



CHAPTER TWO

We Thrive by Contributing

*The purpose of life is to discover your gift.
The work of life is to develop it.
The meaning of life is to give your gift away.*

—David Viscott (1993)

The shock of the November 2016 presidential election activated student Liam Neupert: “I felt devastated and absolutely terrified of what was to come in the next four years” (Anderson-Minshall, 2019).

Fortunately, the gay biracial Boise teenager had a good friend to talk to; “It is so crucial for everyone to have someone or something that allows them to take the time and search through their feelings.”

Neupert also had supportive parents and a new school in Boise that helped him channel his concern into action. He began advocating for LGBTQ rights in the Idaho legislature and volunteered with a peer-led sex education class where teens learn a comprehensive approach to sexual health and teach it to other teens.

In March 2019, as a junior at One Stone, Neupert led the Idaho climate strike that brought hundreds of young people to the capitol steps. About his school community, Neupert said, “We constantly advocate for what we believe in. We have created a community around this problem; we have created a very large ripple effect.”

“The big thing I’ve really seen open up in my life during my time at One Stone is my mindfulness . . . I’ve grown in a way where I am mindfully focusing more on how I am consuming and impacting our planet.”

The vegan fashion trendsetter also reduced his consumption of fast fashion brands after looking at the carbon footprint and employment practices of leading brands. He began to shop second-hand and look for brands that are transparent about their practices.

Neupert, who has become a regional leader on environmental issues, said, “School should be about exploring your passion—authentically you—as well as things you’re not always engaged in.”

Neupert serves on the board of the school that is raising an “army of good for good.” The 2019 cohort of One Stone students in the Lab School and after-school program completed over 400 projects, many of which were in service to the community, including parent and teen discussions about alcohol abuse; teaching middle school girls about healthy relationships and behaviors; a campaign to reduce waste from single-use cups; a campaign to fight drinking and driving on graduation night; taking refugees on outdoor adventures, and three-dimensional printing parts for local businesses (T. Vander Ark, 2019, October 21).

The project topics are student generated or generated by the community. Both students and coaches are informed by community input. At the beginning of the school year, One Stone issued a “Request for Problems” to its local partners that would be used to inform their investigations and contributions.

“Students are willing and ready to talk about tough topics that adults are often conditioned to steer away from,” explained founder Teresa Poppen. At One Stone, they don’t shy away from difficult subjects like depression and substance abuse. When they host community conversations, adults are often surprised at the poised and thoughtful ways One Stone students address emerging issues.

In this chapter, we discuss

- Contribution as not a new idea but a way of being in community that dates back to the earliest years of our existence as a species
- How leading with making a difference might be the way to change the world and that there is no better time to make a difference than now
- The psychological, mental, and physical benefits of leading with contribution
- How contribution builds community and connects us to the ever growing social economy

One Stone is one of the growing number of school communities dedicated to equip and empower youth to contribute to the common good. The idea is new to modern public education, but it has been central to all of the great faith traditions and foundational to civilizations that flourish.

Contribution Is Ancient Wisdom

As long as people have been living in community, there has been an ethic of mutualism and a practical wisdom of purposeful service. Spurred by a mix of mindfulness, gratitude, and obligation, all of the great faith traditions which built global communities value contribution.

The Jewish tradition of *Tikkun Olam* involves acts of kindness to perfect or repair the world. It implies that each person has a hand in working toward the betterment of his or her own existence, as well as the lives of future generations—it asks people to take ownership of their world (Noparstak, n.d.).

Repair the World by Repairing Lives

Kim Lathrop was born with no arms or legs. She lives on her own and every day is a challenge. A team of Bay Area makers created a device that helps Kim grab things with her mouth and bring them closer for ease of use. The simple device is inexpensive to produce and could improve the lives of paraplegics worldwide.

The maker community that addressed Kim's need is a chapter of Tikkun Olam Makers (TOM), a global movement that "creates and disseminates affordable solutions to neglected challenges of people living with disabilities, the elderly and the poor."

