

C l i f t o n L. T a u l b e r t
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Taking a Fresh Look at Entrepreneurship

CLT

One of the great threats facing our Democracy is the underutilization of our youth, those who are or should be on the K-12 Corridor. These are youth within our urban inner cities, Native American Reservations and the pockets of poor youth throughout rural America. Many of them, and for a variety of reasons, have not embraced the K-12 learning process as meaningful for them. They do not see themselves in institutions of higher learning or as productive and caring citizens. However, when we see them across the streets, hanging out or just living out the day, as adults who have passed their way, we recognize that in spite of how they feel and how they choose to live their lives, they have potential. How then do we tap into the positive dreams that are simply lying dormant within their minds? Entrepreneurship could be one of the answers to turn these youth around. Using technology-their dream machine- to bring highly personalized and dynamic entrepreneur classes into these school environments (mainstream or adjunct) could grab their 'independent' and often misguided bravado and give them a new and positive 'vision' for their future; thus making the schools places of value. When the physical school becomes valuable in the eyes of the student, it also becomes a place they want to safeguard. It becomes their "promising" community. With technology, they can bounce ideas off their peers around the country and indeed around the world.

It becomes a case of personal "will" being challenged. It becomes a conversation of "I Can." When all around them is telling them that they can't and that they'll never be the kid from on "top of the hill," however that 'hill' looks to them, this journey into self-discovery could change that paradigm of thought. It's about pulling out of their heads ideas that makes sense to them. It's about them being able to see those ideas take shape on paper and become promising conversations. Their communication skills increase, as their personal projects demand more and more of them. It places a new spin on time utilization. Pride and productivity merges and in so doing reduces the time once allocated to negative and destructive behavior. Entrepreneurship provides for inclusivity and collaboration. It teaches that other people matter, even in the execution of a personal dream. It personalizes pride to their lives. It brings about a sense of ownership. As that sense of ownership increases, so does the attention to productive citizenship.

Entrepreneurship is no silver bullet. But for those who may feel on the outside of the house, this endeavor gives them reason to think otherwise. I know this personally! In spite of the dire circumstances that surrounded my life, I caught hold of the fact early on that an idea in my head could, in fact, become reality. In spite of legal segregation that surrounded my life, I saw the independence, though limited, experienced by those people within my community who had pushed against the odds. The idea of ownership impacted me on so many levels. I recognize this now as I look back. School became important, as did making right decisions, because a vision had been kindled and I was determined to see it happen. No young person is responsible for his or her birth circumstances. When those circumstances are not productive, an opportunity exists for the community as a whole to bring value to their lives. Entrepreneurship in our schools can tap into undiscovered treasure within many of our youth, lift their sights higher and provide them with a positive and productive community. **Many of us can become that uplifting community.**