

# Introduction

## *Making World Class Learners*

by Yong Zhao

### NO MORE BOOMERANG KIDS

“One in five people in their 20s and early 30s is currently living with his or her parents,” writes a 2014 *New York Times Magazine* article, “and 60 percent of all young adults receive financial support from them. That’s a significant increase from a generation ago, when only one in 10 young adults moved back home and few received financial support.” The article “It’s Official: The Boomerang Kids Won’t Leave” once again brought much attention to the issue of the economic conditions of today’s youth, the boomerang generation. For many reasons, mostly the lack of financial resources to be independent, an increasing number of today’s youth return to live with their parents, after briefly living away, mostly for pursuing higher education.

### GAVIN NEWTON TANZER

There are of course exceptions. Gavin Newton Tanzer is one of them. Not only is he not returning to live with his parents, but he has been helping others to find hope and future in distant lands. A 25-year-old American living in China, Gavin has founded several companies and nonprofit organizations

that help future youth become financially independent and socially responsible individuals in the globalized world. In 2010, while still a student at Columbia University, Gavin founded China Pathway, a company that provides consulting services for Chinese students intending to study abroad and Chinese educational institutions to develop study abroad pathway programs. In 2011, he founded Uexcel International Academy, with Compass Education Group, to bring international school programs to public schools in China. Both businesses have been profitable. He has dabbled in other businesses as well, including founding a company for data mining and even a company for movie production. “Neither of which went anywhere, but stemmed from what I saw as opportunities,” said Gavin.

Gavin left home upon graduating from Newtown High School in 2007 at the age of 18. He spent a year in China, learning the language and culture, making friends, and honing his organizational skills by serving at the youth volunteer programs in the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games. He now speaks fluent Mandarin Chinese, with a Beijing accent, in addition to French and Spanish. More importantly, he spotted the need for a better understanding about China. When he returned to attend college at Columbia, he started the Global China Connection (GCC) student organization, which now boasts more than 60 chapters in over 10 countries. GCC connects thousands of future youth leaders who have a desire and are willing to have a better understanding of China and opportunities in China.

But most impressive is Gavin’s new venture, which is transforming education in China. In 2012, he founded Sunrise International Education, a company that develops and provides extracurricular programs in China and ultimately globally. The premier program of Sunrise is the introduction of American-style high school debate in China. After only 2 years, Sunrise programs have trained nearly 100,000 Chinese students and organized tournaments with over 6,000 participants. “We are set to have around 12,000 in tournament this

year [2014],” according to Gavin. And Sunrise is working on adding two more leagues: drama and business. In many ways, Gavin’s programs are delivering more impact on Chinese students than many government reform efforts in terms of helping them develop critical thinking skills, communication and public speaking skills, and independent thinking skills, in addition to broadening their educational experiences. By the way, Gavin’s company has over 20 employees, expecting to double that soon.

### THE ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET

What makes Gavin different from the boomerang kids? The mindset. Gavin has an entrepreneurial mindset that makes him a creator of opportunities and jobs for himself and others. The boomerang kids have the employee mindset that makes them look for jobs that no longer exist. Technology and globalization have transformed our society. Machines and off-shoring have led to the disappearance of traditional middle-class jobs—jobs our education has been making our children ready for.

Since there are more boomerang kids than there are graduates like Gavin, it seems reasonable to say that Gavin is an accident, while the boomerang kids are the norm. In other words, the boomerang kids are the inevitable, while Gavin is a nice serendipity. This is because our traditional education, by design, produces employees rather than entrepreneurs. The challenge for educators today, if we wish to have fewer boomerang kids, is to figure out how to redesign our education to prepare entrepreneurs like Gavin so they do not happen by accident.

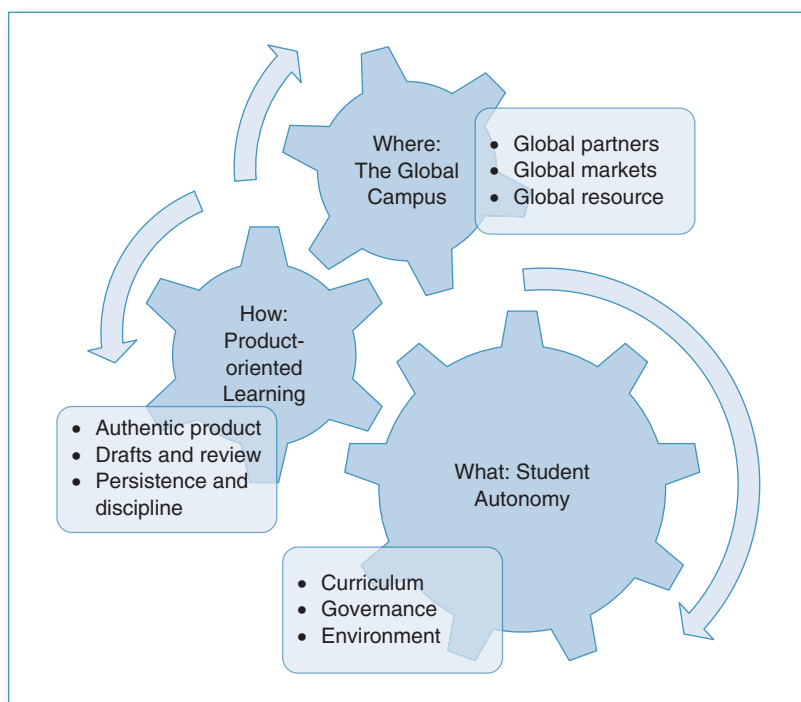
### THE IDEAL SCHOOL

That is the purpose of the book *World Class Learners: Educating Creative and Entrepreneurial Students*, which outlines a new

