An Evaluation of Experiential Learning Strategies for an Entrepreneurship Boot Camp: The Case of the National Entrepreneurship Development Company and the University of the West Indies

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ABSTRACT

There has been a global movement to support the creation of sustainable business enterprises via entrepreneurial activity. To encourage the growth and supply of entrepreneurs, training programmes have been designed to deliver knowledge at various stages along the entrepreneurship continuum. The pedagogical approaches of experiential education have been making its way into the delivery of entrepreneurship education programmes as a unique variable in programme implementation. This research article investigated the impact of the deployment of experiential learning into the delivery of an Entrepreneurship Boot Camp. It was revealed that the experiential techniques made a positive impact on the delivery of the curriculum and it was recommended that future Camps adopt a customized approach by an entrepreneurial assessment at the application process, the provision of mentoring services, a post after care support programme including an agency referral system and an expansion of the programme into the Secondary School system.

KEYWORDS

Business Enterprise Launch, Entrepreneurship Boot Camp, Experiential Learning, Sustainable Business

INTRODUCTION

There has been a global movement to support the creation of sustainable business enterprises via entrepreneurial activity. Indeed, while entrepreneurship should not be viewed as a panacea for development, current research strongly suggests that business ownership can yield tangible results in reducing poverty, assisting in socioeconomic development, leveraging entrepreneurial competencies, utilizing of natural and other resources and building generational wealth. To encourage the growth and supply of entrepreneurs, training programmes have been designed to deliver knowledge at various stages along the entrepreneurship continuum. These programmes can be targeted to different market segments of entrepreneurs such as pre-startup, business launch and ongoing operations.

The pedagogical approaches of experiential education have been making its way into the delivery of entrepreneurship education programmes as a unique variable in programme implementation. However there has not been a high level of research into the impact of using experiential learning within
an entrepreneurial framework in order to ascertain how participants respond to experiential learning and the impact these techniques and learning environment has on their subsequent entrepreneurial pathway. This paper will address that gap by an investigation into an experiential based learning Entrepreneurship Boot Camp (EBC) a collaboration between the Department of Management Studies at the University of the West Indies (UWI) and the National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited. (NEDCO). The knowledge gained from this research will lead to a greater understanding of experiential learning for entrepreneurship and can be a guide to create training programmes for entrepreneurs that can be scaled and replicated in other countries of the Caribbean Region and can be useful in providing an avenue for the cross fertilization and expansion of entrepreneurial ability.

REVIEW OF EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Most scholars agree that experiential learning means learning from experience or learning by doing. It implies a practical experience within the learning process. The first step in experiential education immerses adult learners in an experience and then encourages reflection about the experience to develop new skills, new attitudes, or new ways of thinking. The research of Wurdinger, and Carlson (2010) also explains that Experiential learning is any learning that supports students in applying their knowledge and conceptual understanding to real-world problems or authentic situations where the instructor directs and facilitates learning.

The research studies of Carver (1996) further outlines that experiential education is a learning strategy that makes conscious application of the students’ experiences by integrating them into the curriculum. The framework of these experiences encompasses any configuration of senses (such as, touch, smell, hearing, sight, taste), emotions (for example excitement, anxiety, fear, hurt, empathy), physical condition (e.g., temperature, strength, energy level), and cognition (e.g., constructing knowledge, solving problems). Experiential education can be viewed as a holistic strategy because it embraces students in their entirety - as thinking, feeling, physical, emotional, spiritual, and social beings.

There have been many terms utilized to label the process of learning from experience. Dewey (1938) created the term “learning by doing,” and contends that in order for education to be progressive there has to be an experiential component to the lesson. He argues that by focusing only on content, the teacher eliminates the opportunity for students to develop their own thoughts of concepts based on interaction with the information. He also suggests that each student's experience will be individualized based on past experiences, and not all students will develop the same outlook of the concept. Thus, the experiential learning classroom mimics society, where all people have different views of topics and information and provides a richer learning experiences for students. According to the Association of Experiential Education (2014) the core components of experiential educational principles are as follows:

- Experiences are carefully chosen for their learning potential (i.e., whether they provide opportunities for students to practice and deepen emergent skills, encounter novel and unpredictable situations that support new learning, or learn from natural consequences, mistakes, and successes).
- Throughout the experiential learning process, the learner is actively engaged in posing questions, investigating, experimenting, being curious, solving problems, assuming responsibility, being creative, and constructing meaning, and is challenged to take initiative, make decisions and be accountable for results.
- Reflection on learning during and after one’s experiences is an integral component of the learning process. This reflection leads to analysis, critical thinking, and synthesis.
- Learners are engaged intellectually, emotionally, socially, and/or physically, which produces a perception that the learning task is authentic.
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