**Scripting entrepreneurial life: exploring enablers for action through entrepreneurial narrative and dialogue**

**Paper Type**: Refereed paper

**Abstract**

**Purpose –** Positioning entrepreneurship as a practice moves away from conceptualising “who” an entrepreneur is towards the appreciation of action and enactment in the creation of entrepreneurial practice. The paper seeks to inform the field of entrepreneurial research by focusing on the flux and flow of entrepreneurial life, drawing from an anthropological position we explore the application of linguistic approaches through a dialogical perspective of social action.

**Design/methodology/approach –**Through the paper we address the recent calls which have been made in the literature for scholars to pay greater attention to social constructionist perspective of entrepreneurial practice, in particular the use of discourse as a means of exploring entrepreneurial action.  The particular point of interest here is the focus on the mediated nature of practice, the process through which discourse and language create entrepreneurial action in the form of understandings, meaning and judgement.

**Findings – Through the reflective commentary offered we demonstrate the needs for researchers to be reflexively attentive to how we research entrepreneurial action through carefully crafted discursive practices.**

**Research / Practical implications –** The paper explores the role of discursive methods of inquiry in action, by explicating the role of dialogical theory as a critique of entrepreneurial practice. We illustrate the methodological contribution of discursive approaches in terms of how we can “craft” modes of action based inquiry.

**Originality/value –** The contribution of this explorative paper is that it seeks to demonstrate the critical importance of subjectivities from and through the lived experience being captured through “crafting” modes of linguistic research and the importance of researcher reflexivity in highlighting the judgements and choices made through enacted practice

Key Words: Linguistics, Dialogue, Methods, Entrepreneurship, Identity, Social Learning

**Introduction**

The core of entrepreneurial endeavour is that of creativity and innovation, which requires people to practice or work in novel ways. To act in an entrepreneurial manner requires more than simply applying knowledge and skills; it involves doing something over and above normal practice. The increasing emphasis on issues such as entrepreneurial identity, language and action in current research, highlight the importance of discourse. This involves focusing towards the more relational and emergent aspects of entrepreneurial practice, drawing emphasis to the manner in which meaning and the concepts of entrepreneur identity are constructed and harmonised within the social relationships which exist between people in any given social context. There, issues such as context, activity, orientations, experiences, emotions, all interact with one another and the social environment in order to develop and bring into existence innovative ideas and practices. The entrepreneurial research field is fragmented and dominated by an objective perspective in terms of how we practice as inquirers, both in our thinking and action. Numerous researchers have called for the adoption of qualitative methods which specifically focus on social process of acting (Aldrich and Martinez, 2001; Bergendahl and Landstrom, 2003, Higgins *et al*., 2015; Welterand Lasch, 2008; Wiklund, *et al*, 2011) where more in-depth knowledge is sought as a means of exploring lived and living practice. The emerging desire to seek “know-how” modes of inquiry as opposed to “know-what” suggests towards an activity based approach to inquiry. By focusing on the day-to-day activities of the entrepreneur a more practice-based orientation can be realised, (Johnston *et al.,* 2003).

What is elusive about action in social practices, is that no matter how common or patterned they may seem, at any point in time one cannot offer a comprehensive description of the social practice, as to do so infers that one is able to foresee all possible future events that may occur and secondly that one possesses an unambiguous language which can reflect reality, neither of these rationales can be applied. As Popper (1988) stated, in order to be able to predict an event, one would have to state what exact data was required for such a prediction, which is impossible to do, in other words “we do not know what we need to know”. The implication is that a social practice has no essence or intrinsic nature which can be captured, in that a social practice depends on how human actors interpret it to be, (Morgan 1986; Schatzki, 2005). In this view, entrepreneurs are not seen as individually isolated but relationally engaged in the creation of the conditions which make their social world, through their interactions with their social environment (Goss, *et al.,* 2011; Johannisson, 2011). This social context creates both opportunities and restrictions on the entrepreneurs’ space of possible actions; these are continually constructed, transformed, and negotiated through the relationships with those around them. As exemplified by Fletcher (2003, p127), who suggested that entrepreneurial action is “*dynamic and constantly emerging, being realised, shaped and constructed through social processes*”. In adopting this position, the paper recognises entrepreneurial practice as dynamic actions, which do not, and cannot, possess a static ontological position.

