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A Phenomenological Study:
Exploring High School Students' Experiences Earning an Entrepreneurship Diploma (ED) in an
Entrepreneurship Education Secondary School Program

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Abstract

As of 2015, 42 states reported some type of entrepreneurship education standards, guidelines, or proficiencies and 18 states required entrepreneurship education courses to be offered at the high school level. Yet, there is only limited research on the experiences of students in degree-granting entrepreneurship education secondary school programs that promote an entrepreneurial mindset. This leads to a limited understanding for the secondary school leaders and curricula developers designing and implementing these programs and potentially may result in the creation of ineffective programs. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore high school students' lived experiences earning a high school Entrepreneurship Diploma (ED) that was designed to promote an entrepreneurial mindset. This study analyzed qualitative data, collected through questionnaires, interviews, and reflection matrices, from the ED Cohort 1 members, as well as their parents and former program faculty.

Four results emerged from the study's findings: (a) The uncertain and non-traditional future work landscape necessitates a diverse and holistic skillset, which this ED promoted; (b) Participation in numerous and reoccurring experiences that enable high school students to apply classroom learning to real world problem-solving and presentation empowers students to develop confidence and take risks; (c) Sustained collaborative and teamwork-based learning leverages social relationships, and helps students to develop and understand the value of support networks; and (d) Self-reflection and feedback in the context of entrepreneurial mindset development enables powerful and purposeful self-discovery of an authentic identity. These results offer valuable insights to secondary school leaders and curricula developers designing and implementing entrepreneurship education programs that promote an entrepreneurial mindset in students. Since these results also indicate the skills with which high school students might be entering college or the workforce, these results are indirectly valuable to college administrators and employers, who desire entrepreneurially minded individuals or employees.

Context

The Fourth Industrial Revolution is comprised of the exponential growth in globalization, autonomation, and digitization of work and has resulted in a global startup revolution and the emergence of the gig economy (Bakhshi, Downing, Osborne, & Schneider, 2017; Schwab, 2016; Startup Genome LLC, 2018). These factors have led to the desirability of creativity and an entrepreneurial mindset in the 21st century (Silverman, 2018). Entrepreneurship education increasingly has emerged as a vehicle to promote an entrepreneurial mindset in students, but mostly in universities, and with limited qualitative literature on entrepreneurship education programs in high schools that promote an entrepreneurial mindset (Gold & Rodriguez, 2018).

Problem

Secondary school leaders and curricula developers seeking to design and implement programmatic approaches to promoting an entrepreneurial mindset in high school students have a

limited understanding of how high school students experience degree-granting entrepreneurship education programs that promote an entrepreneurial mindset. This limited understanding is a problem, since it contributes to a gap between how secondary school leaders and curricula developers perceive students' experience of entrepreneurship education and how students actually experience entrepreneurship education. This gap potentially leads to the design and implementation of entrepreneurship education curricula that ineffectively promote an entrepreneurial mindset.

Purpose

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore high school students' lived experiences earning a high school Entrepreneurship Diploma (ED) that was designed to promote an entrepreneurial mindset.

Participants

The target population for this qualitative, phenomenological study was individuals who met the criteria of having a substantive degree of first-or-secondhand, shared experiences with respect to the studied phenomenon of the experience of earning the ED. This study's 11 participants – three ED Cohort 1 members, six parents, and two former faculty – were selected using snowball sampling. The researcher identified prospective participants who were ED Cohort 1 members, their parents, or former program faculty, emailed them an invitation to participate, and asked them to recruit other potential study participants.

Data Collection and Analysis

To enable participants to describe their lived experiences with respect to earning the ED, the researcher used the following data collection methods: (a) anonymous, self-administered, open-ended response questionnaires, (b) semi-structured interviews, (c) reflection matrices on Cohort 1 members' curricular and extracurricular experiences, and (d) the researcher's journal. First-and-second cycle coding methods were used to analyze the data. First cycle methods included descriptive, in-vivo, emotion, values, and narrative coding. Second cycle methods included pattern, focused, and axial coding.

Findings

Five findings emerged from the data analysis: (a) Influence on college and career choices and readiness; (b) Value of real-world experiences and exposure; (c) Cohort 1 membership as formative to realizing the value of support networks; (d) The Entrepreneurship Diploma as a zone of holistic development; and (e) Discovery of authentic, unique self-identity as empowering. Each finding consisted of three themes (Figure 1).

