Filming Entrepreneurship

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Abstract. In this article, we propose a method for teaching entrepreneurship as a dynamic, real-life phenomenon by challenging students to produce a film that 'captures' entrepreneurship in this way. In introducing the teaching method, we build on insights from visual literacy. We contend that when teaching students about entrepreneurship, the use of film stimulates and tests students' ability to deal with something new and innovative; it teaches them to think about concepts at a higher level of abstraction, and to formulate their own vision rather than simply learning existing definitions. Finally, we maintain that filming fosters the ability to use visuals to recognize opportunities and to convey these opportunities to potential stakeholders.

Keywords: entrepreneurship education, film, entrepreneurship as dynamic phenomenon, active learning, visual literacy.

1. Introduction

In this article, we propose a method for teaching entrepreneurship based on having students make a film about entrepreneurship. Teaching by means of film or video has become rather popular (Champoux, 1999, 2001; Mallinger & Rossy, 2003; Buchanan & Huczynski, 2004; Bumpus, 2005), and this is also the case in entrepreneurship education (van Gelderen and Verduyn, 2003; Neck et al., 2007). Van Gelderen and Verduyn (2003) have described how a set of feature films about entrepreneurship can serve as case studies in entrepreneurship education. Neck et al. (2007) have described how one particular movie (Dead Poets' Society) can be used in entrepreneurship education to illustrate the entrepreneurial mindset as well as to facilitate a discussion on the topic. Van Gelderen and Verduyn (2003) and Neck et al. (2007) both cite examples of using existing film material in the classroom. Having students make their *own* films can be regarded an innovation when it concerns the already existing experiences in teaching by means of film or video.

This article introduces a course outline for having students make their own films about entrepreneurship, and discusses experiences from a pilot course in relation to learning about entrepreneurship. We have designed this course because we wanted to teach about entrepreneurship as a dynamic and 'real-life' phenomenon, and to encourage our students to go and 'capture' this phenomenon not by means of (static) text, or photo, but by means of streaming image: film.

2. Filming Entrepreneurship

Using films in the (entrepreneurship) educational setting has several benefits. Film captures the complexity of issues (van Gelderen and Verduyn, 2003); helps provide a vivid learning experience (van Gelderen and Verduyn, 2003, Neck et al., 2007); motivates students and sparks their imagination (van Gelderen and Verduyn, 2003); helps students understand and begin to cultivate their own entrepreneurial mindset (Neck et al. 2007); and helps stimulate discussion (Neck et al., 2007).

These benefits all relate to the use of film as a passive learning tool (watching). Having students make their *own* films has several additional benefits. Firstly, by introducing an assignment like filming to students who have no prior background in or even explicit interest in film-making, the student's ability to deal with something new and innovative is engaged and tested. Secondly, by giving them an active role as film directors students are challenged to think about concepts they read about in the course literature at a higher level of abstraction, and formulate their own vision rather than simply learning existing definitions (Van der Wal, 1999). Focusing techniques, editing, framing of shots, camera angles and sound help a director make a powerful statement. In this respect, the use of film forms an important means for teaching students to read or decode messages. Thirdly, filming stimulates the ability to use visuals to convey an idea to an audience and communicate more effectively.

Clearly this is an important skill for entrepreneurs: in order to turn their ideas into reality, entrepreneurs will often have to convince others to invest in their venture or to give them access to valuable information and resources. Written reports and business plans may be valuable tools in obtaining such support, but using visuals may prove to be even more powerful in committing others to the venture. The "ability to 'read,' interpret, and understand and use information presented in pictorial or graphic images" is called visual literacy (Wileman 1993: 114).

Associated with visual literacy is visual thinking, described as "the ability to turn information of all types into pictures, graphics, or forms that help communicate the information" (Wileman, p. 114). Having students make their own films employs visuals as more than 'just' a visual stimulus for interpreting and creating meaning. One can say that visual thinking is about *different* ways of

thinking or looking; not only at entrepreneurship, but which develops the students' 'mental agility' (Verduyn and Jansen, 2005) or 'imagination' (Gartner, 2007). One may argue convincingly that it helps in the (future) identification and exploration of entrepreneurial opportunities (Chia, 1996, Kirby, 2004). According to Gartner (2007), entrepreneurs generate and modify *visions* of what 'the future' might be, or where things may go. If students are able to capture these visions in film, this will not only inspire them to pursue their visions of the future but, as stated previously, will also enable them to convince and commit potential investors and other stakeholders to support their venture.

