks entrepreneurially minded engineers, the value of theory is much greater, for it develops individuals who are aware of the ways in which language and environments foster innovation and who can create environments where that language will flourish. It means that they can create the conditions within which innovation might flourish, even if they are not intent on creating new value themselves.
3.2. Method: Discourse Analysis and Beyond

Theory often has practical implications for critical study, which makes methodological discussions and applications another easy site where faculty not predisposed to entrepreneurship can integrate it into their classrooms. In general, these methodologies address the following question: If we grant that entrepreneurship is socially constructed, then how do we study the role of language and communication in the formation, conceptualization, and success of entrepreneurs? Scholars who take this question seriously apply a variety of methods to acquire a clearer understanding of how entrepreneurship proceeds. Many of these methods—both quantitative and qualitative—emerge out of discourse analysis, the study of language in use.

Discourse analysis, however, is not a singular methodology employed in only a few very narrow cases. According to Putnam and Fairhurst (2001), discourse analysis covers the following methodological approaches: sociolinguistics, conversation analysis, cognitive linguistics, pragmatics (including ethnography), semiotics, literary and rhetorical analysis, critical language studies, and postmodern language analysis. This is a range of methods, to be sure, and so the key point regarding methodology is that the study of language in organizations (including thriving and budding entrepreneurship firms) comes through a variety of means, and, consequently, can be taught in a surprising variety of courses and departments. The specific application of rhetorical and literary analysis to entrepreneurship will be discussed below, but other sites where these methods show up include courses in philosophy, sociology, feminism, cultural studies, American studies, media studies, psychology, etc. Essentially, any course that explores the use of sign systems (written, oral, visual, media-based) is a course where entrepreneurship might profitably serve as a case study.

The benefit in both the theory and method appeals, then, is twofold. First, the student's grasp of the theme (the theory or the method) is advanced by being tethered to a case regarding entrepreneurship. Second, the student's grasp of entrepreneurship is advanced by closely studying it in the world. Before turning to the way specific theory-based methodological applications of social construction illuminate entrepreneurship and provide entry points to other disciplines, it is important to point to a more general aspect of practice that serves as the third site for easy appeal.

3.3. Practice: Rhetoric and Communication

If social construction does nothing else, it indicates the utter importance of communication for the successful innovation and diffusion of ideas. Hence, the third easy appeal is found in disciplines that teach writing and speaking, disciplines where many faculty often already approach their courses instrumentally by appealing to the fact that "communication skills" are the most highly sought-after skills in future employees. While these faculty members employ this hyper-pragmatic argument to persuade resistant students of the value of their courses, these professors are also products of the linguistic turn. This means that though these theories may not often find voice in their classes, they most certainly influence teaching philosophies, assignments, lectures, and, importantly, the professors’ own research agendas. If these faculty members are to be persuaded to explicitly integrate principles of entrepreneurship into their courses, the way forward is to appeal to this theoretical background.
For many communications faculty primed to accept this appeal, the entry point is rhetorical theory, the ancient framework under which most professors who teach writing and speaking work. At the risk of oversimplifying, rhetoric instructs how to employ appeals to ethos (the character of the writer/speaker), pathos (the emotions of the audience), and logos (the logic of good arguments) to craft purposeful messages for specific audiences within particular contexts. Like the theory of social construction to which it is related (some would say it presaged), rhetorical theory is a rich and vibrant field of study that has been usefully applied to entrepreneurship (see Downing 2005, Anderson 2005, Holt and Macpherson 2010). But for all its theoretical value, rhetoric is a highly pragmatic, practical discipline that provides students with a thoughtful framework for constructing effective messages in the real world. These messages are often conveyed through business plans and elevator pitches, genres that can be clearly and productively located within a rhetorical framework.

