New Findings and Learnings
Informing the future of GripTape’s youth-driven learning programs
Report on Activities and Research, June 2018
Recent research has made clear that to survive and thrive in current and future economies, young people will require a critical combination of agency, resilience, and adaptability. Since 2016, GripTape, whose mission is to empower young people with the resources and skills to pursue their passions, has been radically re-engaging youth to drive their own learning.

Along the way, GripTape has explored new models for youth learning and engagement using “rapid learning cycles” to iterate on organizational and business models as well as to prototype, test, and implement innovative opportunities for young people — all in support of youth-driven learning and development.

This report provides an opportunity to reflect on the incredible momentum we have generated led by GripTape youth.

We present an overview of organizational highlights from GripTape’s activities between June 2017 and May 2018, recent research findings from our first long-term, longitudinal impact study, and GripTape’s programmatic learnings.
Institutional highlights: Jun ’17 - May ‘18

Lines of inquiry: impact findings

Mindsets
Self-confidence
Perseverance, determination, and self-motivation
Self-awareness
Expanded perspective

Skills
Goal-setting
Forethought
Self-regulation
Self-reflection

Behaviors
Demanding
Seizing
Proactive collaboration

Programmatic learnings: GripTape’s learning cycles

What’s next?

Contact
Institutional highlights
This is GripTape

GripTape’s mission is to deepen youth learning and development. Our signature program is the Learning Challenge, a 10-week, youth-designed and led learning experience for young people ages 15-19.

We offer youth a radically different experience where they have complete decision-making control over the design, implementation, and assessment of a self-led learning journey.

What the GripTape Learning Challenge is

The Learning Challenge includes four main components:

- A 10-week experience where youth spend at least 2/3 of their time outside class on a self-directed Learning Challenge during which they have complete decision-making control over the what, when, where, why, and how of their pursuit, as well as the targets and metrics of this learning experience
- Grants of up to $500 to support their learning
- An adult Champion who provides belief, interest, and encouragement without advice or direction
- A network of peers, program alumni, and youth leaders

To learn more about the GripTape Learning Challenge, visit www.griptape.org.
2017-2018 Program Activities

Since its founding in 2015, GripTape has supported more than 200 youth-led Learning Challenges, where young people have pursued learning topics related to music, hardware and software design, medicine, crafts, and business, amongst others.

Key Program Activity Metrics

3 NEW LEARNING CYCLES (LC)

Learning Cycle 4: 54 youth
Learning Cycle 5: 81 youth
Learning Cycle 6: 43 youth

178 MORE YOUTH SERVED*

44% male, 56% female
47% first-generation college students

100 ADULT CHAMPIONS INVOLVED

95% volunteers
20 states represented

*Findings of demographics for youth served are based on survey data from youth in Learning Cycles 4 and 5.
2017 Program Results

At the completion of their journey, Challengers consistently report that the experience had a significant, positive impact on their confidence and views of their own competence, as well as how they approach their learning and understand what they need to do to be successful.

Key Program Results Metrics

PROGRAM SUCCESS
Nearly all Challengers across LC4 and LC5 (98%) self-assessed their Challenge as a success, and 95% stated they are interested in pursuing additional topics where they get to design and lead their own learning.

PROGRAM SATISFACTION
100% of Challengers reported they enjoyed participating in the Learning Challenge.

“NET PROMOTER SCORE”
77% of new Challengers have been recruited by past Challengers.
Lines of inquiry: impact findings
We are excited to present recent research findings on the impact of GripTape’s programs for youth development and learning. These results come from our latest completed learning cycles, as well as our first long-term, longitudinal impact study.

GripTape’s research is oriented around a framework for learner agency which looks at outcomes in terms of changes in mindset, skills, and behaviors in youth who completed the GripTape Learning Challenge.

- **Mindset**: internal factors that influence an individual’s desire to exercise control over their learning
- **Skills**: an individual’s ability to effectively contribute to, influence, and guide their own learning
- **Behaviors**: an individual’s actions of taking ownership over their learning process

To learn more about the Framework for Learner Agency, visit www.griptape.org.
Methods
A variety of research methods were used to capture changing conditions in youth learner agency amongst young people who participated in GripTape’s learning cycles between June 2017 and May 2018, including:

- **Surveys**: Both end-of-journey (t+0 months) and post-journey surveys (t+6 and t+12 months) were administered to GripTape Challengers.

