**WHAT’S WRONG WITH COMPETENCY-BASED EDUCATION?**

Competency-based education (CBE) has been defined as a system in which students advance at their own pace upon “mastery” of “content, 21st-century skills, and dispositions.”[[1]](#endnote-1) It is associated with computer-based training, known euphemistically as “digital learning” or “personalized learning.”

* CBE is the antithesis of a liberal-arts education. It focuses not on academic knowledge but on workforce skills. The natural devolution is to allow politically connected corporations to develop “badges” and “credentials” that will be required and to convert K-12 into merely a training program for their entry-level employees.
* CBE does nothing to transmit our culture and our civilization. "If education is beaten by training, civilization dies," C.S. Lewis wrote, for "the lesson of history" is that "civilization is a rarity, attained with difficulty and easily lost."
* Even if education were properly viewed as workforce-development, CBE fails the test. The German model shows that students who have such training rather than a liberal-arts education struggle in later employment when their narrow skills become obsolete.[[2]](#endnote-2)
* Most parents don’t want “competency” for their children, but rather excellence.
* Since this training is digital, education will be pared down to what can be digitized and what is considered “useful” in the (current) job market.
* Genuine education requires human interaction, but CBE marginalizes the teacher as a professional. It’s “depersonalized learning.” No student was ever inspired by a machine.
* CBE imposes a data-juggling burden on already overburdened teachers.[[3]](#endnote-3)
* CBE enables students to advance without committing knowledge to long-term memory.[[4]](#endnote-4) Click and move on. This will not prepare students for authentic college work.
* CBE is more about mining data on students than on educating them. Every keystroke tells the platform developer/vendor something useful about the student – his capabilities, his behaviors, his attitudes. This data will be fed into non-transparent algorithms to create predictive profiles that could determine students’ future paths in life. The algorithms will be unalterable and permanent.[[5]](#endnote-5)
* This data will be a marketing goldmine for corporations.
* CBE will enable indoctrination of students with government-approved attitudes and opinions. Video-gaming, which is a much-hyped part of CBE,[[6]](#endnote-6) enables collection of massive amounts of behavioral data, which can be shared with various parties without the student’s or parents’ consent (or even their knowledge that such data exists). Parents will probably not have access to digital material their children are exposed to.
* There is little chance this sensitive data will be kept secure,[[7]](#endnote-7) especially since federal student-privacy law has been gutted to allow widespread sharing of personally identifiable information.[[8]](#endnote-8)
* Because CBE’s online content and badges will be created by national curricula providers and corporations, local control – via parents and local school boards – will disappear.
* Corporations will increase their influence over education through developing and marketing badges, which can be designed for virtually any perceived "workforce" skill or attitude.
* The badge system of CBE will eventually ensnare homeschoolers. If corporations require the CBE badges for employment, homeschooling parents may be forced into using the same training materials.

1. <http://www.knowledgeworks.org/sites/default/files/Competency-based-education-policy-brief-two.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. <http://hanushek.stanford.edu/publications/german-style-apprenticeships-simply-cant-be-replicated> . [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. <https://paulemerich.com/2018/01/15/why-i-left-silicon-valley-edtech-and-personalized-learning/> [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. <https://eric.ed.gov/?q=personalization&ff1=souEducational+Leadership&id=EJ1132313> [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. <https://truthinamericaneducation.com/privacy-issues-state-longitudinal-data-systems/embedded-assessments-end-around-parental-opt-outs/> [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. <http://jamespaulgee.com/pdfs/Learning%20Systems%2C%20Not%20Games.pdf> [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. <https://oversight.house.gov/hearing/u-s-department-of-education-information-security-review/>. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. <https://www.scribd.com/document/217174726/Ferpa-Aacrao-Comments> [↑](#endnote-ref-8)