Promoting visual literacy, and thus visual thinking, in combination with the awareness of the openness or 'unfinalizability' (Steyaert, 2007) that comes with studying entrepreneurship as a dynamic and real-life phenomenon (see next section), can thus be very powerful instruments in fostering entrepreneurial potential.

We will now elaborate on the underlying entrepreneurial perspective in designing a course based on filmmaking. Subsequently, we will provide an outline for a course based on this method and discuss findings based on a pilot. These form the basis for the conclusion.

3. Conceptualizing Entrepreneurship

Since what entrepreneurship educators teach mirrors their own perspective (Neck et al., 2007), we will elaborate on the viewpoint adopted by the teachers and applied in the course. In the entrepreneurship literature, many conceptualizations of entrepreneurship can be found. These range from the founding of a new firm (e.g. Gartner, 1989; Deakins, 1996; Reynolds, 1997) to the exploitation of opportunities to create value regardless of the context (new venture creation, corporate entrepreneurship, or even public entrepreneurship) in which this occurs (Shane and Venkataraman, 2000).

In our pilot course, the focus is on the former approach (entrepreneurship as new venture creation) and more specifically, on the *process* of new venture creation. 'Process' is a recurring term in entrepreneurship research and it can be conceptualized in many ways (see Steyaert, 2007 for an overview of process approaches in entrepreneurship studies). In the approach applied to this course, the nature of the entrepreneurial process (and 'opportunity') is understood to be about *emergence*; the emergence of 'something new' (in this case a new venture). A process view predicated on emerging (or better: becoming) demonstrates an interest in 'underlying complexities' (Nayak, 2008) and thus in 'everydayness' (Steyaert, 2004).

In a process view predicated on emergence entrepreneurial processes are seen to be enacted through *daily activity and interaction* (Steyaert, 2004) – entrepreneurship as it *is* (or: as it has been) happening, the actual, everyday

unfolding of it. A (new) venture is not the end product of a series of (sequential) steps; rather than a *fait accompli*, entrepreneur*ing* as process should be understood as a *fait accomplissant* (Nayak 2008: 178). Entrepreneuring as process is open, unfinalizable (Steyaert 2007); it comes with a sense of 'surprise'.

Adopting this process view means that we are interested in how activities are formed, how they flow and change (the *dynamics* of entrepreneurship), and also in activities that could easily be dismissed as too *ordinary* or too *mundane* in another viewpoint (Mitchell, 1997; Steyaert, 2004; Hytti, 2005).

Having students learn about 'real-life' entrepreneurship thus means that they learn to have an eye for its 'everyday' (mundane) quality. In our experience, students tend to have a somewhat glamorous idea of management in general and entrepreneurship in particular. This view of the entrepreneurial hero is reinforced by many publications in popular-science journals and other media, as well as by scientific publications that focus on the special personality of entrepreneurs vis-à-vis other actors in society (Ogbor, 2000; Schwabenland, 2001; Nicholson & Anderson, 2005). Yet entrepreneurship is not only about heroic, fast-growing, successful ventures, but also about small-scale, *ordinary* entrepreneurial initiatives (Mitchell, 1997; Steyaert, 2004 and Hytti, 2005).

Understanding the everyday nature of entrepreneurship helps students to realize that entrepreneurship presupposes a 'feet on the ground' attitude. We feel that this 'reality check' enhances our students' ability to make better-informed decisions about whether or not they can and want to become entrepreneurs, while at the same time it raises the awareness that in fact entrepreneurs are normal people (rather than heroes), thus making the profession more attainable (Hytti, 2005).

In short, through the course, we aim to guide the students in experiencing, exploring, discovering and 'capturing' entrepreneurship as a real-life and dynamic phenomenon of new venture creation. As stated in the introduction, we aim to achieve this through having students create their own film; the only way to 'capture' something in its everyday unfolding is film.

4. A Course Overview

The course design we describe in this paper is based on 160 study hours (designed to run over 8 weeks). Table 1 presents the activities per week, Table 2 an estimate of student time investment per activity.

Table 1: Overview of activity per week

When?	What?
Week 1	- First lecture: Introduction to the course
	- Video workshop
Week 2	- Second lecture: Filming as a research method
Week 3	- Preparing to film: the making of the film script.
	- End of week 3: film script due
Week 4	- Progress meeting (consultation session)
	- Start collecting the 'raw material' (filming)
Week 5	- Collecting the 'raw material' – cont.
Week 6	- Making of the film (editing)
	- Progress meeting (consultation session)
	- End of week 6: film due
Week 7	- Writing of the paper
	- End of week 7: paper due
Week 8	- Closing session: Film Festival

Table 2: Overview of estimated student time investment

Activity	Estimated time (hours)
Contact hours with teacher	10
Preparation for introductory seminar (reading, preparing questions)	20
Preparing for the filming process – making the script	40
Filming (setting up, collecting raw materials)	10
Making the actual film (editing etc.)	40
Writing the paper	40

The learning goals communicated to the students are:

- We want to guide the students in experiencing, exploring and discovering entrepreneurship as a real-life and dynamic phenomenon and as an ongoing process; we emphasize this perspective through filmmaking as a teaching method.