TOM teams identify neglected challenges, prototype affordable solutions, upgrade what works into products, and disseminate solutions to end-users. Three dozen global TOM communities are supported by Reut, an Israeli social impact group founded by Gidi Grinstein in 2004.

We find this emphasis on contribution in other faith traditions as well. For example, Father of the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther, viewed vocation as the locus of the Christian life. He said the purpose of every vocation is to love and serve your neighbors. God does not need your good works, Luther said, but your neighbor does (Veith, 2016). Social welfare is a principal value in the Islamic tradition. The practice of service to humanity is widely instructed and encouraged (Stefon, 2010). The high holy days of Passover, Easter, and Ramadan all celebrate reconciliation. The world's great religions teach this spirit of making all things new in daily life.

Working for Social Justice and Human Dignity in Chicago

Billy Moore did 20 years of hard time for a murder he committed as a young man. For more than a decade after his release, he has worked as a life coach for other ex-cons for The Inner-City Muslim Action Network (IMAN), a community organization that fosters health, wellness and healing in the inner-city by organizing for social change, cultivating the arts, and operating a holistic health center.

The IMAN vision is "To serve as the model of the Muslim tradition of facilitating transformational change in urban communities, by inspiring others towards critical civic engagement exemplifying prophetic compassion in the work for social justice and human dignity beyond the barriers of religion, ethnicity, and nationality."

The nonprofit was formed in 1997 by Dr. Rami Nashashibi and is guided by deep spiritual convictions around principles of human dignity, social justice, and compassion, particularly for marginalized people of color in the inner city.

Dana, acts of generosity and giving, is the first theme in Buddhism. A kind and compassionate attitude toward every living being and the world is central to Buddhist teaching (Moffitt, n.d.). And the indigenous approach to living sustainably is based on nurturing relationships in communities through sharing and the understanding that our planet is a living entity that must be cared for and preserved for future generations (Share the World's Resources, 2010).

Teaching Civic Virtues

The new reality is that many young people do not grow up in communities of practiced religion. Generation Z is the least religious generation. Instead, “Post-Millennials live in a culture of choice, self-actualization and freedom of expression,” said Sacred Heart Professor Christel Manning (2019).

While positive for a sense of tolerance and opportunity seeking, this trend of non-religiosity raises questions. Will more young people grow up outside communities of caring adults? How will young people be exposed to role models of contribution?

Contributing to the common good is a civic virtue. It’s one of four elements of practical wisdom identified by the Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtue at the University of Birmingham. The others are intellectual virtues like curiosity and critical thinking, moral virtues including compassion and integrity, and performance values of getting work done with persistence and collaboration.

Developing these virtues—what some might call character education—has been a historical component of schooling, from ancient through modern times, with the exception of a few decades at the end of the 20th century in many Western democracies.

After more than two decades of preoccupation with grade-level testing in reading and math, a growing number of schools in the United States and around the world are returning to broader aims, with contribution at the core.

And rather than reading about character in a textbook, more schools are taking an applied approach and supporting youth-led efforts to serve the community. Finding a way to make a difference in the community uniquely develops all the top skills—self-direction, curiosity, and civic identity—identified by Turnaround for Children’s Building Blocks for Learning, a framework for the development of skills children need for success in school and beyond (Stafford-Brizard & Cantor, 2016).

The Building Blocks report makes clear that these priority skills are built through modeling, support, and opportunities to apply and transfer them independently. Relationships and social context are keys.

“Empowering All Students to Make Meaningful Contributions to the World”

That is the remarkable motto of the Loudoun County Public Schools, a sprawling district northwest of Washington, DC, serving about 84,000 students in 94 schools.

In his 5 years as superintendent in Loudoun, Dr. Eric Williams led community conversations that resulted in updating district aims. While many districts reference citizenship as a goal, Williams appreciates the personal nature of contribution and the breadth of expression in private sector careers, community service, and civic engagement.

