How Montessori Prepared Me to Thrive as a Future Professional in the Age of AI

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As artificial intelligence changes the face of the workplace and the professional landscape across the globe, it is important to consider the tools we are giving our children to thrive in their adulthood. The nature of jobs themselves is changing so rapidly that it may seem impossible to prepare young people for the careers they will embark on in the next two decades.

To that end, it is more important than ever that students cultivate the skills that will allow them to be successful in an evolving society. We believe that Montessori, with its focus on developing curiosity, independence, social skills, and initiative, gives children the qualities necessary for a fulfilling and successful life in the age of AI.

Lina Bhatia, a 2022 graduate of Forest Bluff School, has a special interest in technology and education. As a part of this interest, she has created a blog exploring these concepts and discussing how the two relate to each other. She recently wrote a post entitled "How Montessori Prepared Me to Thrive as a Future Professional in the Age of AI" and gave us permission to share it on our blog.

We are so proud of Lina and the thoughtful way she articulates a mature and insightful perspective on this important topic, and we hope you will enjoy her writing here.

I've always been curious about the ways people learn, the tools we use to shape that learning, and how technology is transforming education. As someone passionate about both education and technology, I'm especially interested in the intersection of learning methods, platforms, and technology. This blog is my way of exploring those questions more deeply, including reflection on my own educational journey and research from those of others.

From kindergarten through second grade, I went to a Montessori school (a type of school that emphasizes self-directed learning, hands-on exploration, and mixed-age classrooms). Not just any Montessori school, but a pure-ist, rural-ish, Amish-adjacent Montessori school in Illinois, where every morning started with a walk in a prairie and ended with baking a fresh loaf.

In second grade, my family and I moved to California for a few years, which is when I was first introduced to the digital world. I remember sitting in my third-grade classroom, being

given an iPad, and using a site called Scratch. The first time I moved a couple blocks of code around, hit the run button, and saw the sprite move a couple of steps to the right, I was amazed.

Now, as a rising senior in high school who is interested in education and computer science, I can look back and appreciate how the Montessori Mindset gave me the tools to thrive within these fields, and perhaps, most importantly, within the rise of artificial intelligence, as it reshapes the professional landscape.

Montessori education centers around a few core principles: independence, curiosity-driven learning, mixed-age classrooms, and self-motivation. At my school, no one told you exactly what to do or how to structure your day. You were given choices – a whole lot of them – and it was up to you to figure out how to spend your time productively.

Montessori instills these very traits from the earliest years. No one micromanaged how I spent my time, so I had to learn to prioritize, follow through, and make sense of unstructured freedom. I also had the independence to explore whatever I wanted to; I remember, after we moved back from California and I went back to the same Montessori school, in sixth grade, I was fascinated with frogs and ended up writing a 10-page research report on frogs. This early practice in self-direction mirrors the kind of autonomy expected in modern work environments, especially with AI.

That freedom taught me how to manage my attention and follow my interests—an experience that mirrors today's work environments, especially as AI reshapes the professional landscape. According to the World Economic Forum, self-management, active learning, and curiosity are among the top 10 skills essential in today's workforce. Eighty-one percent of executives in Deloitte's 2024 Global Human Capital Trends identified adaptability, curiosity, and self-directed learning as critical skills for navigating rapid technological change.

With limitless possibilities and few clear instructions, success depends on your ability to take initiative, manage your attention, and make decisions without someone telling you what to do next, exactly what Montessori education fosters early on.

Montessori's mixed-age classrooms, where younger students learn from older students, also model the type of mentorship that happens in the workforce. In the upper elementary classroom (4th, 5th, and 6th graders), I was on the "fish committee," responsible for the care of our class fish named Survivor, aptly named as he was forgotten about over one holiday. These committees were organized where the older student acts as the "leader," training the younger two protégés. This peer-to-peer learning model mirrors the programs used in 55% of U.S. companies to accelerate skill development and career advancement for early-career professionals. In the workforce, the ability to seek out mentors and learn from peers puts you at an advantage. Building a network, finding guidance, and learning by doing are habits that accelerate skill acquisition and increase opportunity.

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As a current high schooler living in the rise of AI, knowing what you want to do with it and having the drive to follow through are essential. Montessori fosters this kind of motivation by encouraging curiosity and allowing students to explore what genuinely interests them. That exploration creates a self-reinforcing loop: the more curious you are, the more you learn, assuming you have access to high-quality educational resources, and the more rewarding that process becomes.

The future of work is changing, and education must evolve to meet it. The principles of Montessori education not only anticipate this future but actively prepare students to succeed in it, as I've described. Of course, there are also other methods, tools, and platforms that help students prepare for the future, many of which I hope to explore in future blog posts. Also, there are important barriers and limitations to Montessori education, and in education policy in general, that must be considered. For example, most Montessori schools are private and tuition-based, putting them out of reach for many families. Some states are starting to make public funding available for private schools, including Montessori programs, raising questions about equity, public resources, and educational priorities. Is expanding access to Montessori through public funding a good thing? Could its principles be integrated into public school curricula so that more students benefit from its strengths without the barrier of cost?

As I think about AI, EdTech, and the future of learning, these questions matter. The challenge isn't just building innovative tools—it's ensuring that the invaluable principles of independence, curiosity-driven learning, and self-motivation that I had the opportunity to learn from Montessori education can be accessible to every student, regardless of zip code or income.