

Entrepreneurship Training for Inner City Youth

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Abstract

School closures and low performance are problems in urban high schools without any real solutions. An investigation of some of the underlying problems that hamper inner-city high school administrators from implementing change and innovation that might prevent school closings and low performance among the student population of local districts within metropolitan areas is undertaken. A review of both domestic and global demands on future workforce skills will be used to help shed light on possible initiatives and program changes for secondary education in America. Plans and projects for the expansion of entrepreneurship training and integration into secondary curriculum are presented: including the Entrepreneurial Encouragement Program, Hyde Park Technology Corps, and Hyde Park Entrepreneurs.

Introduction

Plato talks about education in the *Republic* and asks, “That the most important stage of any enterprise is the beginning, especially when something young and sensitive is involved? You see, that's when most of its formation takes place, and absorbs every impression that anyone wants to stamp upon it” [1]. “Preach, my dear Sir, a crusade against ignorance,” wrote Thomas Jefferson in a letter to a friend [2]. Thomas Jefferson believed education was the means by which people could become useful productive members of the state and the “basic necessity for self-government,” to develop a good strong technically advanced nation [3].

Current Conditions

“We need help fast,” said Hyde Park teacher John Kugler, the school's teachers union delegate” [4], in reference to the rise in school violence. Hyde Park Academy (HPA) is an inner city high school that exhibits many of the issues that are being experienced in public education today. The history of HPA is one of prominent and influential people who went through the halls of the high school: i.e., actor Steve Allen, former Secretary of Veterans Affairs Jesse Brown, musician Herbie Hancock, singer Mel Torme, soul singer Minnie Riperton, and aviator Amelia Earhart. The rich history of HPA, “the glory years,” has prevented the initiation and implementation of much-needed change at the school even though the demographics and socioeconomic status of the students has changed. In addition to these changes there is a shift towards gentrification and restructuring of low income housing in Chicago and the area is again in flux.

Global Demands

Industrialization in the late 1800's and early 1900's was the influence on American education, educators such as Dewey, Meade, and Mann pushed for an efficient and standardized educational system to produce skilled workers for American progress [5]. American culture is no longer an industrial leader pushing manufacturing to the edges of innovation and production. Instead, America has become a superpower with an aging population that looks to be a partner in a globally interdependent social structure [6].

Hence, there is a need to shed the pedagogical tendencies of the past and to focus on utilizing existing strengths on the future, this will help to provide youth with the tools and skills to compete in a rapidly changing global market place. Globalization directly affects the demands on the current and future graduates of the American educational system. Consumerism in America is driving innovation and enterprise in foreign countries that are competing for market share in the US. Sustainability and capitalization need to become incorporated within the curriculum to help prepare students for success in the world economy [7]. The educational system of today is still working on solving issues that were related to the industrialization of western society. There needs to be a break from the past and prepare for the future.

Entrepreneurial Encouragement Program

One consequence of global demand is the development of the Entrepreneurial Encouragement (EE) program which is a vehicle by which information is shared about the many opportunities for occupational independence that exist in the fields associated with vocational studies. It is a program designed to open the minds of inner city youth to the opportunities that await them in their communities and around the world [8]. Chicago State University, Students in Free Enterprise (SIFE) team presented the EE program to minority vocational students of the Chicago Public Schools. The belief of the program is the importance of making a concrete link between classroom study and real world demand for skilled multicultural, multilingual artisans, who will be able to design, build, repair, and maintain our infrastructures in the years to come [9].



Figure 1. Contractors with EE Program lecture and instruction.

Hyde Park Technology Corps

The goal of the Hyde Park Technology Corps (HPTC) is to catalyze the development of youth resources for themselves and their communities. An outcome-focused, project-based and technology-based environment is used as a stimulating program framework to accomplish this goal. HPTC is organized as a student-run social venture which develops computer learning centers in an underserved community. The organization is a Microsoft Authorized Refurbisher (MAR) through its Fresh Start for Donated Computers program and affiliate of Youth Technology Corps (YTC) an international organization that empowers youth to become agents of change at home and around the world through technology education, community service and teamwork [10].



Figure 2. Hyde Park Tech Corps service equipment at HPA.

One project the HPTC completed was to rebuild computers for the International Baccalaureate (IB) program at Hyde Park Career Academy. The HPTC team received a request for ten computers to set up a computer lab. HPTC students proceeded to rebuild computers that had been taken off the inventory sheets of teachers and marked for disposal. The equipment was then reconfigured and installed into a classroom.

Hyde Park Entrepreneurs

The following is the description of the Hyde Park Entrepreneurs (HPE) Student Enterprise program from the Education to Careers (ETC) website:

Student Enterprises supplement classroom training through the creation of student businesses from various career cluster areas. Students work with teacher advisors after school and on weekends to conceptualize, develop, and implement service or product-oriented businesses to a customer base within the Chicago Public Schools. The Student Enterprises program teaches students entrepreneurship skills, provides students with hands-on experience [11].

Statement of students in business proposal:

We want to use what we learn and our shops to make money and help the school. We believe we can do small repairs, classroom maintenance computer maintenance small construction, printing services, software installation, newsletters and even design and build special small furniture [12].



Figure 3. HPE construction work and custom furniture design & build.

Projects that the enterprise has completed include: preparing and painting the 4000+ square foot cafeteria facility at HPA, designing and installing 12 data drops at 250' plus for the physical education department, redesign and upgrading the Computer Aided Drafting (CAD) laboratory in conjunction with a \$50,000 Improvement Grant [13].

Conclusion

Hyde Park Academy is a school rooted in the past and consequently is paying the price for the lack of forethought that globalization creates change. Through experimentation, engineering and entrepreneurship the school can become a leader in educational change. Achievement of student growth as a result of implementing pragmatic learning by designing and developing a highly efficient modern laboratory facility that integrates entrepreneurship in an inner city urban high school is essential for understanding the self-efficacy of students, including the various stages of cognitive development that each individual may be experiencing. By using "hands-on" instruction, characterized by an extensive highly specialized laboratory environment, students will be empowered to design and create learning facilities of the future that will be used to generate innovative concepts that conform to industry standards in a fast paced authentic learning environment.

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Biography

JOHN KUGLER is a design and build instructor at Hyde Park Academy, a Chicago Public School, since September 2004. Previously, he worked for 20 years in the manufacturing and construction industries. He completed his BS and MEd in Technology Education at Chicago State University and earned his Illinois State Secondary Teaching Certificate through the Alternative Route to Certification program at Eastern Illinois University. He now teaches three levels of architectural design/drafting and three levels of carpentry/construction programs at HPA.