

## Enterprise Education to Entrepreneurial Vocation: Why Entrepreneurship Should Include Youth

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I am a practitioner of community and economic development, by way of leadership and workforce development. When considering how I believe teachers can help achieve social justice and equity, particularly in communities that wish to improve economic conditions, what I hear is what can we do to move beyond the zero-sum game. Throughout history, education has been a tool, with varying degrees of success, for building economic infrastructures. Still, I advocate for education, within the walls of the school and beyond, to serve as a pillar for community and economic development. But I further assert that education today, tomorrow, and for the foreseeable future must promote the development of skills directly related to wealth creation—to earnestly address economic conditions.

In this article, I lay out why the fastest-growing curriculum across higher education is gaining support for pre-college youth as well.

## Entrepreneurship and Community & Economic Development

Entrepreneurship education is a response to youth unemployment. It was introduced into formal education as a means of encouraging growth and generating employment.<sup>1</sup>

Both public and private sectors have been charged with addressing the capital needs of communities. However, within the past twenty years, the private sector has been heavily criticized for its inability to support the capital needs of diverse communities—and specifically underserved communities. The limitations of the private sector have led to public sector leadership in addressing this problem.<sup>2</sup> While opportunities for firm creation are embedded in the private sector, research shows that the private sector can neither sustain economies nor economic growth on its own.<sup>3</sup>

The private sector, specifically large-scale businesses, could be an impediment to social and economic development goals. This is why entrepreneurship has emerged as a response to economic development efforts. Economic development, as a term, means increasingly sophisticated ways of producing and competing. This, in turn, leads to the accumulation of physical and human capital through an interrelated process of structural change and education.

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<sup>1</sup> Nelson, E. Robert. "Entrepreneurship education in developing countries." *Asian Survey* 17, 9 (1977), 880-885, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2643595>.

<sup>2</sup> Rubin, Sass Julia. "Countering the rhetoric of emerging domestic markets: Why more information alone will not address the capital needs of underserved communities." *Economic Development Quarterly* 25, 2, (2011), 182-192, doi:10.1177/0891242410388935.

<sup>3</sup> Wennekers, Sander, Wennekers, André van, Thurik, Roy, Reynolds, Paul. "Nascent entrepreneurship and the level of economic development." *Small Business Economics* 24, 3 (2005), 293-309, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40229424>.

Theoretically, we recognize that knowledge does not just benefit the recipient but is also spilled over into the community in which that recipient interacts. When agents acquire new knowledge, that knowledge can be exploited for economic opportunity. Entrepreneurship, then, is where economic opportunity meets community need. Entrepreneurship is not just about profit seeking—it is about improving the quality of people’s lives. The entrepreneurial mindset is a critical mix of success-oriented attitudes, including initiative, intelligent risk-taking, collaboration, and opportunity recognition.

Still, while entrepreneurship has long thrived in America’s economy, formal instruction has been deficient because entrepreneurship education until more recently was undervalued.

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## Educational Policy and Entrepreneurship

Among the greatest challenge facing the U.S. economy and consequently the education system is how to grow a skilled workforce prepared to meet and exceed the demands of the present-day economy.

I think it has been made clear that today’s economy requires innovative thinking with an entrepreneurial mindset. But because formal curriculum within a large number of school districts exclude entrepreneurship education, the discipline has been slow to grow at the primary and secondary levels—despite the rapidity of growth at the collegiate level. High schools, in particular, have not been able to revise curricu-

lum to meet the rapid changes in technological advancement.

Jacobi emphasizes that the goal of entrepreneurship education is to engage a segment of the community in the creation of social capital.<sup>4</sup> The solidarity amongst stakeholders—that is, teachers, parents, students, public and private sectors, and the community-at-large—results in more institutionalized practices that can address problems such as violence, unemployment, inequality, and exclusion. When viewed in this way, entrepreneurship is about thriving in an economic system where all actors and stakeholders are essential.

The more recent expansion of entrepreneurship education supports the function of formal education and is a response by the institution of higher education to ensure that nations maintain a high standard of living and remain competitive in the global economy. In the US, it has emerged in the face of youth unemployment and economic development challenges.