The business plan, perhaps the core document of any entrepreneurship or new ventures course, is often viewed as the most important text that an entrepreneur will craft. Indeed, pick up any relevant textbook and you are certain to have an entire chapter devoted to the genre of the business plan. These chapters are almost always serviceable, but because they treat the business plan as a fixed, rigid document, they underplay what any teacher of writing would say is critical: whatever the value of the template offered (and entrepreneurship textbooks always offer a template), the success of a business plan requires an appreciation of audience, purpose, argument, and context, the hallmarks of a rhetorical point of view. The link to rhetoric is consonant with and a critical part of the linguistic turn and theories of social construction. As a result, faculty that teach writing from a rhetorical point of view are already aware of the ways in which language shapes and is shaped by audience and context, and even if the business plan is not often taught in their courses, they already understand the ways in which what they teach empowers students to use language strategically to persuade. The business plan—and the larger proposal genre and the role of argument more generally—then, is a potentially easy appeal to any faculty member who teaches courses with any kind of sensitivity to writing or rhetoric. Connect the business plan to larger civic goals through social entrepreneurship, and the appeal will be even more welcome.

If the business plan is the quintessential written genre of entrepreneurship, then the elevator pitch is its oral counterpart. Again, like the business plan, this genre is not often taught inside traditional speech classes, though this may be changing. Also similar to the business plan, the elevator pitch contains implicit rhetorical connections to audience, purpose, argument, and context that any faculty who teaches speech will recognize immediately. For example, at Kettering University, the elevator pitch has been distilled down into an implicitly rhetorical heuristic based on the Need, Approach, Benefit, Competition (NABC) model described by Carlson and Wilmot in their book *Innovation* (2006). The NABC framework is fundamentally rhetorical because of its focus on need (the specific exigency), the benefits (for a consumer audience), and the competition (for the listening audience). Employing this model requires thinking rhetorically, whether entrepreneurs know it or not. Within Kettering's Entrepreneurship Across the University program, this heuristic has served as a framework for presentations at faculty seminars and is a common means by which non-communication faculty have incorporated the entrepreneurial mindset into their courses. For those who teach a rhetorical approach to communication, the use of the NABC model in courses that typically do not teach writing or
speaking is a welcome sight because it allows conversations about the importance of rhetoric, writing, and speaking to occur across the university.

Thus, like their counterparts who teach writing, speech faculty will roundly support the argument that an innovative idea is nothing if the value proposition cannot be efficiently and clearly explained orally. But like the business plan, the elevator pitch is but a subset of the oral genres and general oral communication aptitudes any successful entrepreneur will need. The elevator pitch (via the NABC model or another), then, is a second entry point for engaging faculty who teach students the theoretical foundations of crafting smart, thoughtful discursive acts that will be successful in the real world.

In short, the broad theoretical connections to philosophy and sociology, the wide range of methodological application, and the more practical connections to oral and written communication create potentially easy entry points for expanding and deepening student understanding of the principles of entrepreneurship across a variety of disciplines. But while these faculty might be quickly persuaded that what they teach is relevant, this can only happen to the extent that those doing the persuading have already persuaded themselves of the value of entrepreneurship's constructivist and discursive core.

**4. Entrepreneurship and Metaphor**

Accepting the creative role language plays in the social construction of reality implies that insights into that reality can be gained by studying the function of language in use. What is more, understanding how discourses of entrepreneurship actually function has important implications for instructing and altering the practice of entrepreneurs. In this section, the rhetorical and literary study of metaphor illuminates how the study of language adds value to entrepreneurial education and can be taken up in a variety of courses that deal in the constitutive power of discourse.

**4.1. Understanding Entrepreneurship Through Metaphor**

One of the most productive ways of exploring how language figures reality is to look at the figural use of language itself, metaphor in particular. In the universe of entrepreneurship, many constellations of metaphors shape how it is constituted. Capturing this constellation of metaphors is important for explicating entrepreneurs’ own self-understanding (who do they think they are?) and for describing how portrayals of entrepreneurship generate and rely on a broader cultural conceptualization of what entrepreneurship is (who do we think they are?). Consequently, metaphor is often studied in one of two ways: through conversation or narrative analysis of entrepreneur's talk and through corpus studies of entrepreneurship in media and the news. The focus on metaphor, then, has both methodological and substantive implications.