We seek to illustrate an alternative methodological position to the predominant focus on prediction, measurement and generalisation which is currently dominating much of the entrepreneurial research field (Steyaert, 2007**;** Blackburn and Kovalainen, 2009). The yearning to explore and understand a person’s definition of an experience and the meaning which is attributed to it locates qualitative research within an interpretivist tradition (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). While such a tradition has existed for many years in the social sciences, its use and adoption in the entrepreneurship field has gained interest but is currently under represented, (Blackburn and Kovalainen, 2009; Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008; Welter and Lasch, 2008; Neergard and Ulhoi, 2007). This growing trend provokes one to consider the contribution of narrative research to understanding entrepreneurial behaviour. Steyaert and Bouwen (1997) suggested that narrative methods can make a purposeful contribution to the field by introducing conceptual, paradigmatic and methodological ideologies which are more humanist and appreciative in their understanding of social agency and practice, (Johannisson, 2011; Keating, *et al,.* 2014). Through the paper we address the recent calls which have been made in the literature for scholars to pay greater attention to social constructionist perspective of entrepreneurial practice, in particular the use of discourse as a means of exploring entrepreneurial action ([Fletcher, 2003](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/13552550810897687); [Foss, 2004](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/13552550810897687); [Downing, 2005](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/13552550810897687); [Johansson, 2004](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/13552550810897687);  [Hytti, 2005](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/13552550810897687); [Hamilton, 2006](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/13552550810897687); [Cohen and Musson, 2000](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/13552550810897687); [Down and Reveley, 2004](http://www.emeraldinsight.com/doi/full/10.1108/13552550810897687)). The position has been referred to as the “fifth movement in entrepreneurial research” by Fletcher (2003). The particular point of interest here is the focus on the mediated nature of practice, the process through which discourse and language create entrepreneurial action in the form of understandings, meaning and judgement. The use of linguistic approaches as a means of exposing relational ties, takes account of the entrepreneur as a social actor who is dependent upon social interaction to support the development of their entrepreneurial identity, (McDonald, *et al.,* 2004; Wiklund, *et al,.*2011; Thorpe, 2008; Blackburn and Brush, 2008; Welter, 2011). The writers define qualitative inquiry as a means of exploring and understanding the subjective nature of what one can term “lived experience” from the perspective of those who have experienced, seeking to make sense of the explanations and meanings which individuals assign to their experiences (Blackburn and Kovalainen, 2009; Welter and Lasch, 2008). As such, discursive accounts enable the researcher to gain insight into the social and relational means by which entrepreneurs realise innovative practice.

Building upon previous research into the role of dialogical exchange in practice, a linguistically approach was adopted to explore the use of language in mediating and shaping entrepreneurial action. The influence of a dialogical approach to researching practice allows for the researcher to become sensitive to both implicit and explicit social interaction by drawing focus towards the choices and judgements which underpin action. A dialogical mode of inquiry invites a critical re-assessment of one’s engagement in performing and investigating practice, grounded not so much by cognition and emotion but by the manner in which the senses inform our approach to methodological and applied sense-making, (Antonacopoulou, 2014). The paper seeks to exemplify for the reader and indeed the entrepreneurial field, the impact dialogical research can contribute to the understanding of entrepreneurial action and the exploration of entrepreneurship in new and more enriched ways (Wiklund *et al.,* 2011). The paper is developed in the following manner firstly we argue for the need to develop alternative modes of qualitative inquiry to entrepreneurial research, a more practical approach can be found within linguistically modes of inquiry. We then set out to explore the contributing role of dialogue as the critical mediational artefact in sustaining and developing entrepreneurial action. In this context we theoretically demonstrate how a linguistic approach can better support insightful research. The paper aims to offer insight into the role of discursive as a mode of inquiry to the study of entrepreneurial practice we draw upon social constructionist ontology where the focus of the inquirer is to make sense of the intersubjective nature of entrepreneurial action. In order to understand the discursive nature of practice, in the entrepreneurial context, it is important for the researcher to appreciate and position the entrepreneur as a complex dynamic human actor.

**Contextualising the Lived Experience**

If we accept that entrepreneurs through their use of dialogue create meaning and understanding in their everyday interactions, then dialogue lies within action and action lies within dialogue. The entrepreneurs practice and how we make sense of it exists through the meanings we ascribe to their actions, through the act of interpretation. This is not to suggest that the external physical world is independent of our perceptions, but it does draw specific focus towards the perspective that the only way actions exist is through the manner in which we experience, interpret and relate or give meaning to our actions, (Schatzki, 2005). The meanings which we ascribe to an action are embodied in the holistic ways through which we come to make sense of a social experience. For qualitative researchers in the field of entrepreneurship meaning lies not in measures or objectivity but in our capacity to find meaning and sense in our experiences (van Eckartsberg, 1986; Neergard and Ulhoi, 2007). The role of the researcher becomes that of an interpreter and crafter of meaning. The goal is to develop the ability to capture the lived experience in a manner which illustrates and protects the essential meaning of the experience “what it was actually like”.