Fostering the life skills of students enhances the benefits of communities collectively. To translate entrepreneurship education into entrepreneurial activity, youth should be integrated into the labor market and entrepreneurial social activity in a meaningful way.<sup>5</sup> The challenge in creating more effective policies is to ensure that its impacts are for positive, both for the individual and the community, and that underserved communities are the primary beneficiary.

## Entrepreneurs are Made

<sup>4</sup> Jacobi, Pedro. “Public and private responses to social exclusion among youth in São Paulo.” *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 606 (2006), 216–230.

<sup>5</sup> Brixiová, Zuzana, Ncube, Mthuli, Bicaba, Zorobabel. “Skills and youth entrepreneurship in Africa: Analysis with evidence from Swaziland.” *World Development* 67 (2015), 11–26, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.worlddev.2014.09.027>.

Literature supports the inclusion of youth in entrepreneurial education and related activity. However, the study of entrepreneurship education is limited. Due to the limitations, several constructs of entrepreneurship education have not been settled upon. As the discipline emerged, the argument existed as to whether entrepreneurship education could be taught or whether entrepreneurial motivation was an inherent character trait. Based on the growth of the discipline, it is now evident this argument has been settled upon: these skills can be taught.

The entrepreneur has been embedded into American character since the first recorded inventions from great innovators, such as Thomas Edison and Lewis Latimer. We are surrounded by the outputs of innovators, such as the light bulb, filament, cars, and computers. The emphasis on the end product rather than the process paints the entrepreneur as capable of independent and spontaneous innovation. To credit the entrepreneur, these are traits of an innovator, but history informs that innovation is a process that is influenced by environment, circumstance, motivation, and many other factors. Thus, the entrepreneur is made—not born.

Entrepreneurship curriculum should utilize a multi-disciplinary and mixed-method approach of instruction. However, there is no single method to teach entrepreneurship education.

Research expanding the past several decades has shown that the classroom alone cannot provide the skills needed to build a real business. Potential entrepreneurs need exposure to risks, creativity, and ambiguity—which can only be acquired through experiential learning. The typical business pedagogy taught in the classroom lacks hands-on applicability. Entrepreneurship education should be seen as a complement to other business and leadership programs that covers an understanding about the

broader economy and their own personal economic foundation.<sup>6</sup>

While there is a strong argument that entrepreneurship education can support or improve economic conditions, research has been limited in youth or pre-college age entrepreneurship education. Due to the nascency of entrepreneurship education for youth, there is a gap in information, a lack of theory, a lack of agreed upon evaluation, and a lack of policy. Entrepreneurship education and skill development programs can be an invaluable experience for youth because it provides the opportunity to build on skills relative and beneficial to all aspects of life. This is one aspect of entrepreneurship that seems to be uncontested.

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## Conclusion

The profound ability for entrepreneurship education to address social justice and equity, particularly in communities that wish to improve economic conditions, make it ideally suited for addressing economic and workforce development.<sup>7</sup> While there has been an unprecedented increase in demand and subsequent supply of entrepreneurship curriculum in higher education, in more recent years, other institutions—

<sup>6</sup> Aspen Youth Entrepreneurship Strategy Group. *Youth entrepreneurship education in America: A policymaker's action guide*. (Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute, 2008).

<sup>7</sup> Nelson, E. Robert. "Entrepreneurship education in developing countries." *Asian Survey* 17,9 (1977), 880-885, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2643595>.

such as primary schools, secondary schools, and not-for-profits—have begun to offer creative opportunities for entrepreneurship skill development as well.

However, the nascency of youth entrepreneurship education have led to gaps in evaluating the validity of the construct and a dearth of practitioners. Nonetheless, the importance of curricula designed to foster the development of entrepreneurship implores all stakeholders—students, parents, teachers, and researchers—to find practices and policies for social and economic improvements. After all, the knowledge and skills obtained through entrepreneurship education not only benefit the individual, but stand to benefit the welfare of the community.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.