- **In-depth Interviews**: End-of-journey Interviews were conducted by each youth’s GripTape Champion, while post-journey interviews for a subset of youth from previous learning cycles were conducted by external researchers.

- **Stakeholder Interviews**: Adults identified by youth were also interviewed as part of the post-journey research process to capture their observations of sustained changes in youth.

**IMAGE**: Adult Champion interviewing Challenger at end of learning journey

**IMPACT FINDINGS**
As a result of the research, we found:

Youth gained critical knowledge and demonstrated evidence of meaningful and sustained changes in their beliefs and actions as a result of the GripTape experience. In particular, we found recurring patterns in these themes:

1. **Challengers overwhelmingly reported feeling an increased sense of confidence in their learning ability as a result of their GripTape experience, and adults concurred with these self-assessments.**

2. **Challengers reported increased perseverance, determination, and self-motivation, articulating a new understanding of the value of failing and making mistakes as part of the learning process.**

3. **Challengers and adults remarked on increased self-awareness and awareness of others as a result of youth’s self-directed Learning Challenge and their engagement with an adult Champion.**

4. **Challengers and adults reflected on the impact of the GripTape experience in expanding youth’s perspective of their local and global community.**

5. **Challengers and adults reported enhanced learner skills in the areas of goal-setting, forethought, self-regulation, and self-reflection.**

6. **Challengers are actively demanding and seizing new learning opportunities, with 97% reporting that in the six to 12 months after participating in GripTape, they have decided to pursue a learning opportunity they would have previously passed on.**

7. **Challengers are proactively collaborating with adults and peers to create new learning opportunities in multiple contexts, including in the classroom, on the job, and at home.**

8. **Challengers reflected on the marked differences in the value and impact of their GripTape experience as compared to those in school, with many citing their learning journey as the first time they were given the opportunity to do something by and for themselves.**
THEME

Increased sense of confidence

Challengers overwhelmingly reported feeling increased confidence in their learning ability as a result of their GripTape Challenge, and adults concurred with their self-assessment.

End-of-Journey

At the completion of the journey, Challengers overwhelmingly reported feeling increased confidence as a result of their experience, with 98% of Challengers reporting that participating increased their confidence about their ability to complete this journey and others like it in the future. 97% reported that as a result of taking part they are more confident that they can get better at challenging things if they work hard.

Post-Journey

Echoing sentiments expressed by youth at the completion of their journey, increased and sustained self-confidence on the part of Challengers is one of the strongest themes heard from both youth and adults. 100% of youth surveyed reported that participation in GripTape increased overall self-confidence and belief that they can accomplish something with hard work.

Challengers reported that when facing new situations in a variety of settings, such as having to speak in front of class, working the cash register at a job, speaking before 400 people at a conference, or taking a difficult math class, they drew on the increased confidence developed as a result of their GripTape experience. They described now having a robust, internalized conviction they can do anything. Moreover, 100% of youth surveyed reported that the GripTape Challenge strengthened their belief that they can successfully drive their own learning.

Parents and mentors were enthusiastic and in full agreement that GripTape has continued to impact Challengers’ self-confidence in their daily lives. One mother said of her daughter, “She has so much more confidence and self assurance, and I can trust her to follow her goals and let her do what she wants to do.”

WHAT CHALLENGERS SAID

“I am no longer nervous when starting something new. Before I was nervous about it … but I have gained confidence because of GripTape.”
WHAT WE HEARD

One mentor described a Challenger who was hesitant working in schools with youth who were his peers when he first started with GripTape. He was reluctant to interfere if there was a problem or issue, but since his participation in the Challenge, she has seen him step up and talk to other young people, acting as a leader in uncomfortable situations. She has witnessed his increased confidence in the most vulnerable situations, and shared these observations as evidence that the work of GripTape has taken hold, not only for his project but for his overall outlook.

A mother stated, “My daughter is fearless; she has grown tremendously in her confidence to approach people.” Another parent reflected on her son’s decision to finish the journey when his teammates dropped out, recounting how this choice and experience have given him the confidence to know he can do anything he puts his mind to.
### Developing resilience

In particular, youth made clear that failing and making mistakes is no longer something they fear, but rather understand as a necessary part of the learning process.