In a study that epitomizes both of these implications, Nicholson and Anderson (2005) explored the semiological shift in metaphoric portrayal of entrepreneurs over ten years of British newspaper stories. What they discovered was that the portrayal shifted from entrepreneurs as mythological heroes in 1989 to entrepreneurs as more rational, fallible agents in 2000. The authors argue that this difference captures shifts in socioeconomic, political, and cultural influences that had occurred over those ten years, in particular, the contribution entrepreneurs made to the financial crisis. While Nicholson and Anderson do not claim that these representations are reality, their work demonstrates that the use of metaphors constrains and
controls how entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship are conceptualized in specific spheres, which affects what and how they innovate.

The study of metaphor use by entrepreneurs themselves does similar work. Dodd (2002), for example, employed discourse analysis to study entrepreneurs' life stories to see how metaphor emerged in their own narratives. She located seven different metaphors, ranging from journey and race to parenting, building, and war. Depending on which is chosen, each of these frames entrepreneurship by making prominent particular features of the experience. Building on Dodd (2002), Cannice and Bell's (2010) analysis of five years of survey results identified 14 different metaphors, which ranged from evolution to physics to architecture, war, games, and writing. The sheer variety of these metaphors in both these studies is a stunning commentary on the creative ways entrepreneurs think about what they do. But perhaps more important for discussions of social construction, each metaphor also figures entrepreneurship in specific and quite interesting ways and raises useful questions.

Thus, the value of entrepreneurial metaphor analysis is twofold. First, each of these studies employs a specific discursively sensitive methodological approach that might serve as models (both to emulate and to criticize) in classes where those methods are discussed. Second, coming to terms with the ways that language shapes how entrepreneurship is conceptualized by both those who do it and those who talk about it raises questions for reflection and analysis: What happens when entrepreneurship is framed as a process akin to birth instead of battle? A journey instead of building? How do these different metaphors figure agency, competition, context, and ultimately success? These questions belong not only in the entrepreneurship classroom, but also in classes where the significance of rhetorical style is often discussed—literature, poetry, speech, and writing classes, for example. Furthermore, these discussions capture the significance of metaphor use by entrepreneurs and serve to prepare future entrepreneurs. As Dodd argues, the use of metaphor is both a creative force for entrepreneurial imagination in general and "a useful addition to our didactic armoury, facilitating students grasp of what it feels like to be an entrepreneur" (532). As such, discursively sensitive analyses of metaphor illuminate the methodological, substantive, and pedagogical value of studying constructive language.

4.2. Understanding Entrepreneurship As Theater and Storytelling

While it is instructive to see how entrepreneurs and their minders employ figurative language (the inductive account above), for those who theorize it in terms of social construction, metaphor also serves as a productive framework to explain the socially constructed nature of the entrepreneurship process more generally. Two metaphors in particular are relevant here—theater/drama and narrative/storytelling—and both emerge out of and help to account for the inherently uncertain environment within which innovations develop.

It will come as no surprise to those who advocate for innovative ideas that what they are often doing is performing for an audience. However, theorizing entrepreneurship through the theatre/drama metaphor articulates why performance is a meaningful way to understand what entrepreneurs do and to explain why they should actively embrace the metaphor in order to be better persuaders. Anderson (2005), for example, argues that entrepreneurship is a process of becoming, where entrepreneurs faced with an unknowable and uncertain future must act as if—as if the prototype works, as if the market exists, as if the profits are known, as if the competition can be beaten, etc. The business plan and elevator pitch embody acts to control this liminal
space: they are both fact and fiction, projected fantasies performed through persuasive appeals (598). This is social construction on the ground, where the better the performance, the more real the entrepreneur's reality. The theater/drama metaphor has implications for the audience as well, for like any audience to a performance, they must suspend their disbelief and accept the fantasy pedaled by the entrepreneur. All told, Anderson argues, rightly, that embracing the theater/drama metaphor has implications not only for how entrepreneurship is understood as a social, enacted process; it also provides an impetus for entrepreneurs to take themselves seriously as performers. This includes taking up a critical stance towards their performances (not unlike a theatre critic). Thus, it is a short step from here to the productive and critical experience offered in speech or theatre courses, where performance can be practiced, evaluated, and improved.