He believes in “engaging students in solving authentic problems as a means to developing students as knowledgeable critical thinkers, communicators, collaborators, creators, and contributors.”

“When learners see themselves as an entrepreneur now, when there is a real audience for their work now, they have a strong sense of ownership of their work,” said Williams

In elementary school, Williams looks for students working in small groups to solve an authentic problem. They might consult an expert to develop a knowledge base and then share the solution with that expert.

At one Loudoun middle school, several students struggled with cancer. Their classmates developed projects to learn about different types of cancer and raise funds for a cure. “We want to see learners choosing a problem and coming up with solutions across content areas,” said Williams.

Another elementary school developed pitches for Amazon’s second headquarters. Students did a ton of research on local geographic and economic strengths and they developed pitches on why Amazon should locate its second headquarters in Loudoun. Economic development officials and Amazon Web Services executives came and listened to the student proposals.

Middle school students developed pitches for historical markers. Based on a student proposal, the state approved a monument at the Ashburn Colored School, which served African American students during the era of segregation.

At a Loudoun high school, students developed a project to test road de-icing materials that were alternatives to traditional, more environmentally damaging de-icers. Students pitched their ideas to community experts, including state transportation officials and promoted the alternative de-icers through social media and homeowner association newsletters.

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“Having students focus on authentic problems can be a game-changer,” added Williams. “Ownership leads to persistence. Learning will be deeper. Student ownership of their work leads to persistence when the work becomes difficult. And ultimately learning will be deeper and longer lasting” (“Eric Williams” 2019).

What If Impacting the World Was the Goal?

Educators working with high school students observe a good deal of boredom. They often ask about how to engage students so that they learn the required content. Sasha Barab (an Arizona State professor) thinks that is the wrong question (Peters, 2019).

Barab suggests a thought experiment: What would happen if educators reversed the core assumptions, beginning with the interrelations of person, content, and context and then put emphasis on how to leverage success with particulars to generate appreciation of universals?

In other words, what if we started with the learner and what they care about?

“In contrast,” argues Barab, “when one treats impacting the world as the goal, then the criteria for success becomes whether the individual can, and chooses to, leverage the to-be-learned content in ways that are relevant to goals that they view as important.”

“In this redesign,” explains Barab, “the focus is on learners making progress in situations that they care about and for which universals have value.” In contrast to systems that privilege only content, a redesign would put person and context on equal footing.

“Such a system would prioritize people thriving in particular situations, not on consuming content in ways that might have value in some future situation.”

Imagine schools that were laboratories of transformation—of people and communities—rather than places where formulas and facts were memorized. Imagine if schools helped young people to understand who they are, what they're good at, and where they will make their initial contribution.

Barab concludes,

By starting with the specific use cases that learners care about and the progress they wish to make in these situations, or even that the educators wanted them to make, one would begin to see the power of the situation and the learner, resulting in an educational system that valued making awesome people who can do great things over one that primarily cares about disembodied articulations.

EL Education Focuses on Contribution

EL Education is a national network of schools and a leading curriculum provider with a three-dimensional vision of achievement where students master knowledge and skills, develop character, and create high-quality work.

At the heart of character is the ideal of contributing to a better world—students “putting their learning to use as active citizens, working for social justice, environmental stewardship, and healthy, equitable communities (e.g., citizenship, service, advocacy).”

The character core is supported by helping learners develop a positive identity. That includes agency, purpose, and belonging. The academic environment is designed to support character growth through compelling curriculum, student-engaged assessment, deeper instruction, and a student advisory called Crew.

A middle school example of students contributing to a better world is Polaris Charter Academy in Chicago where 96% of students knew a gunshot victim. Students met with community stakeholders, researched peacekeepers, wrote a book, created public service announcements, and organized a citywide day of peace (EL Education, n.d.)