One student described how she continued on her journey even when the bakery orders for her Challenge were initially slow to come in. When they finally did, she could not keep up with them and disappointed clients by delivering orders late. The decision to persevere — to figure it out, lean on family to help her problem-solve and assemble orders, and persist until she finished the work — demonstrated that she can do anything.

Another Challenger noted his determination to continue working towards his goals even in the face of challenges balancing “real life” since his GripTape journey ended. He explained, “The biggest lesson I learned was that nobody is going to chase your dreams for you or hand them to you ... you have to go get them for yourself ... it is my job to make something happen and make sure I am learning.”

Parents confirmed seeing increases in motivation, determination, and persistence among youth in the months following their GripTape experience. Many shared that, since the GripTape journey, their children were ignited in a way that was exciting and “unstoppable.”
WHAT WE HEARD

One mother said, “Before GripTape [her daughter] did not have a go-getting spirit ... she had a laziness about her and she wouldn't push herself enough. Now she is more motivated and has healthier pursuits and is not lazy.”

Another parent shared how her experience as an immigrant and her daughter’s lack of opportunities through school as an ESL student had been hard for them. The Challenge left her daughter charged up to fight the injustice that the education system has put on her by treating her like she cannot learn more difficult content just because she does not speak English fluently. Her mother said that GripTape has “lit a passion in her daughter that cannot be turned off.”
THEME

Increase in self-awareness and awareness of others

Young people and adults alike noted increased self-awareness and awareness of others on the part of Challengers, and directly attributed this growth to their GripTape learning journey and engagement with an adult Champion.

Awareness of their impact on others

Almost all of the youth interviewed described a new awareness of how their actions impact others around them. For many young people, the GripTape experience was also an opportunity to recognize the direct effect their actions have on the outcome of a project. As a result, Challengers reported behaving differently and understanding the importance of professionalism, including meeting deadlines, dressing and communicating more professionally, and balancing the role of managing employees and being accountable to an employer.

Youth described how this affected the ways they work with others. One young person noted, “I have to understand the golden rule in my everyday life. It can be hard sometimes, but it is possible.”

WHAT CHALLENGERS SAID

“I’ve learned the ability of being more self-aware and conscious of myself and my actions ... I’ve learned to be more accountable and catch myself when I’m doing something wrong or reinforce certain things that I’m doing right.”
WHAT WE HEARD

Adults echoed these observations, with over half of those interviewed noting that increased self-awareness was one of the most significant behavioral changes they saw in these youth as a result of their GripTape experience. Many attributed this to Challengers’ powerful experiences with GripTape adults who were outside of family or school, coupled with experiences these young people had beyond their home and/or city.

For example, one father discussed how influential the Champion was on his daughter as an outside agent — someone other than a parent. He explained, “The opportunity and experience and interacting with other people, people not telling her what to do, but other people thinking through things with her that are not just mom and dad and within the family. It was good for her and her self-development ... what she has heard from others has helped her to be self-aware.”
Expanded perspective of their local and the broader global community

Challengers and adults reflected on the impact of the GripTape experience in expanding youth’s perspective of their local and global community.

Expanded views about the world around them

Youth and parents both reflected on how the GripTape experience led young people to broaden their view of the world around them. In several cases, Challengers reported that their learning journey resulted in a growing desire to impact the greater community after their Challenge.

For example, one youth shared that while he started his project to memorialize a great artist, it has since grown to be a service and calling to involve and serve the neighborhood and its youth. Interestingly, being part of the GripTape community of current and former Challengers and interacting with adults as part of that community, served to expand many young people’s perspectives about those around them.

Over half of youth referenced the power of the GripTape community and how important it has been to them to be able to call on the adults and other young people in the GripTape network following their Challenge.

“What Challengers Said

“For my Learning Challenge, I wanted to learn to code effectively and get new perspectives on topics in the world today. I planned to design and promote a website tailored to a teen audience and to work on communicating my opinions and hearing what other young people think. I also wanted to learn to learn in innovative ways.”
WHAT WE HEARD

Similarly, youth and parents both reported how exposure to new ideas, people, and places as part of their journey served to “open up the world” to new and exciting opportunities, such as receiving invitations from GripTape to take part in speaking engagements, summer camps, or conferences.

