

WHEN WILL OUR EMPOWERED KIDS ARISE?

By Marc Prensky

[799 words]

We are all worried about the growing number of deadly shootings in our schools. As some students courageously raise their voices, many adults express their pride in student demonstrations, speeches, and cries for people to vote. I applaud these kids—but consider: We could do and did, all of those things in the past. They are using the change methods of an earlier time.

Today's kids live in the digital age. Our school-age kids have access to technology more powerful than all the world's governments had when we landed on the moon. Each one with a smart phone has an "extended brain," and all the world's kids are becoming networked together.

This has taken us all by surprise. We humans have no real idea, as yet, of how to use all this new power positively—for protest, change, or anything else. But one would certainly expect that 50 million "extended brains all networked together" in the US, and hundreds of millions in the world, will come up with ideas and solutions for producing change beyond the marching and voting of the past. Empowerment of kids has already started—kids have created tests for cancer, new ways to test water for lead, apps to use facial recognition to help Alzheimer's patients, to rate police encounters, to combat bullying, and more. (You can view 100+ examples at btwdatabase.org.) As the world now confronts some of the questionable uses of technology, from surveillance to sharing of personal information, most of new ideas we need will come from our youth.

How can we encourage this? One answer is to help our kids accomplish in the real world. In the past school kids couldn't easily do positive things outside their immediate world; Today it is incredibly easy for kids to survey a million people, build and share an app, and work on a team with members on every continent. Using today's technology—powerfully applied—every single kid has the capacity to make a positive impact on his or her local and global community. Unlike many adults, kids view the powerful emerging technologies of artificial intelligence, social networking, simulation, real-time connectivity and big data analysis as tools to use to create positive change—something their generation is eager to do. Hackathons, design thinking tools and more offer them growing opportunities to do this. Kids' technology power will increase a billionfold in their lifetimes. We need to start helping this newly empowered generation arise and innovate more quickly.

An alternate accomplishment-based education is now emerging in the world to meet the needs of the kids who want to create change. It has them design and complete project after project with measurable positive impact on their communities and world. High Tech High & Elementary in the U.S, Riverside School and Design for Change in India, Ecole 42 and CGI in France, and Escola Concept in Brazil already offer this new type of education. More and more colleges welcome students who choose this route. Those colleges take huge advantage of the kids' accomplishment abilities to prepare them far better for the world of work.

No place has as yet made real-world accomplishment education a universal alternative option for kids, but it would be greatly in their interest to do so. Students would leave school with a resume of real-world accomplishments, and the ability to say “That was a problem before, but now, because of what I and my team did, it’s better!”

Moving education in this new direction is not easy, but it is crucial for our kids’ success in their coming world that they be able to accomplish. “The best predictor of future accomplishment is past accomplishment,” says one IBMer. To avoid becoming victims of the world’s coming automation, kids will need to be able to combine their individual dreams, concerns, strengths and passions with the exponentially increasing power of their technology in unique ways to accomplish world-improving tasks.

Today we judge kids not by what they can accomplish, but by what we, from an earlier era, expected them to do. Suppose instead we encouraged our school kids, from the beginning, to use their new power and capabilities to accomplish useful things, to help others, and to better their world? Because real-world projects sit uneasily within our current system, a possible option is for school administrators to create separate “schools within a school” within their existing buildings. Far too much adult time today time is spent berating our kids for their use of technology, leaving many of our kids feeling under-respected, under-valued and under-appreciated. We would do so much better to say to them: “Surprise us with new your power to accomplish positively in the world!”

Will they figure out ways to reduce or stop the shootings? Hopefully— and sooner if we set them on their way.

#####

Marc Prensky, is an award-winning, international- acclaimed speaker in over 40 countries and author of 7 books in the field of education. Coiner of the term “Digital Native,” he has taught at all levels, from elementary to college. Marc is the founder of The Global Future Education Foundation, devoted to promoting Empowerment Through Accomplishment Education in the world, and the Real-World-Impact Project Education Network, uniting all those offering such education to kids. Contact Marc at marcprensky@gmail.com.

The student projects cited in paragraph 3 can all be seen at btwdatabase.org.