

Real, World-Improving Projects

Kids adding value to the world

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WHAT IS NEW IN OUR TIMES is that when young people are interested in improving their world, they can now do something about it.

When, recently, a family was harassed unnecessarily by police in Atlanta, the family's two teenage girls and their teen brother developed "an app to help improve police behavior and community relations. It lets citizens rate their experiences with officers, record both parties' race and sex and the purpose of the interaction, and find aggregate scores for county forces." The app is called called Five-O (a slang term for cops) and it's quickly spreading around the world. (per the *Economist*, who reported on it.)

This is non-trivial "value added" to the world, by kids.

Currently, in our education we literally ignore, and effectively throw away, the new potential value-adding power of those in school — who are, roughly, one-seventh of all humans. We have somehow decided that these young human beings have *no value at all to add to the world though our educational system* (other than "outside" manual labor and menial work) — until we have "taught" them," and they have grown up.

The young today are no longer buying this specious argument, and neither should we. Today's kids, around the world, *know* they can add value to the world right now. They are, in more and more cases, going out and doing it, either on

their own or — when they are lucky — supported by scattered teachers and programs.

Primary school kids are improving their neighborhoods. 10 and 11 year olds are designing public amenities such as parks, and doing government work such as environmental reports and cryptography. 13-year-olds are 3D printing prosthetic hands (using instructions already on the internet), and using the Web to find other kids who need them. High school kids are installing and upgrading networks, testing water quality, restoring historic ships and other artifacts. Kids of all ages and genders are starting companies and NGO's to solve world problems. What is currently being done by kids is already amazing, but their potential has hardly been tapped. We are at the start of something completely new and positive — school-age kids able to improve the world in useful, measurable, and non-exploitive ways. What we now need — above all — from our education is to encourage this further.

Our kids now can take world-improvement into their own hands — in positive ways —and want to. These examples are just the very tip of a very big and growing list of real-world improvements kids are doing and accomplishing both in (and mostly for now outside) of school, around the world.

So it is time to move away from the kinds of “PBL” projects that only help kids “meet standards” and make *all* our projects real-world.

Having looked for such projects, I have found them all over, and seen them fall into many categories. They include:

- Helping one's local community
 - Cleaning up
 - Creating local parks and gardens
 - Designing and building local amenities
- Helping the less fortunate
 - Re-distributing discarded materials
- Building and repairing infrastructure
 - Digging wells
 - Improving sanitation
 - Putting in Wi-Fi and Internet connections

- Directly assisting peers or others
 - Tutoring
 - Connecting with seniors
- Preserving our history and legacy
 - Restoring wooden boats
 - Restoring historical artifacts
- Assisting with government functions
 - Creating required reports (e.g. environmental)
 - Measuring air and water quality
- Adding new information to the world's knowledge and databases
 - Citizen science
- Public Service
 - Evaluating our Public Servants and Services

To see examples in all these categories, please go to <http://globalempowerkids.org>. Obviously these are far from all the possible categories for student projects. It's important that students, hopefully in collaboration with their teachers, think up more and more of them — and do them.

I am now collecting as many of these real-world-improving projects as possible, and hope to create a world data base accessible by all. I'd very much appreciate your sending projects you know of that have had real world, measurable outcomes (i.e. not just "reports") to me at marcprensky@gmail.com, along with any such lists and databases that you know of.

Thanks.

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