One mother talked about the importance of visiting New York City for her son, who had never been outside of Delaware, as part of a GripTape event. The experience expanded his perspective while simultaneously helping him focus his goals. She said, “Honestly, I think getting him a more globalized perspective around his work, being in a different city like New York, working and being part of that atmosphere … it has helped him focus on his work and see a lot more people working hard out there and different levels of their dreams. It has been the most important thing to broaden his perspective.”
**Enhanced learner skills**

Challengers and adults reported enhanced learner skills in the areas of goal-setting, forethought, self-regulation, and self-reflection.

**Forethought & Goal-Setting**

Students consistently reported an increased ability to use forethought to set a vision for their work and set goals to define what they hoped to accomplish.

For example, one youth described how participating in GripTape helped him learn the importance of sitting and thinking everything through before starting a learning experience. He shared, “I would say GripTape taught me the importance of sitting and pre-meditating and planning ... Goal-setting is like coding and learning computer languages. It is much the same in this way; you have to think about the steps before you take the next step ... you have to be able to sit back and see everything you want to do.”

Survey results support this theme, with almost all young people reporting that when completing other learning and projects in the six and 12 months after the journey, they always or frequently visualize what they want to achieve (97%), figure out their goals and what they need to do to accomplish them (100%), and ensure goals are clear and reasonable (94%).

100% of youth also reported that the GripTape Challenge helped them understand: 1) the importance of having clear goals; 2) how to successfully approach a learning experience in a way that will lead to achieving these goals-and; 3) that adjusting goals is a regular part of learning.

Youth and adults alike shared examples of how GripTape taught them the importance of goal-setting, which they now apply to other learning experiences. Three-quarters of the young people interviewed many months later talked about the importance of writing down goals and using them as a foundation to make a plan.

Several Challengers and parents described “goal or dream-boards” that youth created and now hang in their bedrooms/house. Parents also noted observing more goal-setting behaviors on the part of their child, such as using a planner, creating pros/cons lists, or writing out short- and long-term goals.
**Self-Regulation**

Young people also indicated an increased use of self-regulatory behaviors in learning experiences after having participated in GripTape. Most notably, youth and adults both described how Challengers appreciated the importance of time management through their Challenge, and have gained better time management skills that they now apply to various life contexts. Three-quarters of the youth interviewed six and 12 months later indicated GripTape helped them stay on top of what's happening in their life.

One mother noted that this school year has been much different compared to last year for her daughter and her. Before GripTape, her daughter was always scrambling at the last minute to complete assignments or book reports, but this year she comes to her mother ahead of time to help her find a book instead of doing so the night before in a panic. Similarly, a Challenger shared that learning how to write everything down and keep a planner has been a very important skill for him because it keeps him from over-committing, enabling him to limit what he signs up for, manage his time, and follow through.

Youth report that in the months since their GripTape journey they have practiced behaviors that help them successfully construct and persist on an appropriate course of action to pursue their goals. For example, a significant majority of Challengers reported that they always or frequently make a clear plan to achieve their goals (82%), check their work while doing it (88%), use their plan to check their progress (88%), assess the quality of their work and make improvements if needed (97%), and adjust their plan or goals based on their learnings or experiences so far.

Several parents also talked about the importance of forethought and self-regulation in helping their children effectively budget and plan for their expenses. They learned to stick to their budget by making a list, prioritizing items, and shopping strategically at particular stores, and have transferred these skills to other experiences.

**Self-Reflection**

Data show that six to 12 months after the journey, youth have incorporated more self-reflective behaviors into their lives. Survey respondents reported they always or frequently incorporate the following actions into their learning experiences now:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>% Always or Frequently</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Look back to make sure I have <strong>completed all necessary steps</strong> in the plan</td>
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<tr>
<td>Look back to see if I <strong>used the best approach</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Look back at the problem to <strong>see if my solution makes sense</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Look back to <strong>think about what I did well and what I could do better</strong> next time</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

One young person shared that he finds himself trying to reflect on his actions after GripTape. He noted, "I ask myself, 'Is your intent in the right place? Is it in line with my moral compass?'" Moreover, a parent noted during an interview that her daughter was able to use the GripTape experience to reflect on whether or not a particular field of interest was something she wanted to pursue for a career, which was notable since prior to the learning journey her daughter had been certain it was her field of choice.