The view of entrepreneurial practice as encompassing socially constructed shared meanings holds true to the conversational practices which are embedded in the very social fabric of everyday action, (Fletcher,2006Nicolini, 2009; 2012).According to Shotter (1995; 2008) the main purpose of any social exchange or interaction is not simply the representation of various elements in the entrepreneur’s social reality, or the outer expression to pre-existing constructed thoughts, but contained in the creation of various patterns of social relations. Berger and Luckmann (1967) argue that the social world is produced through human interaction through their ongoing activity and routines, yet it is experienced as being objective, in that it affects the actor’s lives on an iterative basis, in which the entrepreneurs have to engage and experience the social world in order to fully appreciate it and understand it. At the ontological level there is a belief in multiple realities which are socially constructed, Hosking and Bouwen (2000) puts forward the argument that constructionist assume a relational ontology, in which the entrepreneur’s social reality can be viewed as both interdependent and co-dependent, (Burr, 2003; Giddens, 1991). The researcher needs to consider a degree of uniformity between their assumptions and how their interpretations affect the focus of the study. In terms of research methods and method of theorising the researcher needs to make choices, which result in very different orientations to social constructionism, are those between the ideas of subjective or inter-subjective realities and between an objectified reality, against one which is always emerging. The idea of subjectivity, social reality is assumed to be negotiated by individuals within the social setting, each actor having their own awareness, meaning and ways of making sense, within a broader social context (Schon, 1983, 1987;Cunliffe and Eriksen, 2011).

In this case, the focus of such research lies in discovering how individual actors make sense of their surroundings, such as language, ways of talking about experience, negotiating some form of collective meaning, the nature and impact of that collective meaning, (Holstein and Gabriuem, 2000; Rosenthal and Peccei, 2006). For example, differing constructions of the entrepreneur’s reality are adopted or resisted, how social symbols (or facts) such as metaphors, stories and discourse are established in conjunction with the entrepreneur’s culture and identities, (Boje, 1994; Holstein and Gubrium, 2000). An element from this particular approach draws attention towards the *process of construction*, in other words how practice develops meaning, (Creed *et al.,* 2002; Oswick and Richards, 2004; Heracleous, 2006; Schatzki, 2005). According to Potter (1996) who summarises this process-oriented approach as “If we treat descriptions as constructions and constructive, we can ask how they are put together, what materials are used, what sorts of things and events are produced by them, and so on" (p. 98). Central to the view of the authors is the premise that as entrepreneurs, we develop our sense of reality and meaning about our social surroundings, and oneself, in our interactions, stories, and conversations which are reflected in those around us. In doing so, one can view our surroundings with a sense of identity. We are socially embodied and embedded in an intricate flow of complex inter-related social knowledge. While there are numerous approaches to a social constructionist paradigm, the critical features of the perspective rest in the recognition and use of discourse, providing the manner by which “we” come to experience the social world? This leads one to consider how the process of certain versions of reality and what is perceived to be entrepreneurial truth come to be accepted, (Cunliffe, 2002).

The concept of discourse has numerous definitions associated to it; at the most basic level discourse is simply our spoken word (Sinclair and Coulthard, 1975; Downing, 2005). Over the years the term has encompassed written as well as text-based elements (Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Van Dijk (1997) defines discourse as a practice which represents a collection of language, ideas and philosophies, positioning discourse in this context leads one to conceptualise discursive practices as a way of creating action. In other words, through dialogical interaction, talk is enacted as a means of creating and shaping practice, “language in action” (Watson, 2000, p4; Potter and Wetherell, 1987). Discursive modes of inquiry are focused towards the socially constructed nature of the entrepreneur’s reality, which heavily determine how they interpret, interact and shape their emerging identities, as well as mediating and influencing what is considered to be appropriate and legitimate means of action (Cohen and Musson, 2000). Initially, researchers in the general area of organisational studies sought to acknowledge the use of stories and storytelling as important conveyors of tacit knowledge and learning, in which language is the critical mechanism used to accomplish such methods of dissemination. The collective nature of language, in particular its social, cultural and localised context in terms of being able to relate and interpret, drew focus towards that of identity formation, suggesting that one’s dialogue could be relationally collective, rather than simply resting with the individual (Orr, 1996; Potter and Wetherell, 1987; Gergen, 1991; Hjorth and Steyaert, 2004; Fletcher, 2006; Gartner, 2007). Sambrook and Stewart (1998) draw a distinction between discourse as a noun and as a verb which enables one to compose dialogue as a coherent method of communicative action (Rigg, 2001). Discourse as a noun/verb are expressions of beliefs, values and assumptions which seek to convey meaning as they are enacted, (Van Dijk, 1997) or communicative acts (Habermous, 1972; Hermans and Hermans-Jansen, 2001; Holquist, 1990). Discursive practices position the entrepreneur as being situated in inter-subjective modes of dialogical interaction which are embedded in relation of power and political tensions.

