

STORIES WE TELL: DECONSTRUCTING FRAUD THROUGH FILM IN THE EE CLASSROOM

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Questions we care about

We are two lecturers who designed an ‘interventionist’ entrepreneurship course that combines critical entrepreneurship studies and film studies. We had asked ourselves: how can we make students aware of the (grand) narratives and myths that persist in entrepreneurship? Stories of entrepreneurship often seek to celebrate only ‘the wealthy and successful’ (Welter et al. 2017) and are inherently gendered (Balachandra et al., 2019, Bird & Brush, 2002). These stories, which are laden with values, beliefs, and unspoken social norms are perpetuated as part of a hidden curriculum in entrepreneurship education (Jones, 2018). Thus, we wondered: how can film help us uncover the hidden meanings of the stories told in and beyond the EE classroom? And how can we engage students as active co-learners in the classroom whilst discussing difficult topics such as fraud, and failure? With this course, we follow a call by critical scholars to teach students about the dark sides of entrepreneurship (Talmage and Gassert, 2020; Ziemianski and Golik, 2020).

Approach

In spring 2023, we introduced a new master's level course that would bring a critical perspective to the EE classroom, addressing topics that are seldomly part of the core curriculum at the business school (Parker, 2018). We encouraged students to deconstruct entrepreneurial narratives in popular media and to reconstruct alternative stories of entrepreneurship. This paper reports on how fraud stories were interpreted in the course and how these readings may influence the constructions of entrepreneurship and the entrepreneur.

Results

Films are complex artifacts in popular culture, which must be carefully analysed to understand their underlying meanings. We find that stories of entrepreneurship depicting fraudulent activities can be read in different ways and that this has implications for how entrepreneurship is constructed. Students’ learning reflections highlight how they were initially unaware of these meanings. Throughout the course, they learned to deconstruct narratives in popular media and became more sensitive to ethical questions.

EE implications

Our findings emphasise the need for a critical approach in entrepreneurship education. As educators, we need to be more aware of the hidden curriculum and the values and beliefs that are so deeply rooted in EE. This paper hopes to stimulate a discussion and encourage educators to reflect on the stories we tell in the classroom.

Value/originality

The use of film in the classroom is perhaps not new or original per se (cf. van Gelderen & Verduijn, 2003). Nevertheless, film is seldomly used as a pedagogical tool. The contribution of this paper is twofold: firstly, we theorize film as narrative and argue that popular media stories and ethics should be addressed as part of the entrepreneurship curriculum. Secondly, we illustrate how film can be used as an engaging and effective pedagogical tool that engages students as active co-learners in the EE classroom, even when difficult topics are on the agenda.

Keywords: Narrative, storytelling, critical pedagogy, film analysis, hidden curriculum, ethics