- In making a film on entrepreneurship, students have to think not only about what they want to communicate through their film about the topic (the film's main argument(s)), but also what kind of effect they want to create; what they want to stipulate and how (by using filming techniques: focusing, framing, camera angles, sound etc.);

- Creating a film means the students will have to develop their own ideas *and* 'translate' these ideas into streaming image (instead of 'static' text). In this way we aim to stress the idea of entrepreneurship as a dynamic phenomenon;

- Further, as directors of their own films, students take an active role in constructing knowledge in and through real-life entrepreneurial contexts.

Box 1: Course assignment and instructions

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Assignment

Create a film (individually or in pairs) lasting no more than 5 minutes. The film has to provide a clear and dynamic picture of entrepreneurship. From the film, one should be able to grasp what your idea of entrepreneurship is, and what it looks like in 'real life' ('the dynamics of entrepreneurship'). The films are due at the end of Week 7.

You must also write an accompanying paper. This paper should contain:

    -a summary of the assigned reading material
    -a discussion of your own perspective on the dynamics of entrepreneuring
    -a reflection on the link between these two aspects (reading material and your
        own perspective).
    -a brief discussion of how the film has contributed something new to the orig-
        inal classroom discussion, something that has come 'as a surprise'.

In short, the paper should serve as the written introduction for the film. It should contain no more than 10 pages.

Evaluation

The film and the paper are equally weighted as far as grading is concerned. The films are evaluated using the following criteria:

    -the quality of the camera work;
    -the originality of the material;
    -the extent to which the film meets basic course requirements (duration of the
        film, general topic) and
    -the extent to which the students actually capture the concept of entrepreneur-
        ship as a real-life phenomenon in a dynamic way.

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In the first lecture, course objectives and the course outline are explained, and the students receive instruction on how to complete the assignment (for the course assignment and instructions see Box 1). Before this initial lecture, the students are provided with reading material. This reading material can vary based on the students' previous background knowledge. We use basic texts outlining what entrepreneurship is (not), as well as Steyaert (1997) and Nayak (2008) in order to introduce the concept of entrepreneurial process as emergence. A video workshop is also organized during Week 1, where camera basics, handling

instructions and the necessity for working with a film script are discussed. In the second week, the assigned reading is discussed in an interactive seminar. Students have to prepare presentations and questions. Through this seminar, students should develop a fertile basis for developing their own ideas on entrepreneurship as a dynamic, real-life phenomenon and for relating their ideas to contemporary scholarly debates. From this basis, the students set out on their 'quest' to film what they would consider entrepreneurship as a dynamic and real-life phenomenon to be. During the filming process, two progress meetings are held with the course teacher. The course concludes with a 'film festival' where the films are introduced and shown to the teachers and the other students involved.

As stated in Box 1, the films are evaluated by means of the following criteria: the quality of the camera work, the originality of the material, the extent to which students meet basic course requirements (duration of the film, general topic) and most importantly, the extent to which the students actually capture the concept of entrepreneurship as a real-life phenomenon in a dynamic way. The papers are evaluated using the standard criteria for academic essays. The film and the papers are equally weighted (each 50 % of the final grade).

5. Findings from Pilot

The pilot course was taught in the second semester of a Master's degree program in Management Studies. In total, fourteen students participated and nine films were produced. The reading material we handed out in the pilot course consisted of the previously cited papers by Steyaert (1997) and Nayak (2008), as well as four seminal articles and one book chapter by William B. Gartner[2]. The topics of the films are presented in Table 3.

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2. 'A Conceptual Framework for Describing the Phenomenon of New Venture Creation', Academy of Management Review, 1985, '"Who is an Entrepreneur?" Is the Wrong Question', American Journal of Small Business, 1988, 'What are we talking about when we talk about entrepreneurship?', Journal of Business Venturing, 1990, ''The edge defines the (w)hole: saying what entrepreneurship is (not)', in: 'Narrative and Discursive Approaches in Entrepreneurship'. Edited by Daniel Hjorth & Chris Steyaert, 2004.

