

Digital Learning

Scene One

A city council meeting in a small town. Fluorescent lights buzz.

Mayor: Next up – on our agenda – is – uh – our consultant here on the School Assessment project.

(slick, unhealthy looking gentleman in a turtleneck and blazer stands up and comes to take a mic)

Scissorman: Hello, I'd like to introduce myself. I'm Todd Scissorman with Whacker Strategies. I'll just start this interactive media presentation . . .

(he tries to get a projector to work but it won't, and everyone ends up coming up and trying to make it work: Is it the internet connection? Are you running Windows? Oh, Mac? Maybe you can use my phone as a hot spot? Where is the sound – do you have this on a usb? Finally they give up)

Ok well I'll just talk then. Our firm has been very successful in coming up with 21st century strategies. As you know, your public school test scores and graduation rates are very bad. Well, this is the 21st century, and, folks, it's not about pencils and paper any more. How are you going to get your students to meet the new, rigorous, standards of today and that's coming down the line?

Incentives. If a child scores below average, we chop off a thumb. If that child does not improve, Whack!! (he makes a chop with his hand on the table, startling the group) he, or she, loses the other one.

We don't have any research but anecdotal reports suggest that children are highly averse to losing a body part, and, faced with this consequence, will do anything they can to keep them.

And yes, we have heard concerns from parents that maiming children may interfere with their futures. I want to give you reassurance, however, that, statistically, children who can't – or won't – achieve a passing score on the first grade assessments, are very unlikely to amount to anything, anyway.

Which reminds me of a joke. Ever hear the one about the street drunk with no thumbs?

(another man comes up)

School Superintendent: Hello, yes, as you know, I'm the leader of the new education leadership team here, as you know your test scores were so bad that Secretary of Education Arne Duncan sent us in as a sort of SWAT team – your former superintendent and administration team, and your school board are in a safe place, they are happy and have all they need.

Mr. Scissorman comes highly recommended. This approach is very promising. To give you a little history, in schools with high test scores, they achieve this by posting the children's test scores on a wall, called a “Wall of Shame,” where all the other children can see how they did, which is an incentive for the kiddos to work harder and raise those scores. Well, we're taking that a step further. Already we have had a lot of success making testing stressful, to the point of tears and sleep problems. But this isn't good enough! We need to raise the stakes.

Mayor: Thank you. Any questions from the Assembly?

Assemblyman 1: Well, I'd like to know, how much will this cost.

SM: Actually, you probably already have the tools here in your district. We recommend, however, that you purchase the Apple iDigit device, and you will need teacher training with that in using this device. You do need one teacher device for each classroom to avoid cross contamination, as well as individual digit devices for each student..

Assemblyman 2: if we do both thumbs at once, will that save costs?

Assemblyman 3: This is ridiculous. It's got to be about the kids! We cannot be worrying about costs.

Mayor: Anyone from the audience?

Audience Member: I've been listening to this -

Mayor: State your name, please.

AM: My name is Joe Blow and I've lived here for 42 years. So I've been listening to this debate, and I just wanna know, why don't you start with a toe, for God's sake?

Assemblyman 4: So, what do we do when we chopped off both their thumbs.

SM: I think we can say that this produces a child who is empathetic, and resigned to their fate.

Scene 3

TED Talk

SM: We do have evidence, that, the more kids try, to work devices, when they have no thumbs, the more frustrated they get.

Now, some people try to do things the same old way, and hope for different results. Our approach is innovative, and we're seeing results.

(takes off mask – he is transformed into Bill Gates. Applause.)

Bill Gates: by tying teacher performance in raising students' test scores to retention of their digits, we have a powerful tool to transform teachers and learning in this country. Eventually, we will weed out the lowest performing teachers, because they won't have any fingers left.

Now, when we make tests harder, how can we expect kids to be able to pass them, when we have no actual mechanism to improve teaching, and in fact, have taken away the teachers' sense of control, creativity and self respect?

Well, people ask me this all the time: Bill, you don't know anything about education! They ask me, Bill! How can a technocratic, top-down, high-stakes standardized testing-based system, that has no actual research behind it, and in fact has been detrimental to quality education, they ask me, Bill, how is it that creating a vast new market for private enterprise to market untested products to the

government on a massive scale,

they ask me, Bill, how is any of that going to improve education?