**IMPACT FINDINGS**
**End-of-Journey 6, 12 mo. later**  
% Somewhat or A Lot More Likely To % Always or Frequently

**Forethought**  
Think about what may happen in the future that may impact their work  
85 97

**Goal-Setting**  
Make a clear plan and think about what success would look like  
85 94

**Self-Regulation**  
Assess the quality of their work and make improvements  
90 91

**Self-Reflection**  
Look back and think about how their plan could have been improved  
90 94

**IMPACT FINDINGS**
**THEME**

**Seizing and demanding new learning opportunities**

Challengers are actively demanding and seizing new learning opportunities, with 97% reporting that in the six to 12 months after participating in GripTape, they have decided to participate in a learning opportunity they would have previously passed on.

**Turning passions into continuous learning**

In many of the interviews, the Challengers’ exuberance and energy for what they were learning and working on was hard for them to contain. Youth could not wait to share what they were doing and how GripTape influenced them. One young person is heading off to college next year, passionate about reforming the education system, having spent the previous year after GripTape working diligently on her own to continue making it a system that is fair for all students.

As a group, the Challengers interviewed six or 12 months after completing their journey all described sustained interest in driving their own learning and having turned that passion into specific post-journey learning activities, whether by continuing to pursue their journey topic or transitioning to a related or new field. Surveys support these findings as well, with 97% of youth reporting that since their GripTape experience, they have actively pursued new learning opportunities they are interested in.

**Active pursuit to find new opportunities**

The vast majority of young people reported that since the Learning Challenge, they have actively looked to find new opportunities, including:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>% Always or Frequently</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>94</td>
<td>Looked online for learning opportunities that match my interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>92</td>
<td>Shared ideas about my interests and kind of learning opportunities I would like with adults outside of school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89</td>
<td>Shared ideas about my interests and kind of learning opportunities I would like with adults in school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>89</td>
<td>Talked with adults about how to find other learning opportunities that match my interests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87</td>
<td>Talked with youth about how to find other learning opportunities that match my interests</td>
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</table>
A great majority of Challengers (89%) indicated that since participating in GripTape, they decided to participate in a learning opportunity they previously would have passed on. Similarly, 100% of youth reported they are now more likely to take advantage of available learning opportunities that match their interests.

During the interviews, youth recounted participating in a range of different opportunities outside of their normal learning activities, including attending conferences about new topics, being open to acquiring new skills, and engaging with teachers directly to understand content they were struggling with. In addition, 84% of youth also noted that they more frequently take on leadership roles in their learning experiences than they would have prior to the Learning Challenge.

Nearly all (94%) of youth surveyed reported feeling it is up to them to take an active role in shaping existing opportunities or creating new learning opportunities that match their interests.

Further, Challengers reported that GripTape prepared them with the skills necessary to develop new learning experiences — or sustain or shape others — in ways that are focused on their specific interests, strengths, and growth areas.

Several young people described how they continued to build upon and scaffold a specific passion or area of interest into a new learning opportunity. For example, one youth reported extending her GripTape journey by shifting from a focus on print to digital photography, and expanding it by collaborating with her sister on a business venture to provide photography services within their community.

Challengers overall reported that GripTape helped them clarify what they are most interested in learning. Indeed, 100% of youth reported they are now more aware of opportunities that are available to them where they can pursue topics they are learning about or interested in.
WHAT WE HEARD

A significant majority of young people interviewed many months later described actively seizing opportunities in multiple contexts beyond school.

One youth recounted that after her Challenge, she not only remained engaged with GripTape and continued her journey, but also became involved in numerous opportunities outside of school on topics that fueled her interests.

Other young people described having seized learning outside of school by pursuing projects in legislative work, artistic endeavors, community tutoring partnerships, or building and expanding businesses started through their GripTape Challenge.

Another youth who launched a landscaping business during his learning journey is now engaged with GripTape and does speaking engagements, while expanding his business model from its original GripTape design. He also works within his community connecting residents and organizations.
Collaboration with adults and peers

Challengers are proactively collaborating with adults and peers to create new learning opportunities in multiple contexts, including in the classroom, on the job, and at home.

