Reformers Tackle Deficiency in Children's Screen Time

Pointing to children's failure to spend adequate time in front of video screens, advocates of digital learning have proposed a package of reforms designed to increase youth awareness that books and face-to-face interactions need not take up some much of their time.

"While it's true that teenagers are averaging six-and-a-half hours of screen time a day outside of school, there are still some children who spend literally hours at a time playing outside with friends or curled up reading by the fire in a comfy armchair," warned Anne Avatar, spokesperson for the Institute for Disruptive Innovation.

Avatar conceded that schools have limited capacity to directly address the problem of children who receive less than the recommended six-hour dosage per day of screen time in their homes. But she contended that schools still have an important role to play. "While we can do little to intervene with neglectful parenting, we have a responsibility to ensure thorough screen-time immersion when children are in the care of our public schools. It's so sad to see children missing out on so much software."

Even children who get the six-hour minimum outside of school will, Avatar explains, benefit tremendously from the new digital-learning initiative. "Many children have now advanced to the stage where it is no longer plausible for them to interact with other people. Our schools are wasting the potential of these children, who could be learning through computers instead of staring blankly at a teacher who has no visible interface."

Reformers Automate Personalization

In a breakthrough comparable to Socrates's first interactions with marketgoers in the agora, education's top innovators have succeeded in creating personalized education without the persons. From this point forward, America's youth will advance through school in much the same way a cow advances through a modern abattoir, receiving only minor guidance if they momentarily veer off track.

The fully automated personalization is made possible by advances in digital technology, with continuous online assessments of students. "Teaching is really just a form of marketing, and as with all great marketing, the learning through this software is micro-targeted, based on individualized data," explains Mark Vander Venal of the Parsimony Institute. "Under optimal conditions, the efficiency improvements have been measured at 46.12%."

For years, reformers have been calling for the next generation of schools to be more efficient, and they have focused on minimizing spending on teachers and other humans. Vander Venal, in announcing the culmination of the project, heaped praise on "the vision and tireless efforts of those dreamers."

Like a player advancing through a video game by satisfactorily killing monsters, a child advances through the curriculum by convincing the computer that she is proficient at the current level. Each computer terminal is colorfully labelled as, e.g., *Third Grade* or *Fourth Grade*. The instructional software, in a major advance over past attempts at automated personalization, determines readiness for the child to move to the next terminal, all without human intervention.

Going by the name, "competency-based education," the system sorts each student into her own pathway toward graduation.

"We chose these words very carefully," says Vander Venal. "After all, who could be against something called *competency-based education*? And I remember when I first suggested using *personalization*, everyone laughed and said it wouldn't work. They said that reporters and policy-makers would see right through it. But who's laughing now?"

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