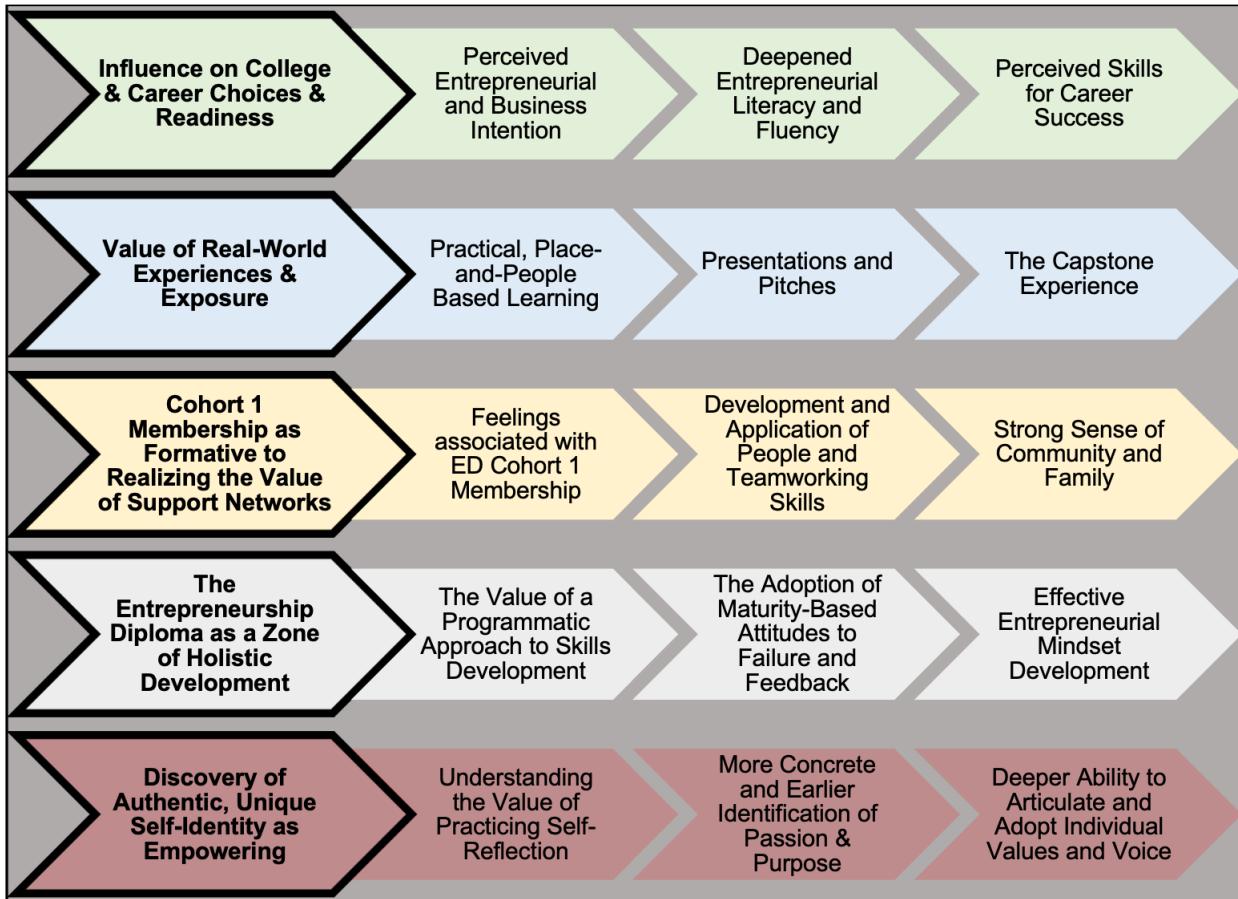


Figure 1. Findings and themes that emerged from the research.

Results

This study produced four results: (a) The uncertain and non-traditional future work landscape necessitates a diverse and holistic skillset, which this ED promoted; (b) Participation in numerous and reoccurring experiences that enable high school students to apply classroom learning to real world problem-solving and presentation empowers students to develop confidence and take risks; (c) Sustained collaborative and teamwork-based learning leverages social relationships, and helps students to develop and understand the value of support networks; and (d) Self-reflection and feedback in the context of entrepreneurial mindset development enables powerful and purposeful self-discovery of an authentic identity.

These results extend the qualitative literature on how high school students experience entrepreneurship education programs that promote an entrepreneurial mindset. These results provide insights on what study participants perceive as valuable with respect to ED Cohort 1 members' preparedness for the future work landscape, their participation in an entrepreneurship education program, and their entrepreneurial mindset development. By considering these results in the design and execution of entrepreneurship education, secondary school leaders and curricula developers can create more effective programs for students.

Conclusions

Three conclusions emerged from the results. First, study participants perceived that earning the ED as a high school diploma enabled Cohort 1 members to develop and apply skills

that better position them to navigate and succeed in their future work landscape. Second, study participants perceived that Cohort 1 members felt more prepared to lead and manage teams, design presentations, engage their creativity and innovate, start and scale a business, and take risks. Third, study participants perceived that Cohort 1 members developed an entrepreneurial mindset by presenting, pitching, working in teams, completing Capstone, and self-reflecting. These conclusions invite secondary school leaders and curricula developers to develop, implement, evaluate, and certify curricula that enable high school students to practice and apply a diverse and holistic range of skills in order to develop their entrepreneurial mindset.

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Author Biography

Dr. Christine Galib serves as the Senior Director of Programs at The Ion. In this role, she oversees the development and execution of programs at The Ion, including The Ion's Accelerator Programs, Workforce Development Programs, Academic Programs, and Community Education Programs. She also directs The Ion Smart and Resilient Cities Accelerator, which supports selected startups as they develop and deploy technology that connects ideas, people, and communities in Houston. The Accelerator is backed by the Mayor's Office, the City of Houston, Microsoft, Intel, and TX/RX, Houston's non-profit makerspace. Christine is the founder of Plan My Plate, which offers leadership, management, creativity, innovation, mindfulness, and wellness consulting. A Teach For America alumna with experience in investment management, pre-medical studies, and educational consulting, Christine holds her bachelor's from Princeton University, master's from the University of Pennsylvania, and doctorate from Drexel University. Her speaking, writing, and research interests include entrepreneurial mindset development, creativity, innovation, leadership, mindfulness, wellness, and apologetics.