Table 3: Films on Entrepreneurship

#	Topic
1	Entrepreneurship is represented as having multiple dimensions, not to be envisaged as a solid entity. Instead, the best attempt to 'capture' entrepreneurship is by means of a silhouette. The silhouette this student has chosen is a Formula 1 car.
2	Entrepreneurship as a kind of 'real-life soap opera,' following a small business owner with a camera for several days. He has attempted to demonstrate through his film that also in the more mature stages of firm growth the small business owner is still an entrepreneur because (s)he continues to be creative and innovative.
3.	The film called 'The Essence of Entrepreneurship' came to the conclusion that entrepreneurship is about passion, earning money, recognition and exploitation of opportunities, creativity and taking risks.
4.	The film called 'Dream On' posits that entrepreneuring is more than dreaming alone; it is hard work (early-bird, 'feet on the ground') in order to reach the final aim: financial prosperity.
5	The film called 'Entrepreneurial Spirit' is a staged real-life soap opera charting the startup process of the three filmmakers.
6	The 'Journey of Entrepreneuring' concludes that 'entrepreneurship is the process of identification, development and bringing a vision to life, using resources which are currently beyond control. Under conditions of risk and considerable uncertainty new ventures are created.'
7.	The film called 'Never-ending Story' tries to show entrepreneurship from a broad perspective, also portraying its contradictions. A definition of entrepreneurship cannot be reached according to the filmmaker; it is a 'never-ending story'.
8.	The film called 'Entrepreneuring; a continuous process' comes to the conclusion that 'entrepreneuring is continuously looking around for ideas and opportunities, researching these ideas and opportunities and finally exploiting the ideas and opportunities that look suitable. Entrepreneuring is in constant motion -- once one obtains something, one starts looking for new ideas and opportunities again.'
9.	The film called 'Cycle of Entrepreneurship' portrays a staged virtual entrepreneurial process as a cycle of activity: opportunity, communication, development, exploring, entrepreneurial activities, exploitation.

Even though the students had clearly put far more effort into the films than the papers – all papers were of mediocre quality – three films were deemed unsatisfactory. One film was simply too long and thus did not meet the technical criteria. Another film consisted of three separate parts and therefore did not meet the objective of showing entrepreneurship as an ongoing process. The third film contained too much acting and was not enough of a serious portrayal of

entrepreneurship as a real-life phenomenon. After the students had revised these films, they all passed the course.

After teaching the course in this format, we learned several things. Namely, it is very important to thoroughly introduce the course, its objectives and the way the course is assessed. Evidently, this has to do with the fact that the students are unfamiliar with this method. One of our experiences in this respect was that we as teachers somewhat assumed that the 'familiar' part of the course (the writing of a paper) would be the easiest part. However, as mentioned, all papers proved to be of mediocre quality.

Contrary to our expectations, filmmaking and editing proved not to be too hard for the majority of the students. The (one-hour!) video workshop was more than enough for the students to start their own filming processes. All the additional support we had anticipated needing was proven unnecessary.

Finally, it was not the filmmaking or editing that took most of the student's time; rather, contemplating what they wanted to film and where to find it (preparing for the actual filming) proved to be most time-consuming. This should be clearly indicated in the instructions.

6. Conclusions

The objective of this paper has been to present a method for teaching entrepreneurship based on having students make a film about the topic. We have based this pedagogy on a view of the entrepreneurial process as emergence; proposing entrepreneurship in its 'everyday' quality (ongoing and as daily activity). In other words, we have presented a perspective of entrepreneurship as a 'real-life' and dynamic process. We have suggested that benefits of having students make their own films about entrepreneurship include encouraging and testing the students' ability to deal with something new and innovative, challenging students to think about concepts at a higher level of abstraction, and to formulate their own vision, as well as fostering their 'visual literacy'. Fostering visual literacy seems to be important for all academic students in an era in which we are 'bombarded' by steady, unrelenting streams of visual imagery (Avgerinou and Ericson, 1997; Christopherson, 1997). Yet, as stated in the introduction, visual literacy is especially important for (future) entrepreneurs as it develops their ability to 'see' or identify entrepreneurial opportunities as well as to present these in a convincing manner to potential investors and other stakeholders.

By presenting a course outline as well as the outcomes of a pilot course, we have aimed to illustrate how filming can be employed to reach specific learning objectives and to contribute to the visual literacy of entrepreneurship students. We consider filmmaking a valuable and innovative addition to the wealth of existing teaching methods in entrepreneurship education and hope it will be of use to other entrepreneurship educators too.

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