

MESSAGE FROM THE RESEARCH COMMITTEE

Connecting Montessori Practice and Entrepreneurship

By Janet Bagby, PhD, and Tracey Sulak, PhD

Currently there are about 7.6 million businesses in the United States, a number estimated to grow to 7.9 million by 2020, fueled by entrepreneurship (IBISWorld, 2015; Bansal, 2012). How does one instill entrepreneurial values in today's young students? According to Lamas (2015), teaching students to think and/or behave differently is one step. Van der Kuip and Verheul (2004) suggest that evaluating the Montessori method of education could identify key factors that can be implemented in entrepreneurial education.

Some of today's most creative innovators and entrepreneurs began their education in Montessori schools (Lamas, 2015). For example, Larry Page and Sergey Brin of Google were Montessori-educated (Hicks, 2014). In a 2004 interview with Barbara Walters, Page said that the Montessori environment assisted him in "being self-motivated, questioning what's going on in the world, doing things a little bit differently" (Sanford, 2014). After interviewing a large number of entrepreneurs, Gregersen (2011) reported that many were influenced by Montessori education.

While personal characteristics might predispose someone to entrepreneurship, it is important to recognize the influence education has on students' future intentions (Soomro & Shah, 2015). Tolerating ambiguity and possessing high self-efficacy often predispose individuals to entrepreneurship, and the Montessori environment supports development in both areas (Segal, Borgia & Schoenfeld, 2005). For example, students in Montessori classrooms develop increased self-efficacy for academic work because the curriculum is paced to match the student. Rather than asking students to complete unfamiliar tasks, Montessori teachers model the process and often use didactic materials to support instruction. The cycle of setting goals, working to achieve these goals, and then setting higher goals has been linked to higher self-efficacy; students gain a positive view of success in the future (Mitchell & Shepherd, 2010).

However, research indicates that entrepreneurship education should be taught in a realistic environment

that promotes active learning and encourages reflective processes in daily learning (Kassean, Vanevenhoven, Liguori & Winkel, 2015). At AMS-accredited Chiaravalle Montessori School, in Evanston, IL, head of school Robyn McCloud-Springer describes their curriculum as "Modern Montessori," in which they apply "traditional Montessori to our current lives and global community" and prepare "our students for innovative and entrepreneurial professions." Chiaravalle altered the traditional Montessori curriculum, opting, as McCloud-Springer stated, "to reduce specialist classes such as formal art and drama and reallocate a portion of those faculty hours to facilitating student-driven work. When we allow students to take their inspiration and translate it into making something tangible, they are practicing valuable innovation."

Montessori schools may not strike outsiders as the best place for entrepreneurial education, but when one considers soft skills, such as development of self-efficacy, and executive function skills, such as organization, then the relationship between Montessori and entrepreneurialism becomes more apparent. As Maria Montessori (1946, p. 69) says, "We must help the child to act for himself, will for himself, think for himself; this is the art of those who aspire to serve the spirit."

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From Hershey Montessori School:

The Microeconomy is a hallmark component of Hershey Montessori School's Adolescent Community. Dr. Montessori envisioned adolescents participating in and managing small business endeavors in order to experience economic activity in their community—the "microeconomy."

Hershey students participate in real economic activity as an introduction to economic life. This work serves as a first step towards economic independence as well as allowing them to measure the worth of their activity against an external standard.

Hershey's younger adolescents participate in projects to study economics and to further create, modify, or promote the community's economic activities. They regularly work on production of items in the woodshop and growing food on the farm. Some middle school students become managers of specific areas of the microeconomy, developing further responsibility and community contribution.

Older students begin to take on adult-level roles of management and business design, developing new businesses and taking workshops in financial literacy, entrepreneurship, business management, marketing and sales, and business law.

Hershey's microeconomy provides students with real-world, experiential learning in all areas of business operations. As students are given hands-on experiences and step into leadership roles, they more easily comprehend the various aspects of entrepreneurship, helping to lead them to eventual mastery of the areas that most greatly interest them. An important component of the microeconomy is the "Hershey Market." The Hershey Market provides students with the authentic experience of operating a business. Students' creative and intellectual process are stimulated as they embark on the essential skills of design, production, exchange, and finance management, which promote the development of the adolescent toward understanding and taking part in adult society.

You can view and purchase these hand-crafted items online thanks to the diligent work of our students who also learn the art of sales and marketing.



From entrepreneurial Montessori parents:

Startup Companies See Montessori As Entrepreneurship Education

A recent article in *ChicagoInno* looked at two different startup company founders, Jake Nickell, founder of Threadless, and Charles Adler, co-founder of Kickstarter, who are parents of Montessori children, and how they value Montessori as Entrepreneurship Education.

"You have the ability to work by yourself, or you're going to be working with peers and you're going to have to be a leader, you're going to have to be a follower. A lot of entrepreneurial parents say...they appreciate their kids having that kind of experience at school."

They also enjoy how students in older grades create businesses that have ranged from setting up a washing service for the schools' linens (they use cloth napkins and placemats), to selling keychains and trinkets they designed and printed on the school's 3D printer, to selling basil before school. Students create a business plan, manage a bank account, and decide how to spend funds. They gave their staff additional training in these methods, and recently opened a new wing with space devoted to STEM projects (to foster tinkering trial and error) and the performing arts (to inspire confidence).

"People who end up choosing to be entrepreneurs have a lot of curiosity and do things in their own way," Nickell said. "As a student of Montessori you're in control of your own education, but there are still guardrails around it all. Teachers are sure you're doing the work around the room, but you're doing it at your own pace...My daughter makes her lesson plan for the day."