According to Vygotsky (1978) all human learning and experience unfolds from the social and cultural context in which an individual is constituted and actively participating in, at any moment in time. Vygotsky (2000) was highly critical of studies which postulate towards the individual as the central point of focus. He claimed that research which was solely focussed towards the static object is misleading as such research can only provide descriptions at the expense of explanation of human practice, (Muller-Mirza and Perret-Clermont, 2009; Higham et al., 2014, Gergen, 1995). Thus, focus needs to be brought to bear not on the individual, but on the processual method through which entrepreneurs engage their discursive resources in order to construct action. It is through dialogical exchanges that entrepreneurs develop a scene of coherence of social reality as a means of direction and purpose, (Kwon, *et al*, 2014). An interesting point to note here is that entrepreneurs are aware of their voice and to a degree reflexively aware of how they use their voice, through recognising opportunistic moments in dialogical exchanges, selecting a particular discursive tone and language as a means to invoke and achieve specific conversational goals (Lounsbury and Glynn, 2001; Fletcher, 2006; Anderson and Warren, 2011). When attempting to engage in a research agenda which seeks to explore the use and role of dialogical as a processual nature of action the researcher is required to be attentive to the entrepreneur utterances or process of engagement, (Fletcher, 2006; Down, 2006). Entrepreneurial research which is focused towards discursively oriented endeavours, tend to focus on the explicit utterances rather than the assumptions and underpinning rationales attached to them. In other words, the situated context of the entrepreneur’s utterances becomes critical for understanding the discursive tones and language sets which the entrepreneur chooses to use from moment to moment as they engage.

When we consider the meaning of dialogue, we suggest towards the view that none of the things we do as humans happens in a vacuum, speaking, writing, reading, thinking or listening. In order to appreciate dialogue as a mode of inquiry we first give consideration to what we envisage by the term. Bakhtin offers to us three central concepts – utterance, addressee and voice. In the social context of the entrepreneur any spoken or written word can be categorised as an utterance. To enact an utterance suggests the entrepreneur is speaking to or into something or someone (an addressee). An utterance is of course only possible if we have a voice, it can only be produced by the entrepreneur’s voice (Bakhtin, 1981, 1984). The entrepreneur voice is thus populated with multiple others through its intentions, attitudes, value and beliefs. Wertsch (1991) suggests that it is highly inappropriate to simply study a singular voice, the plural voice is more of the central focus. The entrepreneur through their utterance takes into consideration the social context which they are speaking into, the person or persons to whom they are engaging with at that moment in time. For example, when an entrepreneur speaks with a client they will behave and act differently from when they are engaging with a business partner or mentor/friend. Not only does the utterance reflect the voice of the entrepreneur, the person who is speaking, and the addressee, it also reflects and constitutes other unconscious elements that have influence and are influencing the social context in which the dialogue is taking place, (Nicolini, 2012). A voice is never unrelated to context it enacts in relation to something, it does not exist in a vacuum and more importantly the voice is never neutral. As a mode of inquiry we are focussed towards how the entrepreneurial voice interacts with others, as a collection of utterances creating meaning and understanding.

Bakhtin’s notion of dialogicality (Bakhtin, 1981), has sought to position the argument that the utterances developed by each participant is the basic unit of analysis in the dialogical process, these utterances form the relatable links which allows the participant to join threads of dialogical interactions. This utterance represents the interaction of at least two voices that is those of the speaker and listener who have a dual position in the interaction. Each utterance or exchange is constructed as a response to other utterances within a dialogical exchange, while taking into account previous context, as well as anticipating future utterances (Kumpulainen and Lipponen, 2010). Each participant recognises or assumes a position, an identity towards themselves and others while recognising and legitimising the existence of other voices within the plurality of the discourse. Wegerif (2011) suggest that dialogue can be defined as the meditational tool, which mediates the gap between two or more voices/perspectives, which are held together in the dynamic tension of human interaction or dialogical exchange. Meaning and practice emerge out of this dialogical space, which represents the tension between differing perspectives, out of this interaction criticisms and judgements as well as insight and understanding are brought to bear on how action emerges.

**Creating Voice - *On the place and voice of the researcher***

The following dialogue is related to one of the authors learning experiences as a developing researcher in the entrepreneurial field. In this conversation the researcher has been openly encouraged to reflexively account upon their thinking to date in relation to conceptualising methodologically the research field. Specifically, in regards to their beliefs and motivations for pursuing a dialogical based approach to understanding the entrepreneurial lived practice. The researcher was encouraged, where possible, to speak openly and frankly without being lead or influenced by her co-writer. Other than the initial question of what focus on dialogue as a means of understanding practice, no topics were specifically pre-defined. In presenting this dialogue we facilitate and allow the researcher to hold the primary voice, through which the researcher’s voice is protected which makes this account or dialogical space as pure as possible.

*Firstly, it became apparent to me that an important aspect of the research was the context, the place where it was to be conducted. It made sense to study the entrepreneurs and their practice where they usually do and act, i.e. to adopt a practice-based approach. If we recognise entrepreneurial practice as being a contextualised phenomenon, then the choice of context has an impact on the way we can study it. I wanted to access the emergent aspects of the practice, as and when it is done, and moreover where it is done. This, for me set out he need to embed my research within the context the participants are placed. But having define the where of it all, I had to think of how to capture this emergent nature of the practice and understand what medium would enable me to do so.*

*Entrepreneurial practice can be seen as an artful form of creating, where entrepreneurs get to think and enact their innovative idea in their lived experiences. The essence of that creativity is drawn from the interactions they engage in, whether it is with others or the context they are in. It is through those social exchanges that practice emerges, in the form of knowing and actions. The dialogues they engage in is central to the way these interactions take place. There, elements such as prior knowledge, assumptions, beliefs and values all influence and help shape the way innovative doing is created and enacted. Ideas and concepts of social norms, historical, geographical, cultural and social dimensions all enable and mediate the entrepreneurial actions and practice as it emerges. Out of the discursive process. So, as a researcher, how can I access these interactions, what is the means by which actions are enabled and brought into practice?*