Collaborating to create new opportunities

In the six to 12 months since the journey, 65% of youth have proactively worked with adults in school and 71% have proactively worked with adults out of school to create new opportunities to better match what or how they want to learn.

Additionally, 83% of Challengers report proactively working with their peers or other youth to create new opportunities that better match what or how they want to learn. Interview data with both youth and parents support this finding, with both groups citing numerous examples of how Challengers have taken deliberate steps to engage with others to open new opportunities by, for example, reaching out to family members, youth agency mentors, teachers, or employers at potential places of business.

Youth were also clear that their increased confidence supports their efforts to create these opportunities, with 92% reporting they now feel confident enough to take an active role in shaping existing opportunities or creating new ones to align with their interests.

One Challenger said that he now seeks answers on his own more frequently before going to an adult for help. Another youth shared how he was inspired by a documentary on prison reform, which has now led him to initiate work with his teacher on a related independent study project.

Parents also commented on how the Challenge led to different types of positive interactions with their children as compared to how they often related around school assignments. In some cases, Challengers invited their families to join in their learning, with the projects becoming a “family” enterprise. For example, siblings helped bake or acted as extras in pictures, while fathers helped with business plans.
WHAT WE HEARD

All of the adults interviewed concurred that GripTape provided youth invaluable life skills by strengthening their character in meaningful and significant ways.

“I see a character trait developing in her. She took on a project, and I saw her personality and character, watched her not even take credit, just because her friends were there and participated and she never took complete credit. And later the girls gave her credit that she was doing it for GripTape, and she took the credit for it, but I was proud to see she didn’t want to be center of attention. Humility. That is what I see in her. That is the word.”
Compared to their school experience

Challengers reflected on the marked differences in the value and impact of their GripTape experience as compared to their experiences in school. Many cited their learning journey as the first time they were given the challenge of doing something by and for themselves.

Marked differences in experience and impact

Youth shared strong reflections on the degree to which the GripTape learning journey was a very different experience from what they usually had in school, and how these differences had a significant impact on what they gained and how they viewed their own success.

Young people noted that the Learning Challenge was not something they had to do nor was directed by a teacher, but rather was an experience they did by and for themselves. More specifically, they described the journey as focused on their interests and passions, fueled by their own ideas and self-motivation, and subject to their own assessment of progress and their own needs for flexibility and modifications.

According to many Challengers, it was these characteristics of the GripTape journey that led to their increased confidence and made them want to approach learning differently in the future.

And, that the power and importance of things like time management, setting goals, making plans, and following them to successful completion was much more evident in a self-directed learning experience they were invested in and responsible for.

Ultimately, Challengers noted that school is simply not set up to value these abilities in teens nor provide them the opportunities to deeply experience and learn them. Indeed, some Challengers noted feeling that many teachers just don’t get it or believe they can do this.

WHAT CHALLENGERS SAID

“High school, it is all about doing everything they tell you to do … What they care about is their teaching and tests, and the message is ‘if you don't pass this test, it’s the end of the world.’
WHAT WE HEARD

All of the adults interviewed explained how the traditional classroom does not allow for the same pedagogical approach as the GripTape Challenge, and they were moved by how the youth soared with the GripTape model.

“GripTape is an opportunity that is so good for the young mind ... it gives them what they don't get at school, to develop skills with different inventions and technology. It will make society better and bring even more entrepreneurs, and we will all reap the rewards. The difference is the classroom is theoretical knowledge ... The students are told, ‘This is how it is done,’ but GripTape gives them the opportunity to start young to develop the opportunity to say ‘This is my own thing, and I can develop to do this and do it well.’”

I shared my journey with my friends and teachers, and while the teachers care about me, they were confused when they heard about $500 going to a 16-year-old. The fact that I started a business didn’t make sense to them. It’s like it was shocking to hear we did the right thing with our budget and didn't squander the money or opportunity ... This felt weird but also empowering because in the back of my head, I thought, ‘You didn't really think I could do it and now you see me here and you know I can do it and I can actually show you.’”