And this is what I tell them: Are you kidding me? Why would it?

Scene 4

another Assembly meeting

A fox runs across the stage, with sounds of a fox hunt, bugles, hounds, horses etc. in the background. The Assemblymen follow it with their heads.

Mayor: And now next up we have Persons to be Heard.

(fox hunter comes up and takes the microphone)

Fox Hunter: Hi, as you know, fox hunting is a very important part of our economy and our culture and heritage. Well recently we've been hit pretty hard by the fewer cruise ship passengers, and then now, we are suffering due to your policy of high-stakes testing. We rely on the young and otherwise unemployable to clean the stables and groom the horses and feed the dogs, and this is having an impact on us, we are having a hard time finding people to do this work that have all their digits.

Mayor: Thank you.

Fox hunter sits down.

Mayor: Any other Persons to be Heard;
(intern comes up. She has on xtra tuffs and trendy clothes)

Intern: Hello, my name is Emily Emily? And I'm an intern with Sitka Institute for Laudable Initiatives? I'm the Community Organizer Intern for the Community Community program, and the Sustainable Sock Puppet Project?

We grow our own organic soy beans in a community garden, that we then harvest and dry collaboratively, and weave them on Fair Trade looms from Bolivia, and make them into socks that we make into sock puppets.

Although, recently we have had some challenges, because soy beans it turns out do not grow very well in our climate, so – (she brings out a sock puppet and puts it on her hand, and the rest of her piece as if it's the sock puppet talking)

we are buying socks and craft foam at Ben Franklin. We believe that sock puppets because they only use the fingers can contribute to resiliency and self esteem in our digitally-challenged population, and contributes to the integration of these folks into the greater community.

Mayor: thank you. Anyone else?

SM: Hello, I think everyone knows me, I came originally on a contract to provide testing incentives in your schools. Well, now I've got on my other hat – I'm here representing the Transboundary River Mines with Unsafe Tailings Dams Inc.. We have a new project, starting soon that's very exciting

development opportunity that will supply jobs for workers without thumbs, “WOOTs” All of our equipment will be specially adapted for use by digitally challenged individuals.

Mayor: Thank you, Mr. Scissorman, we are looking forward to hearing more about that as it develops. Is there anyone else, under Persons to be Heard?

Artist: Hi! My name is Stardust Cedar Tree, I just moved here yesterday, and I love your community. It just feels so warm and welcoming. Already I'm signed up to help with the Sock Puppet project and I'm going out for drinks with Mr. Scissorman! I am so excited to be here. And one thing, that you will probably be hearing about, yes, I was forcibly put on the ferry in Homer by the Troopers but that was due to a misunderstanding, I was painting beautiful murals on things and I thought people would like it.

Mayor: Thank you.

Scene 5:

Artist, alone on the stage. She is dressed with a scarf, brightly colored skirt, and xtra tufs.

Artist: I'd never met anyone like him. Like – so – confident – living on this other plane, where, facts don't matter.

He inspired me to go into teaching, where I could be part of the the implementation of these brave new reforms.

Boy! The classroom was not what I expected! But once we got the kids all medded up on Ritalin, we could actually get things done.

I think of it as an art, really – teaching to the test, seeing how far we can get those scores to come up, without actually teaching them anything.

And we did it! I'm the teacher of the year! And tonight, when I get my award, we'll be demonstrating some of the new technology that let me – let us – accomplish this amazing achievement.

Scene 6

Assembly meeting again. Artist is standing in front of them.
Applause.

Artist: Thank you So Much for this award! Now, we've passed out the student devices, go ahead and strap them on, don't worry, they're de activated.

And now, we'll put a sample test question on the screen, and you can do your best to answer them.

Can everyone read that? OK now do your best -

Assemblyman1: OY! Ouch!

Artist: Oh, I guess Assemblyman Tim didn't get that one!

Ok, now for question two -

Assemblyman 2: Holy shit! My thumb! I thought these were deactivated!!

Artist: oh my god I thought they were -

All the Assembly and Mayor: Oh my god! Take them off!!!

(blood is spurting everywhere)

Child, without thumbs, pops up: Ha! We hacked it!