The narrative/storytelling metaphor also contains conceptual and practical aspects that result from and respond to the uncertain character of the innovative process. Also like the performance metaphor, the ubiquity of stories will not come as a surprise to entrepreneurs, for as Johansson notes, "successful entrepreneurs have developed a reputation as 'raconteurs'" (283). By analyzing interviews with practicing entrepreneurs (an important methodological aspect of discourse analysis), a number of scholars have explored the way entrepreneurs use stories (Johansson 2004, Down 2006). On the conceptual side, these studies show how storytelling captures the ways in which entrepreneurs construct their own self-identities by telling stories about where they have been and where they are going (Down 2006). The resulting constructed self-identity "expresses a reality" for the entrepreneur and the audience she is trying to persuade (27). Storytelling is critical for both these audiences, because the narrative coherence sold to self and other settles the turbulence of time into a compact, comfortable, confident statement about what has happened and will happen. Thus conceptualizing entrepreneurship as narrative--as storytelling and/or story making--encourages entrepreneurs to reflect on and improve the persuasive power of the stories they tell (Johansson 2004). There is an obvious and deep connection here to the rhetorical power of narrative, but because those courses can be appealed to in other ways, the narrative metaphor might perhaps be better used to connect to those courses where good stories are read, discussed, and produced.

Together the entrepreneurs' use of a variety of metaphors and the power of the theater/drama and narrative/storytelling metaphors highlight how a discursive point of view reconceptualizes entrepreneurship, reframes practice, and, as a result, identifies themes and techniques that can be explored in a variety of courses outside business and entrepreneurship programs. As it is in any context where language works, the role of metaphor in entrepreneurship is natural and intuitive, often nearly automatic: entrepreneurs perform, they tell stories, and they use metaphors. If this does not seem new, it is because it is not. Yet when the importance of these discursive tools and techniques is recognized, it enriches understandings of how entrepreneurship works, and, more importantly, it shows how entrepreneurs can self-consciously employ metaphors and think metaphorically to become more rhetorically effective, and hence more successful entrepreneurs.

\[2\] A liminal space is a space of transition, where something is moving from one thing to another. In the case of entrepreneurship, the entrepreneur’s performance attempts move the non-existent or unfunded thing into a funded reality.
5. Conclusions

The purpose of this article has not been to advocate for a specific approach to entrepreneurship, entrepreneurial education, or entrepreneurial-mindedness. Instead, the goal has been to champion the important role of the liberal arts in this process and to indicate where and how those wishing to integrate principles of entrepreneurship across the university might begin to make their case for those in non-technical disciplines. The emphasis has been on discourse because the theoretical, methodological, and practical aspects of thinking and working with language connect to a wide variety of disciplines in the humanities. However, this is only one approach. While this essay’s advocacy for social construction has focused on the micro-processes of language use, constructivist theories also point outward to larger macro-forces that shape and are shaped by discourses. Thus, social construction is merely a seed concept, a framework through which principles of entrepreneurship can be linked to theories, cases, and methods taught in law, political theory, feminist theory (Greer and Greene 2003), history, linguistics (Clark and Sorenson 2002), psychology, even religious studies (Kauffman 2008).

However, before those links can be made, academic entrepreneurship programs that hope to work across disciplines need to recognize, embrace, and make room for their contributions. If the value of the liberal arts is to be harnessed and if the goal of an entrepreneurially minded student body is to be achieved across the university, then the first step for those doing the persuading is to appreciate the essential role that discourse and language play in making that change possible. There exists, then, an almost recursive rationale for first thinking about entrepreneurship in terms of discourses and social construction: this article, this journal, and the wider foundations promoting it in institutions of higher education all function to shape what entrepreneurship will become. Distinguishing civic entrepreneurship from social entrepreneurship from intrapreneurship from entrepreneurial-mindedness and arguing about the variety of ways it should be defined, taught, and incorporated into colleges and universities all continually alter and shift how entrepreneurship is understood. As a cultural force, then, entrepreneurship remains firm but fluid because it continues to be written and talked about. This paper reflects and, if it is at all persuasive, alters the way institutions construct entrepreneurial knowledge and foster future entrepreneurs.

References