Benefit Mindset in Leadership

A new priority for school leaders might be to develop a benefit mindset, one that is focused on doing good and not just personal gain. Developing a benefit mindset pushes beyond development and gain purely for individual growth and puts others, well-being and development into the equation. School leaders who look past supporting individuals getting ahead at the expense of others and optimize the opportunities for collective growth and good embrace this mindset.

Ashley Buchanan, Director at Cohere, describes it as building on a growth mindset and “not only [where we] seek to fulfil our potential, but choose to do it in a way that serves the wellbeing of all” (Benefit Mindset, n.d.). The Benefit Mindset School Guide invites educators to consider a new way of thinking about the purpose of learning and to consider contribution as a central priority of learning.

Buchanan and Kern (2017) write:

The Benefit Mindset describes everyday leaders who discover their strengths to make valuable contributions to causes that are greater than the self, leaders who believe in

making a meaningful difference, positioning their actions within a purposeful context. We argue that creating cultures of contribution and everyday leadership could be one of the best points of leverage we have for simultaneously bringing out the best in people, organizations and the planet.

“Everyone deserves an education that is about their own development as a human being,” said Peter Senge. “The purpose of education—is for me to become me—in the context of the society that I live, so I can truly contribute to my society” (TaishiConsulting10, 2012).

If impacting the world was the purpose of education and a focal point for schools, the potential to change the world and to uplift communities is endless. Not only is it a key to our future, but difference making is motivating, supported by science, and easier than ever.

Difference Making Is Motivating

Speaking to better preparation and motivation, Google’s Jaime Casap frequently says, “Don’t ask a student what she wants to be when she grows up. Ask her what problem she wants to solve” (T. Vander Ark, 2017, January 24).

Focusing on local versions of global problems and opportunities makes learning authentic, integrated, and community connected. Young people

Exploring Real-World Problems

Del Lago Academy—Campus of Applied Science is a public high school in Escondido, just north of San Diego. It’s a single pathway school focused on health and biotechnology.

Del Lago scholars are challenged to explore real-world problems that extend beyond the classroom by establishing side-by-side working relationships with industry mentors.

“We believe students who are challenged intellectually by actively exploring real-world problems value their learning and are motivated to succeed,” said principal Ruth Hellams (2019).

The mission includes preparing “innovators who create solutions to local and global problems through empathy, creativity, and collaboration.”

Another mission component is to create “world citizens who are respectful, responsible, ethical, and compassionate.” This aspiration is addressed, in part, through the advisory system, a weekly opportunity for scholars to meet and share their awareness and appreciation of others’ culture, values, and diversity. They build stronger relationships with each other and enhance community and well-being.

Student tour guides at De Lago gladly explain the five pillars that serve as mutual agreements of how they live and work together: Welcome, Do No Harm, Never Too Late To Learn, Choice Words, Be The Best.

Robert, a senior, found “Be the Best” to be motivating. He knew all the faculty and took advantage of the fact that they all care. After experiencing success at Del Lago in digital media, virtual reality, and podcasting, Robert is heading to UCLA film school.

gain confidence as they experience success and contribute to their communities. Students are more motivated by real-world tasks and learning that has purpose. True projects and learning that is focused on making a difference is innately real world and authentic (Lombardi, 2007).

Difference making can fuel a greater motivation for learning communication skills that otherwise might have seemed less interesting to develop or taking on a bigger problem than the learner thought they could possibly handle. When a learner knows they are going to impact a real person, place, or challenge, it drives deeper learning.

Michael Joyner was an indifferent high school student in Tucson. After graduating, he tried several colleges before ending up at the University of Arizona where he joined the track team but almost flunked out. He decided he'd become a fireman and signed up for the test. Because he was a runner, a graduate student asked Joyner if he wanted to be a subject in a study on lactic acid. He showed up and ran in the lab, and told *Freakonomics*, "Man, this is unbelievable. There's actually people who do this for a living" (Dubner, 2020).