*In considering the entrepreneurial practice and its actions as a mediated and emergent phenomenon, not unlike a performance, with actors and scene etc…, and recognising the need for a practice based research, a question that comes to mind is: what is the role of the researcher within that practice, within that performance? The idea is to access the moment where practice is created, in its “normal” environment, and placing myself within that environment, as a researcher, undeniably impacted on the very nature of the practice, its elements were disturbed by my presence. As much as my intent was to observe actions and discourse as they unfolded, while being part of an invisible audience, the very fact of “placing” myself in that environment mediated and changed the way it did, to a certain extent. Therefore, the idea of the research itself recognises I am there; I am part of the set, and as such it embedded this research within a reflexive approach.*

*Is the only thing we can do/say to recognise our presence and the fact that it has an impact but then still defend the merit of our interpretations and observations? We have to recognise it is the utterance of the researcher- the voice that the researcher chooses to speak out with- their views, their perspective… and these are not only contextualised (in places, time, culture, etc…) and dynamic (evolving, and emergent, at all times) but they are also deeply complex because that chosen voice is mediated through the Dialogical Self researcher. It is one voice, with a choice of words, which results from a number of power relations/tensions in the dialogues held within self and with others, in a particular place, at a particular time. And this voice is a scripted discourse, with an intent, what is it that we are trying to get to? What are the motives? The expectations? …maybe to convince the audience of the validity of the reasoning, the methodology, methods, interpretation and judgements; choosing the words, the language set for this particular objective, or intent.*

*As a student, I had started developing an appreciation for the use of language through stories, as a means of reflection but also of defining meaning and making sense in earlier parts of my studies. This lead me to think of the use of language more broadly. Language is the vehicle through which interactions between people, between context and people, is enabled. The words, gestures, etc…all bring meaning, define what is. The reflection or thoughts that help define actions and practice are “materialised” through words and language used to shape, test and voice ideas in practice. Therefore, a starting point for me to look into the entrepreneur’s practice was to read about the use of language, what research had been done, what thinking had been done in that sense. An element that struck me out as missing, in my opinion, is the recognition of the lived experience, the moment where practice is created: “the art of doing while the way of doing is being invented” (Gherardi and Perrotta, 2014). That is to say that the literature I engaged with mentioned the use of narrative as a means of capturing the use of language and its role in developing the entrepreneurial practice, however narratives are accounts, stories, metaphors. So my thinking moved towards the use of language in the practice, that is the dialogical interactions of people who create and define the practice as they engage in those interactions.*

*As I questioned and thought about the use of dialogical approaches for research, I turned to an earlier set of theories I had engaged with earlier in my studies, which included the idea of the Dialogical Self. I empathise with the view that each and every one of us enter in multiple dialogues, in times and places; and that not only these dialogues are happening between us and others but also that dialogues take place within self. As such, I wanted to recognise the existence and importance of multiple voices contributing to dialogues taking place. That is to say, in the entrepreneurial practice, the entrepreneur engages with other agents being present in the moment – other members of the organisation, investors, customers for example, all of whom have voices; and they also engage with the voices of the different selves, or I positions- I as an entrepreneur, as I as father, I as a friend, I as a member of a community, as examples. This recognition of multiple voices, in my mind, enables us to appreciate the complexity of the dialogical process as a dynamic and socially constructed concept, where voices can complement, contradict, reinforce or cancel out between themselves. That is to say, the recognition of multiple voices within the dialogical interaction makes us appreciate the mediated nature of the discourse.*

*The next question that came to mind is then, how do we get to appreciate and value those different voices? How do we recognise the relations of power between the different voices, in those intrapersonal, or interpersonal dialogues… their ability to be louder or clearer than others? But also, the intent placed on the moment which gives more or less power to each of these voices. There, I need to make sense, develop a knowing of the event and experiences which are lived, by accessing the values, assumptions, past experiences, intuitions, beliefs, prior knowledge, etc… of those I observe and interview.*

Bakhtin (1981/1986) draws upon the work of Dostoevsky who held the view that as we enact there is no single author at work, rather several authors (voice). There is a plurality of voices accompanying and opposing one another through a dialogical space, (Elbaz-Lawisch, 2005). For Bakhtin the idea of dialogue illustrates the possibility of differentiating the inner and outer world of self in the form of interpersonal relationships. The transformation of an inner thought (researcher) into an utterance enables the establishment of a dialogical space to occur between what is expressed (the utterance) and the response (utterances) of others in that space. The necessity to see all voices as co-existing by perceiving all exchanges as unfolding simultaneously through the inter-subjective nature of the dialogical space and exchange. The construction of dialogue as emerging through space allows the authors to treat a particular context of action through both interior and exterior dialogues, thus illustrating the multiplicity of voices and perspectives. In the researcher’s dialogue we can see this multiplicity of voices, the disruptive nature of competing voices in the emerging conscious dialogue coupled to the interior dialogues are clearly present. The emergence of researcher’s practice is the action of passing the ideas/expressions through many varied voices, by leading her expressions through this dialogical space, which contains no focussed or unchangeable meanings but rather allowing her expressions to develop in this field of dialogical relations, the richness of her particular expressions can be brought to action.

