Experiential Learning Curriculum Shown to Positively Impact Business Acumen and Self-Confidence in Students

2018-2019 School Year
Youth Entrepreneurs exists to instill Principled Entrepreneurship™ in young people through experiential learning and confidence building. Its curriculum seeks to increase the business acumen of students while also giving them the opportunity to discover, develop, and apply their innate talents and abilities as they progress through the program. In the 2018-2019 school year, 25% of Youth Entrepreneurs students reported an increase in understanding of how to write a business plan, and 74% of students stated Youth Entrepreneurs played a role in increasing their confidence, among other metrics. The findings of this study indicate the Youth Entrepreneurs curriculum positively impacts the business acumen of young people while also fostering a positive view of self.

Executive Summary

As the workplace more rapidly adapts to automation, high school students face the unprecedented challenge of preparing for a workplace containing jobs currently not in existence. However, some skills are far from being automated; all of these skills deal with emotional intelligence, communication, and self-confidence (Dean, 2017). Considering these future workplace opportunities, the Youth Entrepreneurs program seeks to instill Principled Entrepreneurship™ and self-confidence in its students via experiential learning by helping them identify their innate talents and abilities. The curriculum focuses on four main pillars: Foundational Values, Soft Skills, Currency and Auctions, and Transformational Mindset. In particular, the 2018-2019 student pre and post-program surveys indicate Youth Entrepreneurs alumni display greater business acumen and self-confidence when exiting the program than they did at the beginning, increasing their potential opportunities in the future workplace.

In a March 2019 article, Harvard Business Review discusses the relationship between competency and confidence, best displayed in the early 1980’s study from Schlenker and Leary (1982). The article articulates the key role self-confidence plays in workplace dynamics: individuals projecting greater levels of self-confidence (without over-compensating and appearing arrogant) are viewed as being more competent by their counterparts, oftentimes resulting in greater opportunities within the workplace (Nasher, 2019). Given these findings, it is imperative future courses not only instill subject knowledge and soft skills, but self-confidence around students’ innate abilities as well. The following findings display the efficacy of the Youth Entrepreneurs program with regard to instilling confidence in students while increasing business acumen and developing their applicable, real-world abilities.
Methods and Limitations

The purpose of this study was to determine the level of transformation in Youth Entrepreneurs students across the country by comparing their pre and post-program survey results. A pre-Youth Entrepreneurs survey was distributed at the beginning of the course and a post-Youth Entrepreneurs survey was distributed at the end of the course, both via email. The participants were high school students from across the United States. A total of 4,056 students participated in the pre-program survey; 1,674 students submitted post-program survey responses. Despite the difference in response rates, the overall demographics remained consistent.

Results

Students were asked various questions related to their level of business acumen upon entering the Youth Entrepreneurs program. Following the course, respondents self-reported large increases in their knowledge of areas such as marketing a business, writing a business plan, estimating potential earnings, and calculating a breakeven point, as displayed in Figure 1. Students also reported an increase of 9% in college or career preparedness following their time in the Youth Entrepreneurs class. These findings indicate the efficacy of the Youth Entrepreneurs program teaching young people business skills while simultaneously equipping them for future careers.

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Even more compelling, a large majority of students attributed the Youth Entrepreneurs program with increasing their confidence, transforming their mindsets, and impacting their future. As shown in Figure 2, 80% of students credited their Youth Entrepreneurs class with helping them to identify opportunities that will allow them to be successful in life; 78% believed the course helped shape their perceptions of their talents and abil-
ities, to the point of impacting their future goals related to education or the workforce. Lastly, 74% credited their Youth Entrepreneurs class with building their self-confidence. Each of these unique indicators point to the curriculum's efficacy in instilling an inherent sense of self-worth and respect in students, a vital step in realizing one's potential.

Figure 2: Percent Students Who Found YE Impactful

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>84%</td>
<td>YE improved my understanding of Principled Entrepreneurship*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82%</td>
<td>I will use what I learned in YE in the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80%</td>
<td>YE helped me to identify opportunities that will allow me to be successful.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>78%</td>
<td>YE helped me to think differently about my talents and how to apply them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>76%</td>
<td>YE had an impact on my future goals, such as education, skilled trade, or entering the workforce.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74%</td>
<td>YE helped me build confidence in myself.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusion

The results of these comparative surveys indicate a positive impact in the lives of Youth Entrepreneurs students. In addition to building business acumen, students strengthened their understanding of their innate talents and abilities while also increasing their self-confidence. As mentioned previously, research suggests young people who have greater soft skills and increased self-confidence tend to have more promising career trajectories (Nasher, 2019). Hence, these findings speak to the applicability of the Youth Entrepreneurs program in the everyday lives of students beyond the classroom. It is the organization's hope that these results strengthen this point of view in its constituents across the nation.