The head of the physiology lab told Joyner he could be a student assistant if he got his grades up. He started getting straight As. "I saw that if you wanted to do studies in humans where you put catheters in and do biopsies and that sort of thing, it would be facilitated if you were a physician," explained Joyner. He went to medical school to become a research physiologist. Today, Dr. Joyner is a professor at the Mayo Clinic and is what *Freakonomics* (2019) called "a big deal in the field of exercise physiology."

Joyner's story illustrates the power of purpose and how quickly a bad student can become an academic star when there is a clear path to contribution. His accidental appearance in the lab that turned into a productive career is also a reminder of how important broad exposure, work experiences, and good guidance are to helping young people connect with a sense of purpose.

"If you are motivated, you learn better and remember more of what you learned" (Murayama, 2018). The science of motivation points us to contribution and difference making time and time again, including in Joyner's case. Whether motivated by rewards, intrinsic or extrinsic, or by the change and chemistry in the brain when one makes a connection to another human, we all can benefit from making a difference.

Increased academic motivation can not only come from seeing yourself on a path to contribution but by helping others. High school students raise their own academic achievement by giving advice to younger students on how to improve study habits, upending traditional beliefs about how to boost motivation and performance for struggling students.

"When someone is struggling to meet their goals, we intuitively believe that giving them advice may improve their performance," said Wharton researcher Lauren Eskreis-Winkler. A Character Lab study revealed that the inverse was true: "We increase individual motivation and ultimately performance by placing students in a position to give, rather than receive, help. If we want to motivate kids, we should give them opportunities to help others" (Eskreis-Winkler, Milkman, Gromet, & Duckworth, 2019).

The Psychology Behind Making a Difference

Young people are now more likely to choose a job based on how it enables them to contribute to something larger than themselves (Peters, 2019). This is supported by several global surveys, including a 2019 Deloitte survey of over 60% of millennials who shared that a sense of purpose is why they work for the company (Peters, 2019). Another 2016 survey of millennials showed that more than 64% of employees would consider a company's social and environmental commitments when deciding whether it was a place they wanted to work (Cone Communications, 2016).

Our future (and likely a large portion of our current) workforce wants to have jobs where they are making a difference (Deloitte, 2019). Many millennials surveyed said they wanted to work for a company that was focused on “improving society rather than just generating profits” (Fink, 2019).

Companies like Patagonia have declared that they are in the business of making a difference in the world and that they want employees who are dedicated to doing good in the world.

Certified B Corporations, including Patagonia, are businesses that meet high standards of verified social and environmental performance, public transparency, and legal accountability to balance profit and purpose. The growing number of so-called B Corps are accelerating a shift to redefine success in business and build a more inclusive and sustainable economy. B Corps use profits and growth as a means to a greater end: positive impact for their employees, communities, and the environment. The B Corp community works toward reduced inequality and poverty, a healthier environment, stronger communities, and more high-quality jobs with dignity and purpose. Nonprofit B Lab certifies company claims and annually honors top changemakers for their impact on the world (B Corps, 2019).

This growing preference for purposeful work—in jobs and in school—is not just psychological, it is biological. Numerous studies reveal that there are also cognitive impacts when we engage in difference making. Endorphins are released when we provide help to others and there are other neurological benefits to engaging in acts of service (Haupt, 2010; Luks & Payne, 2001; Rusu, 2019).

Dr. Patricia Boyle, a neuropsychologist focused on studying Alzheimer's Disease, shared that “working toward a goal and feeling like you are making a contribution to society likely increases your sense of purpose in life, which we have found contributes to both psychological and physical health” (Rush, n.d.).

