Technology As Mask?

Let's be sure not to confuse "adding technology" with fundamental educational change

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I would be an enormous shame if all of our efforts to introduce technology in education as quickly and intensely as possible — efforts to which many of us have devoted our entire professional lives — were really, instead, *masking* what truly and fundamentally needs to get done in order to improve our kids' education.

Yet this may, in fact, be the case.

Not completely, of course — technology is needed for future education and a future world.

But many other things, in addition to technology, are needed just as much or even more. And it's crucial that in our rush to add technology — which takes much time and effort — those other things don't get ignored or crowded out.

The world's education needs serious reform for the upcoming age — independent of whatever value technology does or does not add. Our education does not need updating only because of modern technology advances — although that is a big part of what is spurring changes.

The world's education needs updating because the education of today is based on the needs of the past. Today we focus almost entirely on "The MESS": i.e. Math, English, Science and Social Studies, and how to teach them better. What is needed — at least as much as technology — are major reforms to our current goals, curriculum and means of education. Without addressing and fixing these, no matter how much technology we add — or how much we may think we have helped our kids' education by adding it — we will not have accomplished, as educators, what's really needed.

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A New Goal – Becoming

Unfortunately, "learning" — often seen as the holy grail of today's education — is not our real goal — or shouldn't be. Learning doesn't distinguish between "learning CPR" and "learning to make bombs" as education should. So although learning is important, it is not the *goal* of education. The true goal is "becoming" — good, capable, world-improving people. Learning is a *means*. Figuring out who our students have become is quite different than assessing what they have or haven't learned.

Some educators are now beginning to adopt this thinking. A recent U.S. school district resolution begins with:

> **WHEREAS,** the goal of education is more than simply "learning" or "graduating," and it should include "becoming"- becoming a good and capable person who can effectively think, reason, act, relate and accomplish in whatever field he or she enjoys and has a passion for; …

A New "How" -- Accomplishing

In recent years there has been much focus on the "how" of education, much of it enabled by technology. Flipping, partnering, PBL, etc. are now in the forefront of most educators' minds. But what we need — really — is NOT new ways to do our old education better (which many of these techniques offer) but, rather, new ways to connect our kids' education much earlier to the real-world. Our education must move past kids' "being told" (even if it is done, overnight, by the stupendous Sal Khan), past fake, made-up "Problem-Based Learning," to real world accomplishment.

We are now seeing the beginnings of such an "Accomplishment-Based Education": fourth graders designing local facilities and getting them built, fifth graders doing government-mandated environmental reports in place of consultants, high school kids building networks, robots and other things that improve their own, their fellow students' and everyone's world. This real-world project-based approach must now be pushed much farther than today's occasional "service" projects to becoming the *basis* of our kid's education. Technology certainly helps here. But it won't — no matter how much of it is introduced — do this on its own.

A New What — Creating a New Curriculum

It is critical that the "core" curriculum that the world now teaches be rethought for our current and future times. Math, language arts, science and social studies of course have

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importance — but they are *no longer the core* of what our kids have to know to succeed in the world — or even, in more and more cases, to get into college.

The list of the *human skills* that kids *do* need in this age of technology ("timeless" skills is how Eve Andersson of Google refers to many of them) is quite long and important. While skills-based education around the "4c's", "21st century skills", and "Character education" is slowly entering the curriculum, it is often crowded out by the MESS and its testing. Yet which of these would you suggest we omit?:

> Understanding Communications, Quantitative & Pattern Thinking, Scientific Thinking, Historical Perspective, Individual Problem-Solving, Collaborative Problem-solving, Curiosity & Questioning, Creative Thinking, Design Thinking, Integrative Thinking, Systems Thinking, Financial Thinking, Inquiry & Argument, Judgment, Transfer, Aesthetics, Habits of mind, Positive Mindset, Self-knowledge of one's Passions, Strengths & weaknesses, Stress Control, Focus, Contemplation & Meditation, Work ethic, The Habits of Highly Effective People, Body & Health optimization, Agility, Adaptability, Leadership & Followership, Decision making under uncertainty, Experimentation, Research, Prudent risk-taking, Reality Testing/Feedback, Patience, Resilience & "Grit", Entrepreneurship, Innovation, Improvisation, Ingenuity, Strategy & Tactics, Breaking Barriers, Project Management, Programming Machines, Making effective videos, Innovating with current & future technologies, Communication & Collaboration one-to-one, in teams, in families, in communities, at work, online, in virtual worlds, and with machines, Listening , Networking, Relationship-building, Empathy, Courage, Compassion, Tolerance, Ethics, Politics, Citizenship, Conflict Resolution, Negotiation, Coaching, Being Coached, Peer-to-peer, Mentoring, Accomplishing Small & local projects, Larger Projects, Distributed Projects, and Global Projects.

I have suggested elsewhere we organize these essential skills into the general categories of Effective Thinking, Effective Action, Effective Relationships and Effective Accomplishment. Who would *not* want our kids to become capable in each of those areas? That is, of course, only one way to categorize — there are many options.

Education Requires More Than Technology

The world is now waking up to the fact that technology alone — although it is a foundation of education in the future — does not solve all, or even most, of our educational problems. We need to assure that the ***true educational goal*** of helping kids become good capable and world-improving people in their areas of passion, the ***better how*** of real-world, accomplishment-based education, and the ***new "what"*** of a curriculum designed to make our kids effective at underlying human skills — be given at least as high a priority as technology, and not get crowded out, or lost, in our technology-introducing efforts. We must not fool ourselves into thinking we are making educational progress if we do *not* do these things, because if we don't, our beloved technology will be only a mask, hiding our educational failure to keep up with, and provide, all that is really needed.

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