design that would turn the Gavin accident into institutional arrangement. The design includes three elements:

1. *Personalization*: Changing education from imposing on students the same standardized content to enabling students to pursue their passion and strength through student voice and choice, a broad and flexible curriculum, and mentoring and advising.
2. *Product-oriented learning*: Changing pedagogy from just-in-case knowledge transmitting to just-in-time supporting of students' engagement in entrepreneurial activities aiming to produce authentic products and services.
3. *Globalized campus*: Expanding the educational setting from local, isolated, physical spaces to global and virtual spaces to help students develop global perspectives and global competencies.

These three elements form the basic framework of schooling aimed to cultivate globally competent, creative, and entrepreneurial talents needed today. They are about redesigning the three primary aspects of schooling: curriculum, pedagogy, and context (see Figure 1). The ideal school should provide opportunities and resources to enable students to personalize their educational experiences instead of receiving a uniform standardized, externally prescribed, education diet. That is, rather than imposing on all students the same knowledge and skills and expecting all students master them at the same pace, the school co-constructs a curriculum that follows the students' passions and enhances their strengths. In terms of pedagogy, teachers in the ideal school facilitate student development by supporting and guiding students through an authentic process of creating works that matter to others. To make this possible, the ideal school brings in global resources and engages students in activities that enable students to learn for and with students from all over the world. Simply put, the ideal school is no longer a physical campus.

**Figure 1** Elements of Entrepreneur-Oriented Education

While the ideal school in the future is to have all three elements implemented, each element can be implemented separately. A school or teacher can choose to start working on one of the elements and expand to the other two. The elements can also be implemented at different levels depending on the context. An education system at the district, state, or national level can work at the system level to deliver any or all of the three elements. But a school can do this as well, with the understanding that it can be limited by system level constraints such as a state- or national-mandated curricula. Even individual teachers can implement the redesigned education in their classrooms, again with the understanding that they are constrained by system and school level factors such as teacher evaluation, mandated curriculum and assessment, as well as availability of resources.

Limited freedom to make changes in a school or classroom is not desirable, but it is better than maintaining the traditional paradigm. The ultimate goal is a complete transformation of schooling from employee-minded education to entrepreneur-minded education. But the realities of education today only allow for a gradual evolutionary approach to realizing this transformation. The fact that we cannot have the ideal version of the future right away should not stop us from acting on pieces of it. We can take baby steps before we leapfrog to the future. Thus all involved in education: policy makers, system-level leaders, school principals, and teachers all have a role, the capacity, and resources to make changes.

### MAKING THE PARADIGM SHIFT: BOOKS 1, 2, AND 3

*World Class Learners* presents evidence for why we need the paradigm shift. It also outlines the basic components of the new paradigm as well as areas where we can begin the work. Since its publication in 2012, there has been growing demand for more practice-oriented guidance and support to help schools and teachers take on the task of transforming the outdated education paradigm. In response, we decided to work on three books, each addressing one of the elements of the new paradigm.

Three books are intended to be practical. In other words, *World Class Learners* is about the *why* and *what* of educational paradigm shift; these three books are about the *how* and *what* happens. They are cowritten by researchers and practitioners. They include specific strategies, practical advice, and stories of success and struggle. The strategies, advice, and stories were collected from classrooms and schools that have embarked on the transformation journey. They reflect both promises and challenges of the new paradigm when implemented in the current educational settings. While they are intended to guide and inspire, they are not meant to be prescriptive because each school and classroom has its unique opportunities and constraints.

The organization of the three books is similar. They start with a discussion of theories and definitions of each element, followed by specific suggestions for how each can be implemented and what challenges exist that may work against the implementation. The suggestions are specific to system leaders, school leaders, and classroom teachers. They are also made with the consideration of different realities—thinking (beginning), implementing (intermediate), and expanding (advanced).

Each of the three books addresses one element of the new paradigm. *Personalization and Student Autonomy* provides guidance and suggestions for actions that systems, schools, and classrooms can take to create more autonomy for students and enable them to personalize their educational experiences, to enhance their strengths, and to follow their passions. *Product-Oriented Learning* provides guidance and suggestions for systems, schools, and classrooms to design and develop infrastructures and resources to enable students to engage in authentic projects. *Globalized Campus* is to help schools and teachers develop global engagement activities for students.