Finding your purpose and finding work aligned to this purpose have also been found to have positive effects on our overall well-being. Khullar, physician at New York-Presbyterian Hospital and a researcher at the Weill Cornell Department of Healthcare Policy and Research, writes, “Research increasingly suggests that purpose is important for a meaningful life—but also for a healthy life. Purpose and meaning are connected to . . . well-being.” Khullar (2018) continues and shares several positive health benefits of having a purpose, including lower risk of dementia, better sleep and fewer strokes and heart attacks.

In schools, where many students psychologically are struggling due to trauma, biological needs, or other challenges they face, providing them space to find their purpose and enhance their well-being makes sense. A study of 10th graders who randomly were assigned to volunteer weekly showed that after 4 months they had lower levels of inflammation, better cholesterol profiles, and lower body mass index. Students who had the biggest increases in levels of empathy and altruism also had the largest reductions in cardiovascular health risk (Schreier, Schonert-Reichl, & Chen, 2013).

Difference Making Is Easier Than Ever

In August 2018, Swedish activist Greta Thunberg sat outside Sweden's Parliament holding a simple sign that said "School Strike for Climate." Just over a year later, she had four million social media followers, had mobilized 13 million climate strikers in 30 countries, and was *Time's* Person of the Year.

It was free social media, short-form video, and digital infrastructure for memberships and event planning that helped Thunberg activate leaders like One Stone student Liam Nuepert worldwide. Similarly, the shooting survivors from Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School (featured in Chapter 3) vaulted to national prominence after organizing highly visible gun control events. Both gun control and climate change groups would say they haven't achieved their desired impact yet, but they have changed the national perception—and much faster and more efficiently than was ever possible.

Communication applications like WhatsApp and WeChat make it easier for initiative organizers to communicate nationally and globally. Open tools on sites like Code.org make it easier to learn to code an impact application. AWS Educate makes it fast and free to learn cloud computing technology. It's getting easier to access open source machine learning tools like TensorFlow from Google, PyTorch from Facebook, and Azure from Microsoft. GitHub provides the code needed to power world-class software.

A growing number of commerce platforms make it easier to launch a business: marketplaces like eBay and Etsy; commerce platforms including Shopify, Squarespace, and Weebly; and backed supports like Fulfillment by Amazon. Influencers make real money on YouTube and Instagram.

It's increasingly easy to raise money for a good cause. About \$250 billion in venture capital flowed to startups in 2019—about half internationally. Twice that amount was invested philanthropically in the United States alone.

One illustration of smart money flowing to good ideas is the Emerson Collective, an initiative of Lauren Powell Jobs to transform health, education, media, and spread social justice. In venture capital, Village Capital supports impact-driven, seed-stage startups worldwide. Since 2009, they have worked with more than 1,100 entrepreneurs in 28 countries and invested in 110 startups.

Chole Capital is funding female-led startups taking on big challenges like climate change and nutrition. Whoever you are, wherever you are, it is easier to gain access to the right kind of capital—grants, loans, or impact focused equity—for difference making.

These innovations have also made the path to difference faster than ever. The ability to take an emerging idea, share it with the world, get feedback, find followers who support you, and then reach the world all within 24 hours is an unprecedented opportunity more young people ought to be taking advantage of.

The Coming Social Economy

“Humans generally find their place in life through contribution,” said Jeff Fray, psychologist and Senior Vice President at the growth platform Gloop, “and it is this desire to contribute that is the massively latent human resource that will drive tomorrow’s social economy” (T. Vander Ark, 2019, April 11).

Gig work platforms will continue to surface more opportunities to contribute. Enabled by more participation and outcome data, it will become easier to value contributions in ways beyond clocking time. Measures of delivered value could include the traits that make us uniquely human—care, consideration, creativity, and critical thinking.

“Measured efficacy will unlock the new social economy,” said Fray. “Data will tell the value creation story of how well one person supports the growth of another.”

As populations age and as automation eats rule-based jobs, the need and opportunity for the social economy will expand. The social economy will be built on the traits that make us uniquely human—care, compassion, creativity, and critical thinking.

