FIVE REASONS FOR TEACHING ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Something vital is missing from our schools. If we really want to prepare students to be successful in a 21st century global economy, we need to be teaching them entrepreneurship. Since I realized this, I've read voraciously about innovation, start-ups, entrepreneurship, and entrepreneurship education. I've visited Babson College, Olin College, and the Bauer College of Business at the University of Houston to learn from the best in the business. Finally, I have established a very helpful personal learning network via Twitter and the internet to learn more on a daily basis and to stay current with trends in both entrepreneurship and entrepreneurship education.

Courses on entrepreneurship have been available in higher education for years, and in recent years, have appeared in more high schools. As with teaching a language, if we want this skill to become part of a student's DNA, we must introduce it at the youngest possible age. We need to teach entrepreneurship as early as kindergarten and first grade. Here are five reasons why these skills are critical for students' success in the future:

1.   We live in a world in which the future is uncertain, so students need skills that will allow them to make their own way. We can't predict the job market and economy our students will enter. Therefore, we really can't predict what content our students need in order to be successful after they leave our schools. We know without a doubt, though, that our students need skills that will allow them to navigate uncertain waters and chart their own paths. Entrepreneurship education teaches these skills. Entrepreneurship education equips students to seek out problem-solving opportunities, empathize with others, think creatively, take risks, accept failure as part of the growth process, and appreciate the correlation between hard work and success.

2.   Students need more opportunities for creativity, innovation, and collaboration in schools. As testing and standards take over our education system, opportunities for students to create, innovate, collaborate, and demonstrate proficiency or mastery in real-life ways become scarcer. Entrepreneurship education not only encourages, but also requires students to be creative, to innovate, and to collaborate with others.

3.   Students need to learn how to identify problems or needs before they learn problem-solving skills. Problem-solving has been all the rage in education for years. The problem with the way we have traditionally taught problem-solving in schools is that problems are already set up or defined by someone else (i.e. the teacher, the test writer, the textbook company). In the real world, problems get fixed only when the problems have been properly identified. Therefore, students need to learn both how to identify problems,

and how to identify and solve the right problems. If a student identifies a problem incorrectly or solves the wrong problem, the solution to the problem has no value.

4.   Students need more grit. As Angela Duckworth has so aptly stated, grit may be the single most important factor in a person's long-term success in this world. According to Duckworth's research, grades, intelligence, socioeconomic status, and the other usual suspects do not stack up to the characteristic she defines as grit. Students learn grit through entrepreneurship because the entrepreneurial process is both demanding and uncertain. These experiences can be extremely beneficial for students to learn before they graduate and begin to face real-life, dollars-and-cents, people-in-need situations. Entrepreneurs prove to be some of the grittiest people on the planet, and grit can be taught through entrepreneurship education.

5.   The world needs students who are looking to make a difference. This truth is self-evident. Entrepreneurs, by definition, want to make a difference. In the business sense, entrepreneurs seek to solve problems, meet needs, and ease pain or difficulty as a means of selling products or services. In the social sense, entrepreneurs seek to solve problems because of the impact ideas and solutions can make on human beings or on the environment. Either way, students trained in entrepreneurship education enter the world not only trained to identify problems that need solving, but also determined to creatively solve problems, meet needs, and make the world a better place.

Entrepreneurship education holds great value for all of our students, and in particular, those entering the fields of science, technology, mission work, social work, healthcare, and education. The future belongs to the innovators and creators, and entrepreneurship education serves as a great incubator for the types of creative, innovative ideas our students and our world need in the 21st century.