**Activity through Dialogical Space**

The dialogical self brings the multiple selves as I (“self-as-knower”) and Me (“Self-as known”) forming a continuous unity in a social context, (i.e. involving others); and where Bakhtin discusses the self as having multiple voices presenting dissimilar views, hence a discontinuous version of self (Hermans, 2001). Hermans, goes on to define dialogical self as a crossroad model between James and Bakhtin’s views; which encompasses both continuity (through the in-common experiences of is) and discontinuity (through the conflicting voices of self). The multiple selves enter in discourse to exchange information and reflect which results in the definition of a complex narrative self (Hermans and Hermans-Konopka, 2008). In linking dialogical self to an application in practice, we could argue that we are in effect looking at a Reflexive Dialogue, as described by Cunliffe (2002a, 2002b), where the researcher is engaging in a critical internal dialogue in an attempt to make sense of a current situation by building on knowing-in-action (Cunliffe and Shotter, 2006). Herman (1992) understands dialogical as the basis condition for self-constitution, in other words the reflective sense of self, the dialogue between the “I” and the “me” as a fundamental pillar of self-consciousness. Dialogical relationships emerge amongst many different positions of self, which can be internal and external. The self-multiplicity of our voices is a construction of our social relations, in other words the collective voices which are embedded in our dialogue.

Entrepreneurial Acts

Dialogical Practice

Verbs

Nouns

Ground rules

Talk

Text

Space

Discursive Analysis

New challenges  
Discourses

It is the interaction between the outer and inner dialogical self, which connects the entrepreneur, as well as the researchers, to their social context. In order to address these methodological tensions which, surround how do we make sense of entrepreneurial practice we start with a very direct question – “how do discursive approaches work within entrepreneurship studies?” Language can be described as a never-ending chain of evolving conversations and actions, reflecting embedded linguistic and cultural orders. Here the opening of language towards the influence of power becomes apparent boosted by the post-modern debates on the role of the social sciences in the study of human action (Foucault, 1977; Wiley, 2006). The relational practice of dialogical exchange can be extended too many forms of expression such as tone, gestures and actions themselves all convey meaning and moment of relational expression. For example, how we engage and research dialogue must be appreciative of tone of voice, speed of exchange and direction are all noted as being significant, (Wertsch, 1991; Falmagne, 2004). While numerous authors have now suggested towards the importance of relational processes of how we practice, the method by which we begin to research into the process of practice, such as dialogue, are still fragmented and complicated. In the general field of organisational studies methods have been employed which seek to break dialogue up into its constituent parts, for example those who use discursive analysis look towards how structures of wording are used (Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; Burr, 2003). The logic from this method being that if we can determine the foundations from which dialogue is built, then we may be able to understand the relational processes of the phenomenon.

Of course the study of dialogue is not without its issues when attempting to explore dialogue from its constituent parts. Writers such as Shotter (1995) and Barad (2003) have argued that dialogue cannot be deconstructed dialogue must be studied as a complete whole. So a key set of questions now arise for the researcher in terms of how we can begin to enquire into the entrepreneur’s dialogical space? Firstly, we could view dialogue as an invitational expression of meaning/intent. Such a position allows us to draw upon a “performance” approach to dialogue. Secondly, a focus needs to be drawn towards the articulation of enactment and supplements relating within the dialogical space, the social construction of power. This in turn leads to a third position, that of improvised theatre (John-stone, 1999) which allows the researcher to see the drama unfold, (Chell and Pittaway, 1998; Fletcher, 2003, 2006; Drakopoulou, Dodd and Anderson, 2007; Pittaway, 2005). Positioning dialogical exchange as an expression (utterance) of meaningful intent positions dialogue as a relational engagement which contributes to some form of action. An expression does not only convey meaning but also invites a response of some form. Bakhtin (1981) suggests that every expression seeks to provoke another which is of course called forth by prior expressions.