WHAT CHALLENGERS SAID, CONT’D
Programmatic learnings: GripTape’s learning cycles
Since its start, GripTape has used principles of user-centered design and lean startup methodology to develop, test, iterate, and refine our practices, supports, and model. Our hope is that by sharing our learnings, we spur greater commitment to youth-led learning across all contexts in which young people develop.

**GripTape Rapid Learning Cycles**

GripTape uses iterative learning cycles to prototype and test different variables and program approaches, such as prerequisite skills, mindsets, environments, current academic performance levels, peer support and network, adult support models and behaviors, youth-led organizational design, youth as staff, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Learning Design Principle</th>
<th>Youth as Decision-Makers</th>
<th>Peer Navigator Model</th>
<th>Youth Squad Model</th>
<th>Volunteer Model</th>
<th>Youth Learning Challenge</th>
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<td>2016</td>
<td>Surveys and interviews with 300 youth</td>
<td>Youth Learning Challenge</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<td>Peer Learning Challenges</td>
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<td>2018</td>
<td>21 kids embark on Learning Challenges</td>
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<td>2019</td>
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<td>2020</td>
<td>64 kids embark on Learning Challenges</td>
<td>Youth Learning Challenge</td>
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<td>33 kids embark on Learning Challenges</td>
<td>Peer Navigator Model</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<td>2022</td>
<td>100 kids to embark on Learning Challenges</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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Through our rapid learning cycles, we’ve tested and learned things such as:

**Enabling radical agency.** GripTape has found that if young people have decision-making authority, financial resources, and someone to believe in them, they will achieve powerful learning outcomes that overcome deficits in skills generally assumed necessary for success (e.g., executive functioning skills). This lesson emerged from surveys and interviews with over 300 youth in our first learning cycle. It was validated through subsequent youth outcomes over multiple learning cycles.

GripTape also found that young people with low GPAs (1.5) were equally as successful in the Learning Challenge when compared to their peers with much higher GPAs.

**Providing the right kind of support.** Through six cycles, GripTape has learned that youth want support from peers and adults that makes them feel safe and recognized, while still honoring their decision-making ability. Moreover, the supports and “scaffolds” that adults assume young people need are often overstated or inaccurate. Indeed, the role of the Champion was expressly designed by youth to provide consistent encouragement, deep interest, and unwavering belief without advice, guidance, or direction.

**Scaling with credibility.** In our efforts to recruit more youth to the Learning Challenge, one hurdle GripTape faced was that young people don't know how transformative the experience will be before taking part in a learning journey. We learned that to successfully inspire other youth to participate in this new experience, youth-to-youth recruitment by former Challengers was one of our most effective strategies for expanding the reach of the GripTape opportunity. With their firsthand experience and the credibility that comes with being a peer, GripTape alumni are able to convey the impact of the experience to prospective Challengers in a way that adults are not positioned to communicate.

**Tapping into Youth Peer Leadership.** GripTape has also discovered untapped potential in youth-to-youth support. Over 90% of Challengers surveyed want to support each other in their learning. Our recent cycles have taught us that, as important as it is for youth to have an adult Champion who believes in them, they also want more opportunities to support each other in their learning. They desire a strong peer community that offers emotional support, skills and knowledge networking, and social recognition from other young people. Indeed, it was this understanding that resulted in GripTape youth designing and managing our online, youth-to-youth community, known as the Youth Squad. Moreover, these lessons continue to drive our commitment to create new opportunities for youth to connect, support, and encourage each other in person.
What’s next?
Our research and programmatic learnings confirmed the potential of the GripTape Learning Challenge model in strengthening agency and empowering youth to take their learning into their own hands.

In the next phase of GripTape, our focus will be on:

**GripTape Learning Challenge**
- Testing Youth as Champions for Challengers in our existing program model
- Expanding the Learning Challenge into selected rural areas
- Prototyping a community service and in-person youth leadership component in particular geographic locales

**GripTape Organizational Design**
- Building a scalable, sustainable youth-driven organization
- Testing youth support networks focused on learning and aided by technology
- Experimenting with youth-designed business models to generate funding

We look forward to continuing to share our learnings on designing for youth learner agency.
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Credits

Icons from the Noun Project by: Arif Fajar Yulianto, Becris, Creative Stall, dDara, Gregor Crecner, Ivan Colic, Razmik Badalyan