**Teaching Entrepreneurship in Government Schools**

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The value of promoting entrepreneurship and self-employment for sustainable economic development is being recognised across the globe. Start-ups and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) contribute significantly to the economic growth of a country by generating employment, bridging regional disparities, and improving the standard of living in various communities. However, efforts to make a difference may fall short if the working population is deficient in entrepreneurial skills and ambitions. Therefore, the need to make the population of India ‘entrepreneurship ready’ is urgent.

Given the size of the Indian population, there is an urgency to equip the youth coming out of school with skills for seeking and generating employment. It would, thus, be of value to Indian society if entrepreneurship education starts at the high school level.

**Experiments in teaching Entrepreneurship early:**

Currently, formalised education in entrepreneurship is often included at the graduation and post-graduation levels in India, and only at technical and management institutes. In most cases, these courses use conventional teaching methods and do not require students to participate actively. The Entrepreneurship Mindset Curriculum (EMC) was instituted for classes 9-12 in Delhi government schools. The basic premise was that the development of entrepreneurial abilities and mindset through experiential learning in school would not only drive creativity, innovation, and passion to build something new or solve a social problem but would also facilitate one’s career growth.

In 2021, to push the experiential component of the curriculum further, a large-scale programme called Business Blasters was announced. Students in classes 11 and 12 would work on a business idea that could generate profit and/or create social impact. The programme was designed to build the awareness and skills required for entrepreneurship, including business acumen, curiosity, collaboration, communication, and overcoming the fear of failure.

The six-month-long programme involved approximately 3 lakh students, 1,000 school leaders or principals, more than 10,000 teachers, 1,000 business coaches and mentors, and a special task force of the Department of Education. It was personally overseen by Delhi’s minister of education. Given that it was a pioneering initiative, there was much that was learnt during this programme about pedagogy and implementation of entrepreneurial education with an experiential component. Here are some of the key learnings:

1. **It opens up career choices:** This large-scale programme on experiential entrepreneurship proved to be a real-life career choice laboratory. It helped students become more observant and aware of their surroundings, which led to a greater sense of curiosity and critical thinking around potential opportunities and possibilities. Most students who study in government schools in Delhi come from lower socio-economic backgrounds. The Business Blasters programme helped them think of entrepreneurship as a legitimate and rewarding career option upon completion of high school.
2. **It helps increase employability skills and self-efficacy:** During the intense hands-on process of thinking of an idea, taking feedback, improving the idea, working with a team, making a pitch, building the product, and selling it, the students became aware of their strengths and weaknesses, developed confidence and improved self-efficacy, learned to take risks, and were able to effectively communicate their ideas and problem-solve. Experiential learning made learning more relevant and real for most students.
3. **It changes the mindset of stakeholders:** The various stakeholders involved in the programme shared that the students were better off when the support they were being provided moved away from the frame of charity and empowerment. Instead, it is better to focus on providing opportunities that are typically not available to the students.

**Running an Innovative Project at scale:**

The time-bound nature of the project, the uncertainty caused by first-time implementation, and concerns about the safety of the minors involved helped to learn about large-scale project management of new ideas. The on-ground team benefitted from the following approaches to the project:

1. **Tight deadlines:** The individuals who were responsible for project implementation shared that they appreciated the tight monitoring and deadlines during the process. It helped them focus while carrying out tasks that were unfamiliar and outside the scope of their work and expertise. They mentioned that in the absence of deadlines, it was likely that the teams would not have performed as well.
2. **Autonomy:** They further acknowledged that the sheer challenge of executing a large-scale project made them innovate and find their own resources to complete the work. It was not only the monitoring but also the operational autonomy (within situational and project constraints) given by the top team to the on-ground teams at various levels that led to the successful implementation of the project. The school teams also appreciated the freedom they had to shape the journeys of student teams that belonged to their school.
3. **Shared learning:** Being able to share concerns and solutions across schools made it possible to quickly learn and find solutions for sticky issues such as finding mentors and ensuring student safety. Not all problems could be envisaged by the central team and not all answers could be found within the implementing teams. Open communication in all directions helped in finishing the project and facing the challenges that came along the way.

For more experiments like the Business Blasters programme, the wholehearted involvement of the school system and the bureaucracy cannot be overemphasised. Considering the current crisis of higher education and record high unemployment, such experiments, we believe, are worthy of emulation. A systematic analysis of the experiment’s success will help in better implementation of the next edition of such a programme.

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