Gergen (1995) suggests that the meaning and intention of any expression is always ambiguous until enhanced to a relational context. For example, if a person agrees with another the interaction will develop accordingly, however if a person disagrees with another that relationship may take a negative direction, (Gee, and Green, 1998; Hennessy, *et al.,* 2011). In this sense the dialogical exchange unfolds along a trajectory which is created and supplemented by our acts. From a research perspective entrepreneurial action as a dialogical practice can be positioned as a form of improvised theatre, which is dependent upon talk, verbal negotiation and coordination as a mode of establishing action (Steyaert, 2007; Terjesen, and Elam, 2009). This position provides a helpful perspective in terms of explicitly recognising the moment-by-moment manner through which action is created (Johnstone, 1999) which other performers can either seek to block or accept. Acceptance however does not necessarily imply agreement but rather offers the invitation to engage in interaction. The acceptance or blocking of intent is not a simple choice it will involve many voices and opinions. As entrepreneurs talk, they supplement prior contributions and develop their dialogue in that context perhaps unfolding the dialogue towards new emerging topics, pausing to consider important points or attempting to reach a conclusion. Positioning dialogical exchange as a performance allows the inquirer to view how certain points of dialogue are enabled or blocked which shapes the negotiated flow of the emergent dialogue. Entrepreneurial practice once viewed in this mode of inquiry emerges along lines of a negotiated space towards a humanly enacted performance, which encompasses argument, inquiry and affirmation.

**Future Challenges**

The entrepreneur operates in highly dynamic conditions, mediated and sustained through emergent complex action and practice. As a result, qualitative approaches offer the researcher an exploratory opportunity to gain real insight into the lived experiences of the entrepreneur, by placing focus on the social dimensions of the entrepreneurs practice in their natural settings, for example their experiences, perspectives and how they make sense of their actions and interactions. This rich insight offers to the scholarly community a significant contribution to the advancement of the research field, (Patton, 2002). It can be argued that the entrepreneurs are more complex to research, there are no clear structures, measurement is more difficult and assumptions harder to test. As a field of inquiry entrepreneurship both offers and contains different perspectives and schools of thought. Currently the field is studied within the context of many disciplines such as economics, psychology and sociology (Busenitz *et al,.* 2003). The past number of years has witnessed the emergence of a growing concern in the research field in terms of the context and future direction of the entrepreneurial field where current methodologies have been questioned (Davidsson, 2004). In the current debate many scholars are emphasising the need to study entrepreneurship as a social dynamic process extending beyond the individual and towards the social collective (Van de Ven *et al,.* 1999; Drakopoulou Dodd and Anderson, 2007). Researchers in such a setting have to contend with variable data, struggle to establish explanations which are not plausible, Down, and Giazitzoglu, 2014). Entrepreneurs come from all walks of life, shapes and sizes. Given these complexities there is no perfect design to such research, the quality of any research in this instance is the extent to which its outcomes can become generalizable to a wider audience.

The variety of epistemological positions in qualitative approaches enables researchers to deal or rather accommodate far greater complexity in research endeavours and findings by reflecting upon the live experiences of the entrepreneur. In order for the entrepreneurial field to develop as an area of innovative inquiry, researchers need to engage in methods which delineate themselves in ways which have not previously been used (Alvarez and Barney, 2013). Paradigmatic and methodological choices are paramount to the capturing of complexities in the entrepreneurs lived experience. It must be recognised that there are certain aspects of the entrepreneurial practice, which can only be truly acknowledged and addressed by qualitative work. Viewing entrepreneurial practice as a dynamic complex social process, which is contextually situated in social engagement requires a shift away from the predominant assumption that entrepreneurship is a measurable practice. Researcher in the entrepreneurial field have called for the development of more applied methodological frameworks as a means of developing more robust and enriched data sets (Ranch, van Doom and Hulsink, 2014). In this sense as researchers we must immerse ourselves in the entrepreneur’s activities, it is only through the experience of doing and close interaction with the field that we can begin to become aware/familiar with what we understand to be entrepreneurial behaviour, Warren, (2004). The importance of getting close to the research setting is essential if we want to gain advanced meaning into the behaviour which mediates the entrepreneurs practice. In this sense, discursive approaches seek to invoke, indeed require, the researcher to pay close attention to what the entrepreneur does, by capturing the intangible aspects of action which is not immediately observable. It is the triggers or occurrences, which are all too commonly overlooked or taken for granted by those who are not totally immersed in the research setting (Wiklund, 1998). For Vygotsky (1934/1989) human thought develops through and from social relations / interactions with others, Vygotsky views language as an element through which we articulate our conscious thoughts into explicit dialogue and the internalisation of speech as an important issue in the process of language development. This is supportive of Bakhtin (1929/1984) who viewed both thought and words as been understood as the expression of dialogue between different voices through which dialogue becomes an element of language. Dialogical exchange is not just simply a form of communication but rather a form of human existence, through which we consciously exchange in communicative acts which are collectively composed of many influencing and mediating elements. In this context the addressee (entrepreneur) can position themselves as a person who interacts through their own activity with others, it is in this inter-subjective exchange with others that language and activity meet themselves. Entrepreneurs develop a sense of reflective consciousness through their dialogical exchanges that is the language learning development process which develops through social exchanges. The existence of any human relationship is attributed to dialogue; it is the development of communication as a dialogue that allows one to identify the differentiation of the entrepreneur as a dialogical self. The dialogism encompasses all forms voices and relationships, within in these complex set of communicative acts the process of meaning knowledge is the emergent outcome, which is established through the entrepreneur’s social reality.

