

Field Notes: Why We Need to Motivate the Next Generation of Entrepreneurs

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Entrepreneurialism and academics intersect in so many ways that I find it difficult to separate the two. Think about it. Every successful entrepreneur needs to apply mathematics, sound decision making, innovation, problem solving, and hard work. Today's students will create tomorrow's jobs and shape the economy of the future. Don't we want them to know how to do more than take standardized tests? Engaging students in scenarios similar to those on the popular TV show *Shark Tank* is one way to foster creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills in the classroom, but why not make the experience real? Why not provide students with the knowledge, skills, and opportunities to actually start their own businesses?

At our school, 5th grade students do just that by participating in the TREPS program. TREPS was developed by Pamela DeWaal and Hayley Romano to help students everywhere gain the knowledge and skills necessary for business development and ownership. The program covers topics such as making sound business choices, financial literacy, marketing, advertising, sales, and teamwork. Students enrolled in the TREPS program have the unique opportunity to pitch their business ideas to and receive feedback from community members, many of whom are entrepreneurs.

TREPS puts rigorous content in a meaningful and motivating context. The Common Core State Standards, which have been adopted by many states, encourage rigor and authentic performance tasks. What is more authentic than students using their knowledge and skills to create their own businesses? According to the Education Commission of the States' National Task Force on Education and Economic Growth, "A concept of curriculum development that focuses on cognitive goals, but ignores motivation is destined to fail" (pp. 27–28). When students are motivated by a goal that excites them, the question of *why* they need to learn a particular concept or idea disappears. Because they have a chance to do real work, our students are highly motivated and engaged throughout the entire TREPS curriculum. Many of my students return each year to the TREPS marketplace, where students present their business products and tell me how their participation in the program has been the best experience in their educational careers thus far.

Our TREPS programming also gives students an opportunity to be change agents in the world. Many of our students use their businesses as vehicles for raising awareness and money for different charitable organizations. They realize quickly that business owners have the power to reach vast numbers of people, and they choose to use that power in altruistic ways.

The financial literacy students gain through TREPS benefits them by helping them become financially responsible citizens. On their website, the Council for Economic Education claims that "despite the recognition that economic and financial literacy is critical to succeed in modern society, study after study shows that many Americans continue to lack even a basic understanding of economic and financial concepts, and the consequences on Americans' financial state are dire." Why, then, are many American schools ignoring the benefits of teaching entrepreneurship?

There is hope, however. Many school districts are acknowledging the benefits of infusing entrepreneurial concepts into the curriculum. Thanks to research provided by various organizations—and programs like TREPS that bring the opportunity to engage in entrepreneurship into schools—many students are learning not only the value of business ownership but also the lifelong skills that accompany it. Peter Drucker, management consultant, educator, and author, said, "Entrepreneurship is neither a science nor an art. It is a practice" (p. 30). Our schools can cultivate this practice.

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