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Foreword

By Yong Zhao

"Is Google making us stupid?" asked Nicholas Carr, author of *The Big Switch: Rewiring the World, From Edison to Google*, in a 2008 *Atlantic* article.[1] Carr was lamenting the loss of the habit and even ability of deep reading due to the arrival of the Internet. "The deep reading that used to come naturally has become a struggle," wrote Carr, "And what the Net seems to be doing is chipping away my capacity for concentration and contemplation."

Carr's chief problem with the Net is the style of reading it seems to engender, "a style that puts 'efficiency' and 'immediacy' above all else." "When we read online," wrote Carr, referencing Maryanne Wolf, a developmental psychologist at Tufts University, "we tend to become 'mere decoders of information.' Our ability to interpret text, to make the rich mental connections that form when we read deeply and without distraction, remains largely disengaged."

What Carr has me worried about the impact of Google is what Arthur L. Costa and Bena Kallick have me worried about teaching in our schools. Driven by standardized testing that aims to assess our children's ability to provide prescribed answers, the education our children receive in schools may be making them stupid.

"Our practices of assessment, now and planned for the future, focus on the student's ability to provide correct answers," write Costa and Kallick. "Teachers report that such testing has an impact on their teaching." As a result, "they tend to spend more time covering material in class that will appear on standardized tests."

[1]http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2008/07/is-google-making-us-stupid/306868/

Standardized testing has been used as the primary driver for education reform in the United States over the past few decades. Test scores—that is, student ability to give the answers deemed correct by authorities—have been equated with the ability to live a successful life and hence should be pursued at any cost by students, teachers, and schools.

Costa and Kallick make it apparent that success is not defined by test scores. Rather, it is better defined by the attitudes and dispositions that learners bring to any new knowledge. And they make it immediately apparent that these dispositions are what teachers around the world want to see their students demonstrating.

With the imminent implementation of the Common Core State Standards Initiative, millions of children in the United States will not only be held accountable for finding answers to standardized tests, but also standardized tests of only two sets of knowledge and skills prescribed by a group of "content experts." They are expected to be able to find the expected answers at the expected time in the expected format—because the Common Core wants common assessment and prescribes common grade-level expectations.

Given past experiences with high-stakes testing, it is to be expected that the Common Core will further transform education into test preparation rather than focusing on the important 21st-century skills that so many proclaim are essential in order to be prepared for college and career. It seems unavoidable that teachers, school leaders, students, and even parents will narrow children's educational experiences to activities that help children achieve good test scores as the stakes grow even higher for all parties involved. And the stakes are getting higher. The Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC), one of the two Common Assessment consortia, for example, promises that its College and Career Readiness Determination:

- Will provide policymakers, educators, parents, and students with a clear signal about the level of academic preparation needed for success in these postsecondary courses.
- Will provide a strong indicator of college and career readiness that can be used to set performance goals at any level and show progress towards those goals.

- Finally, students who attain a CCR Determination in ELA/literacy and/or mathematics will have a tangible benefit – direct entry into relevant entry-level, credit-bearing courses without need for remediation.[2]

According to Carr, Google seeks to develop the "perfect search engine that understands exactly what you mean and gives you back exactly what you want." It sounds like what standardized tests want—students who understand exactly what the test makers mean and give back exactly what they want. Thus, preparing students to find answers on standardized tests is much like developing "intelligent" information processing machines, the perfect search engine. In other words, we are turning the nation's schools into little Google offices to create millions of much less efficient Google search engines.

But "a perfect search engine" is not what will make children successful in life because intelligence is much more than collecting, storing, analyzing, and spitting out information. Even PARCC acknowledges the limitation of the Common Core:

> It must be noted that the academic knowledge, skills, and practices defined by the PARCC CCR Determinations in ELA/literacy and mathematics are an essential part of students' readiness for college and careers, but do not encompass the full range of knowledge, skills, and practices students need for success in postsecondary programs and careers. For example, Conley (2012) includes learning skills and techniques such as persistence, motivation, and time management as critical elements of college and career readiness, along with transition skills and knowledge such as awareness of postsecondary norms and culture and career awareness.

Thus education should not just be about information processing. What distinguish human beings from machines are emotions, intuition, and individual diversity. Education must include the development of the human elements in our children. Costa

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[2]http://www.parcconline.org/sites/parcc/files/PARCCCCRDPolicyandPLDs_FINAL_0.pdf

and Kallick present a reasonable, practical, and positive alternative—the cultivation of dispositional thinking, the very core of being human. They develop a compelling case for reframing and re-aligning instruction and assessment with 21st-century goals. They provide ample lists of dispositions from which to build a functional curriculum. They offer an intriguing strategy for assessment which involves students in describing the behaviors they see themselves using if they are performing the dispositions. More importantly, the locus of evaluation from others shifts to students becoming more self-managing, self-monitoring and self-modifying—truly the goals of self-directed education. The dispositions thereby become internalized.

Moreover, dispositions provide an excellent guide for teachers, parents, and everyone who cares about education to develop schools and communities as cultures of dispositional thinking. This book is a powerful antidote to the increasing mechanization of education and should be read by all who care to move education beyond search engine development. After all, education should not make us stupid.

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