



EFFECTIVE ENTREPRENEURSHIP EDUCATION REQUIRES THE DEVELOPMENT OF MINDSET AND KEY SKILLS COMBINED WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO SAFELY PRACTICE THEIR USE

A short case study from 10 years of the African Leadership Group

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African Leadership Academy
Developing the next generation of African leaders



INTRODUCTION

African Leadership Group (ALG) is a globally referenced pioneer in experiential education. In its short 10 years, it has established one of the world's most important secondary school (pre-university) programs through [African Leadership Academy](#) (South Africa), and has since expanded to two [African Leadership University](#) campuses (Mauritius, Rwanda) and a [Business School](#) (Rwanda). They are now launching a new network of workplace and entrepreneurship accelerators (Kenya, South Africa) that seeks to make their model of leadership development accessible to many young Africans. The goal is to identify, develop and connect 3 million African leaders of varying level and sector by 2035, making a significant impact on the talent and leadership needed on the continent to deliver an economically prosperous future for the world's largest workforce. Collectively, entrepreneurship, entrepreneurs, and entrepreneurial thinking are linchpins within the African Leadership Group, as they are central to the group's belief in training job creators-*not just job seekers.*

Creating entrepreneurs requires a shift in the way many people think about entrepreneurial education. Still quite nascent as an area of study and practice, entrepreneurship education has fallen into effectively two types: 1) textbook-driven theoretical training and 2) ideate-and-pitch programs. While each of these has their place, the success of ALG's various programs - and a growing cohort of similarly minded pioneers in this space - show that these are not robust enough for increasing entrepreneurial propensity or success in Africa.

African Leadership Group has found success in training young entrepreneurs by shaping *the world within young people* and *the world surrounding them while they learn* as the most effective tools through which to develop critical mindsets and skills. Importantly, this sits within their broader agenda as a leadership development institution, with a mandate to shape and accelerate people of high potential who will lead across the public and private sector spectrum.

SHAPING THE WORLD WITHIN: CREATING ENTREPRENEURIAL CONFIDENCE

Early in the African Leadership Group story, the leadership team identified that their students needed more than just the mechanics of entrepreneurship. Ideation, financing, and scaling up are bread-and-butter concepts within mainline entrepreneurship education, but what good are they without the entrepreneurial confidence to utilize them? As such, ALG built a curriculum that begins by shaping the beliefs, mindset, and overall disposition of students. The model begins with a simple framework called 'Human-Centered Entrepreneurship': BUILD (Believe, Understand, Invent, Listen and Deliver). Simple enough to access and remember, BUILD engages students first at a fundamental level: whether they believe they can be an entrepreneur, dream up a solution to an important problem, or raise an angel round to get started. ALG helps students develop their beliefs about entrepreneurship and their beliefs about themselves as potential entrepreneurs through a few well-tested means.

1 Create sibling rivalry with youth success stories

2 Focus first on the student, not the idea

3 Ask deep questions, don't answer them

4 Build entrepreneurial habits through repetition



1. Create Sibling Rivalry with Youth Success Stories

Entrepreneurial Leadership classes feature profiles and case studies of young African entrepreneurs very prominently - often graduates of the groups program's like William Kamkwamba (Malawi), who is featured in the new Netflix film "The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind"; or past winners of the [Anzisha Prize](#) like Melissa Bime (Cameroon) who is building a blood bank service and Andrew Mupuya (Uganda) who has built a significant paper-bag manufacturing business. By seeing other young people (and sometimes younger people) recognizing real problems and seizing real opportunities, it breaks a self-imposed barrier for students, creates a new openness to the concept. The group's educators believe strongly that seeing role models just a few steps ahead rather than global success stories produce better learning and activity outcomes.

2. Focus First on the Student, Not the Idea

Having broken through the barrier of hesitation, Entrepreneurial Leadership classes prompt students to engage in reflective activities that require introspection about the personal traits that lend themselves well to venture creation. One favorite exercise amongst students prompts them to reflect on their personal passions, interests, and skills (strengths), along with causes or problems that they recognize in the world. Through mapping, peer interviews, and thought exercises, students 'test' combinations of these different categories together until something sticks. Regardless of what students come up with initially, this practice builds confidence in having the underlying capabilities needed to become an entrepreneur.

3. Ask Deep Questions, Don't answer them

Regularly, ALG stops to have 'existential' conversations with students about matters of ethics, values, and other anchoring beliefs of the organization. For instance, students may engage with Mohammed Yunus' Nobel Prize acceptance speech which explores the positive facets of entrepreneurship; they may also engage in difficult conversations about the Triple Bottom Line and where responsibility lies for the wellbeing of society and the environment. ALG creates 'safe spaces' for students to discuss, debate, self-police, and practice inquiry with caring adults.

