Education's Trojan Horse:
The Virus That Broke
The Classroom

By **Aria Saines,** *student,* Punahou School (HI)

Kindergarteners stand giddy in front of their new school, ready for the enjoyment of interactive games and play that will instill wonder and cultivate creativity. This fundamental component of learning ignites necessary skills that will allow them to be a part of our growing innovative society. What they are not ready for, are the tedious hours of work that will ensue in the coming years, limiting their ability to apply their developing cognitive skills to real-life situations. From an early age, students are taught to mold themselves to a prescribed form, constantly conforming to the system's needs—limiting their imaginative potential, and forcing them to undermine their own individuality.

By the time we reach high school, grades become the only thing that students value, which creates an unhealthy culture for families and teachers. It is a perfect representation of the "carrot and stick" method, luring society to define student achievement based on their ability to successfully grab a carrot that was designed to remain out of reach. Slower learning is often perceived as a weakness, while research has shown no correlation between speed, accuracy, and intelligence. Learners who cannot process the material fast enough lose motivation, feel ashamed, and school turns into a dehumanizing experience for those who are deep thinkers. As kids, we are fascinated by the world around us, and accustomed to ask questions that drive us to make sense of things. "Why?" is a powerful tool that allows us to broaden our understanding, and is the cornerstone for discovering new ideas that drive innovation.

The 200-year-old education system has miraculously found a way to erase the very foundation of a child's curiosity.

Teachers must follow the policy of grading a student frequently, which categorizes the student in batches that determines their path forward. The continuous regimen of testing and scoring reflects an Industrial Age mentality, which sets learning standards unattainable by many students. Grades are based on just a few factors that qualifies a student's learning, and does not include the student's growth and ability to apply the material, or a durable level of understanding beyond the last chapter test. Research shows that skills valuable for future success are not usually measured on tests. The World Economic Forum states that "cognitive flexibility," which is a function of adaptability and problem solving will be among the top skills needed to thrive in the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

Competency grading is an emerging solution that schools around the country are embracing. This allows students to demonstrate a skill multiple times, whereas traditional testing measures our capabilities based on a single test. Competencies are assessed on projects and assignments constructed to allow students to apply their understanding of a particular subject. One of the primary components lacking to the old-school system, crucial to contemporary education is authenticity: students study to pass, not to learn. Students are tested on their ability to quickly memorize and regurgitate facts, while most of the information is lost after the exam. As a result, students get discouraged and lose interest.

Along with the competency-grading system, project-based learning (or PBL) has become a valuable pedagogical approach that many schools are implementing. As of today, 303 public and private schools are participating in the Mastery Transcript Consortium, and are redesigning their curricula to reflect the skills essential to emerging businesses and technologies. Most of the skills taught in school today will be replaced by computers and machines due to their reliability and lack of human error. Future jobs will require people who are adaptable, innovative, can ask meaningful questions, and collaborate with others for a purposeful outcome. A report from Oxford University found 50% of the jobs today could disappear within the next 10 to 20 years—a prediction backed up in a McKinsey report released last year which suggested that today's technology could feasibly replace 45% of jobs right now.

The Coronavirus pandemic is changing the culture of education, and could be a watershed moment in reevaluating the current state of education. Educators were tasked to distill their curricula down to its core elements to compensate for the constraints created by distance learning. Many teachers reported omitting material, which makes me wonder if it was even necessary at all. Perhaps the big take-away for both teachers and students is the realization that there are other ways to effectively teach and learn. Along with online lectures and slideshows, teachers are converting busywork into projects where students can customize their learning to suit their abilities and interests. This may prove to be the crucial on-ramp for

implementing new standards of learning around the country, and providing meaningful education today that will be a sine qua non for our future success.

I am a 15-year-old freshman who spends most of my time running on the big hamster wheel of education. I've witnessed paradigm shifts in the way we communicate, access information, shop and travel, while education has remained cloistered and immutable to the changes occurring beyond its walls.

Could it be that the Coronavirus has entered the protected gates of academia as a Trojan Horse for the next creative disruptor? It is interesting to think about, but it is time for me to get running again.

I have a test to study for.

This article was written by Aria Saines

Aria Saines is a rising sophomore at Punahou School, and her interests are music, politics, and foreign affairs. She is a fluent Japanese speaker and hopes to study government and international affairs in college.

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