However, the choice of methods is directly dependent upon the researcher’s appreciation of what it means to experience and how we view the nature of experience through the researchers own worldview. Dialogue and how it develops / shapes entrepreneurial practice is a topic which is not a commonly addressed issue in the entrepreneurial research literature. Even so there are numerous reasons to suggest that dialogue plays a critical role within the entrepreneurial process where the urge to overcome problems and daily business life is important, (Van Dijk 1997). The very essence of practice places focus on the role of dialogue as the central catalyst for emergent action. The choice of methods and theoretical positioning is important when studying the lived experience, dialogical exchange is part of human interaction, in the conceptualisation of discourse, and we argue that a social constructionist perspective is the most appreciative of the research context. Drawing upon the social constructionist perspective a performative position on the dynamic nature of dialogue was applied. Offering the researcher, the opportunity to re-construct methodological approaches shifting focus from the individual to the social collective (Drakopoulou Dodd and Anderson, 2007). Social constructionism is grounded in a hermeneutic tradition where knowledge only exists within the context of the social collective and the inter-subjective interpretations of reality. Social reality can thus be positioned as a reality which is inseparable from human agency, thoughts and actions are the unfolding process of ongoing processes of human interaction and interpretations (Cunliffe, and Coupland, 2012; Cunliffe, 2008).

The need to make sense of social action means truly taking account of the social collective, which are dependent upon mutually reinforcing relationships with other influences and voices. Stegaert (1997) claims that entrepreneurial practice constitutes a never-ending practice of becoming. The emerging interest in entrepreneurial processes and the focus on real time human action makes practice the main unit of analysis as opposed to the level of macro analysis. The continuing lack of studies which seek to acknowledge real-time practice, adopting a micro-processual approach, is the main reason why scholars in the field have missed out on how to appreciate what we term as processual action, particularly so when we position action as an emergent outcome of social interactions, through dialogical exchange, where individual differences and context play such a huge role. If as a research field we can acknowledge and acquire the ability to understand the complexity of non-linear relationships, through the use of methods which recognise social action. Qualitative studies themselves which merely seek to use traditional methods, such as interviews etc. do not meet the challenge of capturing the mediational nature of human practice as it unfolds. Further to this retrospective studies such as narrative research area also less suited for process based research where the temptation to rationalise and structure can unduly influence the researcher and their reporting. In fact, it is these methodological issues which heavily impact the lack of theorising within the research field. As a result, there is a growing need to reconsider what methodological tools and questions best exemplify how we recognise and illustrate the facilitation of learning through the entrepreneurial processes of human action.

Entrepreneurs are active practitioners as opposed to passive participants, they continuously engage in dialogic interactions, which enable the unfolding of shared ideas and common goals. Thus even when current research is focussed on the entrepreneur as a character with associated behaviours, dialogue exchanges directly shape, practice, interaction and behaviour in important ways. The authors of this paper argue strongly that account must be taken of linguistic methodological means, which directly underpin the central development of emergent practice, (Downing, 2005). Despite development of research approached and methods in the entrepreneurial field, there is still a significant amount of work to be developed in order to adopt and integrate conceptualisation of dialogue as a mode of studying entrepreneurial practice. Our ability to carry out context specific analysis of what entrepreneurs actually do and say when they engage in dialogical interaction. For example, how frequently certain established dialogical “ground rules” occur and their related influence on the course of further interaction/practice (Down, 2010; Hytti, 2003; Hamilton, 2006; Down and Reveley, 2004). Despite the growing awareness of discourse as a mode of inquiry in the main stream organisational studies field, the entrepreneurial field has a limited number of empirical studies which have adopted discursive modes of inquiry and these have in themselves been influenced by a functionalist paradigm. Indeed, discursive studies have tended to be described and undervalued as mere gossip or “an obsession with talk” (Grant et al., 2001, p. 5).

The paper seeks to outline the importance of dialogical practice; how significant such acts are to understanding entrepreneurial action. By draw attention to discursive practices particularly the role of language and how language sets are enacted by the entrepreneur in whom they interact and communicate. The authors have sought to illustrate the role of discursive methodological approaches as a mode of inquiry which can truly enrich how we view entrepreneurial dialogue, the nature of their tone, interactions, and interpretations and how these influence and create action. Through such a mode of inquiry discursive practice enables researchers in the field to provide new ways of understanding and researching the social interconnectedness of action and practice. Such a research perspective enables us to appreciate the potential for studying and understanding living practice, there are numerous complex tensions which exist and heavily influence and mediate discursive actions. Adopting a research approach which seeks to recognise the co-existence of many different voices / realities with the entrepreneur practice offers to the scholarly field a truer account of how action is created. The paper offers an initial attempt to outline a dialogical based perspective of researching entrepreneurial practice, ion which we have focused on one aspect of the entrepreneurial process that of social interaction. More researched is required in terms of how we research entrepreneurial practice, if we develop the scholarly field with the skills required to build our research capacity in an applied manner and avoid instilling unreasonable expectations and bias against the use of qualitative methods and data.

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