

New York City College of Technology
English Department
ENG 1101 Final Examination: Form B

Name: _____

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The New York Times

The Excitement of Learning from Profit and Loss

By David Bornstein

It's often been said that the key to success is being able to handle failure. For example, from Winston Churchill: "Success is stumbling from failure to failure with no loss of enthusiasm." Or C. S. Lewis: "One fails forward toward success."

How can educators incorporate this wisdom to produce deeper learning? As many students, teachers and parents will attest, that's not the way most schools operate, particularly public schools. The pressures on educators to use prescribed materials and teach to the test often leave little scope to allow students the freedom to learn through real-world experiences and to "fail forward." This is a big reason why 500,000 young people drop out of high school each year; they feel disengaged and uninspired; they fail to see how school is relevant in their lives.

The flip side is an opportunity. When students are given chances to take learning into their own hands, the results can be impressive. That's been the experience of an educational program called "Build," which makes it possible for low-income students, as part of their high school studies, to work in teams, conceiving, testing, and operating their own small businesses. In the process, they discover—often to their surprise—their potential to deal with unexpected problems, persist through failure, and create something that the world values.

"Build" works in partnership with 23 public schools in Boston, Washington, D.C. and the San Francisco Bay Area, and plans to launch a program in New York City next year. It targets students who are perceived to be at risk of dropping out of school. The program begins with a full-credit class in entrepreneurship in ninth grade—a pivotal year that predicts school persistence. So far, schools report that three quarters of the students who complete the ninth-grade course opt to stay with "Build" through to high school graduation. Last year, "Build" reports, 84 percent of those students were admitted to a four-year college.

"As important as academics are for kids, that's not where the treasure is," said Suzanne McKechnie Klahr, an attorney who founded "Build" in 1999, after she helped four Latino high school students start a small business and saw that the process inspired ambitions to improve academically and enroll in college. "Resilience, the ability to overcome obstacles, that's what matters most. And entrepreneurship might just be the most powerful way to take risks and fail and pick yourself up and try again."

The course is not a simulation. Students, in teams of four or five, divide up responsibilities, conceive a product, design it and produce a prototype. They write a business plan, create budgets, do market analysis, think about promotion and customer service. "The curriculum ties literacy with mathematics with public

speaking and the ability to argue,” says Alexander Laser, an English teacher, who instructs the course at Eastern Senior High School, in Washington, D.C. “It ties together the pieces of the common core to a real world situation. And there’s almost childlike excitement, because the students are not just doing it for a grade. They have this goal of a real outcome, either financially or just contributing to society.”

The 14-year-olds come up with neat ideas: “Lock-It” socks that attach with buttons so you never lose one in the dryer; teddy bears with hidden pockets (to keep cell phones out of the hands of siblings); a pen that can hide gumballs for clandestine consumption.

Once the students have made progress with their business plans, they make pitches to venture advisers, who are frequently professional investors. “They have to ask for startup money,” said Diane Burbank, the principal of Woodside High School, in Woodside, Cal. The stakes are real.

Later, they have opportunities to sell products in the community or at holiday bazaars or other events organized by “Build.” And the learning continues. “Some kids discover they’re selling their product for less than their costs,” added Klahr. “Or they thought it would be popular but hadn’t done a survey, and find out it doesn’t sell.” Along the way, the students pick up soft skills: how to dress professionally, how to create a meeting agenda, how to give a firm handshake. And, crucially, they learn how to ask for help from adults when they need it.

The process helps students gain a genuine feeling of competence, says Burbank. “Students who don’t as a matter of course think ‘I’ll make a PowerPoint presentation for my social studies class’ now have that expertise. The first-year course has a huge ripple effect on the rest of their schooling.” And, of course, if the businesses are successful, they get to keep the profits.

Herbert Castillo, a graduate of Woodside High School who is now a senior at Babson College in Wellesley, Mass., told me that “Build” changed his life. He and his parents came to the United States as political refugees from El Salvador in 1995. “Before ‘Build’ the idea that I would go to college was very loose,” he said. “It was hard to imagine.” When he entered ninth grade, his main concern was just getting through English and math. Then he learned that his team had to come up with a business plan. “At the time it was so daunting,” he said. “A 35-page business plan, with market analysis, and we were going to have to pitch it to investors.”

Step by step, they figured it out, with encouragement and advice. They ended up deciding on a business selling “eco-scarves” fashioned from organically grown cloth and dyes. By the time they graduated, the team had earned a few thousand dollars, said Castillo, making them one of “Build’s” most successful businesses. The money wasn’t the most important thing, he added. “I learned that there are ways to study, to communicate, to organize yourself,” he said. “Those tools helped me succeed in high school and college. But the biggest thing was that I became confident that if you have an idea and you work positively with others, you can create something powerful.”

“Build’s” experiential learning model is worth attention at a time when schools need to adapt to new educational challenges—to prepare students who can work in teams and be flexible, life-long learners.

David Bornstein is the author of [How to Change the World](#), and [The Price of a Dream: The Story of the Grameen Bank](#), and is co-author of [Social Entrepreneurship: What Everyone Needs to Know](#).

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Choose **A** or **B** and write a well-developed essay of about five paragraphs.

- A.** In the article “The Excitement of Learning from Profit and Loss,” David Bornstein argues that the “experiential learning model” used by the “Build” program is worth paying attention to at a time when “schools need to adapt to educational challenges.”

Write an essay where you agree or disagree with this approach to education. Using your own experience (or something that you’ve read, viewed, or witnessed) argue whether you think schools—particularly those with high drop-out rates— should adopt a more hands-on (“experiential learning”) approach, or if you think students would benefit more if schools maintain (and improve upon) the traditional approach to teaching academic skills.

In your essay, present a clear thesis (either defending or arguing against the idea of “experiential learning”), and use specific details to illustrate your point. In addition, you must quote at least once from the article “The Excitement of Learning from Profit and Loss” to help you support your argument.

- B.** In the article, “The Excitement of Learning from Profit and Loss,” David Bornstein discusses “Build,” a successful and positive program that came out of a negative situation (students who were failing academically).

Write an essay in which you discuss an experience you’ve had with turning failure into success. Think of a situation that seemed to have no upside, but from which you eventually learned something—and which, in fact, ended up leading to something positive. You may use any experience from your life (for example, from school, work, home, your community, etc.) to illustrate your ideas.

In your essay, present a clear thesis showing how a negative situation led to a positive one, and use specific details. In addition, you must quote at least once from the article “The Excitement of Learning from Profit and Loss” to help make your points.