4. Build Entrepreneurial Habits through repetition

One final step in shaping student's beliefs about entrepreneurship, and themselves as prospective entrepreneurs, is repetition. Guiding students through regular and repeated BUILD cycles, ALG grows students from believing to thinking, thinking to doing, and then doing with greater confidence. Provided with the time and space to practice new mindsets and skillsets, students take greater risks, navigate roadblocks more ably, and begin believing in themselves as opportunists-in-waiting.

SHAPING THE WORLD WITHOUT: CREATING ENVIRONMENTS FOR REALISTIC, SAFE PRACTICE AND ACCELERATED LEARNING IN TEAMS

Wherever possible, African Leadership Group programs are experiential, with project-based learning being the key means through which the designed skills are acquired. From the earliest days of the first campus in Johannesburg, a Student Enterprise Program was created, to simulate the entire venture creation, management, and destruction cycle. This has been emulated across the campuses. Ultimately, educators within the group spend significant energy and resources creating a simulated on-campus economy, which then becomes a powerful teacher through the experiences it offers. There are key assumptions that drive ALG's approach to create an entrepreneurship simulation, with research ongoing that hopes to validate it over time.

1

Team building and leadership is the key skill

2

The best way to teach teams is to be a coach



3

Schools must invest appropriately in a field a play

4

Capital is required, as is oversight of it

5

Entrepreneur next-step decisions need support

1. Team building and leadership is the key skill

A growing hypothesis amongst the group's educators is that the key skill that predisposes young people to not only entrepreneurship success, but success that includes others, is the ability to work in, build and lead a team of peers.

2. The best way to teach teams is to be a coach

Coaching is a better modality as it is predicated on the assumption that you prepare a team for competition, but that they compete on their own for match day, led by a captain. Coaches focus on individual skills as well as combined effectiveness of the team, helping them work together using different techniques to amplify strength and mitigate weaknesses. These are all critical soft skills that entrepreneurs must learn.

3. Schools must invest appropriately in a field a play

Flagship sports at top schools and universities have beautiful dedicated facilities, coaching staff and time allocations. To be successful, an entrepreneurship simulation must have sufficient participation for the economy to work (at African Leadership Group it is compulsory) with timetable support. Significant blocks of the timetable are dedicated each day for students

to work on their ventures, as well as class time. It is thought of like a team sport, where hours and hours of practice are required as a team out on the field, learning to work together.

4. Capital is required, as is oversight of it

Real money is an absolute necessity for the simulation to increase its effectiveness. A campus economy can drive practice through the funds of the community, but an initial injection through a series of small investments (debt, equity, grants) to kick-start the learning economy each year accelerates the experiences. This requires investments into payment systems and controls, which are increasingly available and affordable.

5. Entrepreneur next-step decisions need support

There is a global industry to help high-school graduates think about where best to go to university and university graduates enter the workforce. This is far less established practice for those that self-select self-employment so young. University Guidance and Career Offices must evolve to include strong links to appropriate incubator and accelerator programs. Schools with established entrepreneur education programs could even consider launching their own. African Leadership Group is experimenting with both approaches. Internally, ALG have the Youth Entrepreneur Support Unit, the Anzisha Prize Fellowship and a new Education Accelerator specifically for graduates who want to start their own schools. They will soon also be launching their own entrepreneur investment fund.

COLLABORATION & RESOURCES

Through the African Leadership Group--already 200 employees and 3,000 students/alumni strong--the work of shaping and supporting young entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial leaders is well underway, and yet the need to establish and scale strong entrepreneurship education, for Africa and the world, remains. The Group is an active collaborator, and always open to possibilities to learn, share, and partner with others to improve the design and effectiveness of entrepreneurship education globally.

Dozens of the world's leading minds in this space have contributed to ALG's experiential learning approach to entrepreneurship education. Some useful additional research and links are below:

- A 2018 research paper from African Leadership Academy's Institutional Learning team that [sets out the need for entrepreneurship education at a very young age](#)
- A blog by former EL teacher and now ALU's Chief Learning Officer Ryan Findley on how [leadership grounds entrepreneurship](#)
- A 2017 [Anzisha Prize keynote address](#) delivered by Fred Swaniker where he outlines 5 lessons from 10 years of delivering entrepreneurship programs at ALA.
- A 2018 talk delivered by ALA's VP of Entrepreneurship, Josh Adler, that outlines the Academy's "[Big Plan for Very young entrepreneurs](#)"