These types of contributions will eventually supersede the weight of an applicant’s test scores or their ability to follow a script. Quality of interactions, meaningful relationships, and commitment to a cause will reign as more valuable, both in schools and in the workplace.

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Grappling With Global Issues at IDEA

Innovation, Design, Entrepreneurship Academy (IDEA) is a small high school in Dallas focused on social entrepreneurship. Students use design thinking to attack Global Goals for Sustainable Development, identify an area of passion, and learn about how they can make a difference.

IDEA has a strong commitment to learning through internships and mentorship. It has an advisory meeting every morning. Students are supported in choosing an internship.

There are no sports at IDEA, but students lead interest-based clubs for academics.

IDEA operates as a community. There are regular “family meetings” of restorative practices that are student led and support learners in developing conflict resolution skills.

Students appreciate working at their pace and for having personalized options as well as flexible space in the school for learning. One student shared, “Personalized learning is working at your own pace, in a way you can be successful” (Midles, 2019).

The goal is to prepare young innovators to launch an impact-driven business before they graduate.

Unfortunately, many communities still struggle to gain adequate access to networks, connections, and resources that make this opportunity to make a difference so ripe. Struggling to connect or having a quality device to connect with shouldn't be a barrier in 2020, but for many it is.

Contribution Builds Communities

Melinda Gates is a leader who has committed her life to making a difference and to creating more access and opportunities for others. Her impetus for dedicating her life to this work might in part be driven by how motivating it is, but it is far more likely that uplifting communities is her driving cause.

She writes in her book *The Moment of Lift: How Empowering Women Changes the World*, “How can we summon a moment of lift for human beings—and especially for women? Because when you lift women up, you lift up humanity” (Gates, 2019, p. 2). She is committed to lifting up the voices and stories, particularly those of women, who are helping their communities around the world.

Like Gates, we have been fortunate and excited to see cities and communities around the world uplifting, gaining hope and viability as a result of individual schools or educational ecosystems choosing to make a difference.

A shift to making a difference in schools doesn't only benefit the students directly; it also can uplift entire communities and groups of people.

Contribution is the innovation economy superpower. By taking on a complicated local problem and delivering value to a community, young people build agency and practice design thinking. It's why Seth Godin frequently says that young people should learn to lead and solve interesting problems.

In places like the rural town of Kearney, Missouri, students are working on projects that benefit their town and local economies. Former Superintendent Bill Nicely wanted to see Kearney be a place to stay and live, not just a place to “get out of.” Kearney has been ranked as one of the fastest growing cities in Missouri.

Marion is a small town north of Columbus, Ohio, with a history of manufacturing. When Gary Barber took over as superintendent in Marion in 2012, he listened to the community. He recognized that relational partnerships are critical to community improvement. He formed a design team that included the chamber of commerce, local colleges, and economic development partners. Together they developed new learning goals, including “A Marion City graduate will be responsibly engaged in the community, take initiative and show empathy, be experienced in the community and in leadership roles.” They experienced a resurgence as a result of shifting high school priorities to focus on providing more meaning and relevance to high schoolers. New program Global Logistics Pathway leveraged local opportunities and partnerships (Vandeborne & Fujii, 2016). The district, as of spring 2020, has a new design team that is refreshing the portrait of a graduate.

Communities like Pittsburgh are being reinvigorated by efforts like Remake Learning, a festival of innovative learning practices and contribution

of ideas making a difference in the lives of youth in the city. Scott Peck, as quoted by hooks (2018, p. 52), shares: “In and through community is the salvation of the world” (Peck, 1998).

The benefits of contributing to the common good are embedded in wisdom traditions and should be central to education. Not only does it benefit the community, but it’s a shortcut to building the most important skills for life.

Ironically, the best preparation for a future full of novelty and complexity is helping young people make a contribution here and now. Rather than focus on what kids might need 15 years in the future, engaging young people in complex problem-solving and delivering value builds agency, collaboration, and subject matter expertise.

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