

Cultivating Youth Entrepreneurship through Agricultural Education and Training

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Why is entrepreneurship education in Agricultural Education and Training (AET) important?

Simply put, entrepreneurs and small business owners are needed in agriculture, the world over. The main aim of youth entrepreneurship education is to develop an entrepreneurial mindset. It is a small but important shift when youth begin to think that they can work for themselves and employ others versus only thinking they must work for someone else; or, not considering agriculture in the same domain as other businesses. When youth develop positive attitudes toward entrepreneurship in agriculture and gain first-hand experience, they are more likely to start their own businesses.

What is entrepreneurship in AET?

Entrepreneurship education in AET is a component critical to the success in retaining young people in agriculture and rural areas the world over (Valerio, Parton, & Robb,

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2014). No doubt many valuable lessons have been taught in formal and non-formal settings on technologies relevant to agriculture and basic business principles necessary for a young person to become a successful practitioner. Yet, youth all over the world still leave the agriculture industry and rural areas in pursuit of other aspirations (Bennell, 2010). Encouraging would-be youth agriculturists to think like entrepreneurs is essential to retaining them in agriculture and will also better equip them to be successful in ever-changing local, national, and international markets. For the purpose of this white paper, entrepreneurship is defined as the craft or skill of starting, developing, organizing and managing a business and assuming the associated risk in order to make a profit. This definition does not emphasize highly innovative entrepreneurship that values bringing new products and services to the market. It does, however, capture the spirit of most entrepreneurship education in AET systems.

How can entrepreneurship be taught in AET?

Four parts of entrepreneurship education in the AET context are explored here:

1. **Coupling instruction with a personalized student project is a powerful, hands-on tool for teaching entrepreneurship concepts in an applied context.** One of the most powerful ways

entrepreneurship education may be taught through agricultural education and training systems is through a student's personalized, individual experience. In many circles, these experiences are called **supervised agricultural**

experience programs, or SAEP

(See Phipps, Osborne, Dyer & Ball, 2008 for an excellent description of SAEP in the AET context). In brief, SAEP is a personal project a student

“SAEP” is supervised agricultural experience program; it is a personal project that a student completes as a part of his/her agricultural education and training.

completes as a part of his/her education or training in agriculture. As an example, students at the Orkeeswa School in Monduli, Tanzania began their own home-based chicken and beekeeping operations as a part of taking an agriculture class at the secondary level. These SAE projects work together to strengthen and reinforce formal classroom instruction. To use the Tanzania students' example again, when these students have classroom discussions about beekeeping, the students with bees at home often have a much deeper understanding of the concepts because of their firsthand experience. Then, they are often able to take what has been learned in the classroom and apply it in their home-based project.

2. **Finding curricula and programming that facilitates the development of an entrepreneurial mindset is an important foundation for entrepreneurship education.**

Entrepreneurial education can be taught in AET systems through a two-part system—classroom instruction along with hands-on projects. An abundance of curricula for entrepreneurship education exists and can be applied to the agriculture context; indeed, much already has (see Heinert and Roberts, 2014 for a good summary of practices in entrepreneurship education and existing entrepreneurship programs in various geographic locations). However, what is often missing is the application of concepts through an individualized and supervised agriculture project. The Sega Girls School in Tanzania and the Uganda Rural Development and Training School (URDT) are two

excellent examples of schools using formal instruction coupled with SAEP. Students manage multiple small income generating enterprises around the school campus while at the same time receiving formal instruction in agriculture and entrepreneurship. Classroom instruction on both the technical skills of production agriculture and entrepreneurship coupled with practical application through a supervised program is a very powerful way to help a young person develop an entrepreneurial mindset.

3. It is essential to identify a competent instructor to teach entrepreneurship education.

Teachers and facilitators of entrepreneurship education in the AET context are critical to the success of the program and consequently to the success of students and program participants (Heinert, 2016). To be more effective in teaching entrepreneurship education, instructors should:

- i. Become entrepreneurs themselves. Many studies have demonstrated that teachers who have been or were currently entrepreneurs are more effective at teaching the concepts of entrepreneurship.
- ii. Be open-minded and enthusiastic with their students. Effective teachers of entrepreneurship education are able to help a young person find their passion for agriculture and wisely advise them on how to turn that passion into an income generating business. Many young people are intimidated at the prospect of working for themselves or starting their own business. The effective instructor enthusiastically works to help their aspiring entrepreneur find a good business idea and work to make it successful. They also are not afraid to allow the student fail but are there to help the student learn from their mistakes and move forward with them. Again, an AET system that offers SAEP is an ideal training ground for this supportive education.
- iii. Encourage students to start and run income-generating projects while the student is in the AET system. Many students prefer working for someone else. However, the effective instructor helps move the student from a mindset of being an employee to being an employer.

To help students be successful in entrepreneurship efforts, it is important to consider a few key barriers to entry. Access to land, capital, and other physical resources often pose impossible barriers for

many young would-be entrepreneurs in agriculture. Effective entrepreneurship education in AET systems should at least help provide resources for the youth to solve these issues. For example, some AET programs establish youth micro-loans that help them gain access to necessary capital. Others set up school gardens or other school-owned small businesses so the students can have access to land at least during their time as students. Programs that anticipate the common challenges for youth entrepreneurs are often more effective than those that simply provide training. Entrepreneurship education in the AET context has the potential to develop the entrepreneurial mindset of youth, engage them in different ways in agriculture, and put them on paths to becoming future business owners and innovators in the agricultural marketplace. Providing proper curricula, partnering it with SAEP, having an engaged and effective instructor, and anticipating challenges common to many youth in agriculture, are a few promising practices.

OTHER RESOURCES

- Junior Achievement is one of the largest and most global resources for entrepreneurship education:
<https://www.juniorachievement.org/web/ja-usa/home>
- The Engler Entrepreneurship in Agribusiness program is a unique entrepreneurship oriented program in the agriculture context at the university level:
engler.unl.edu

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