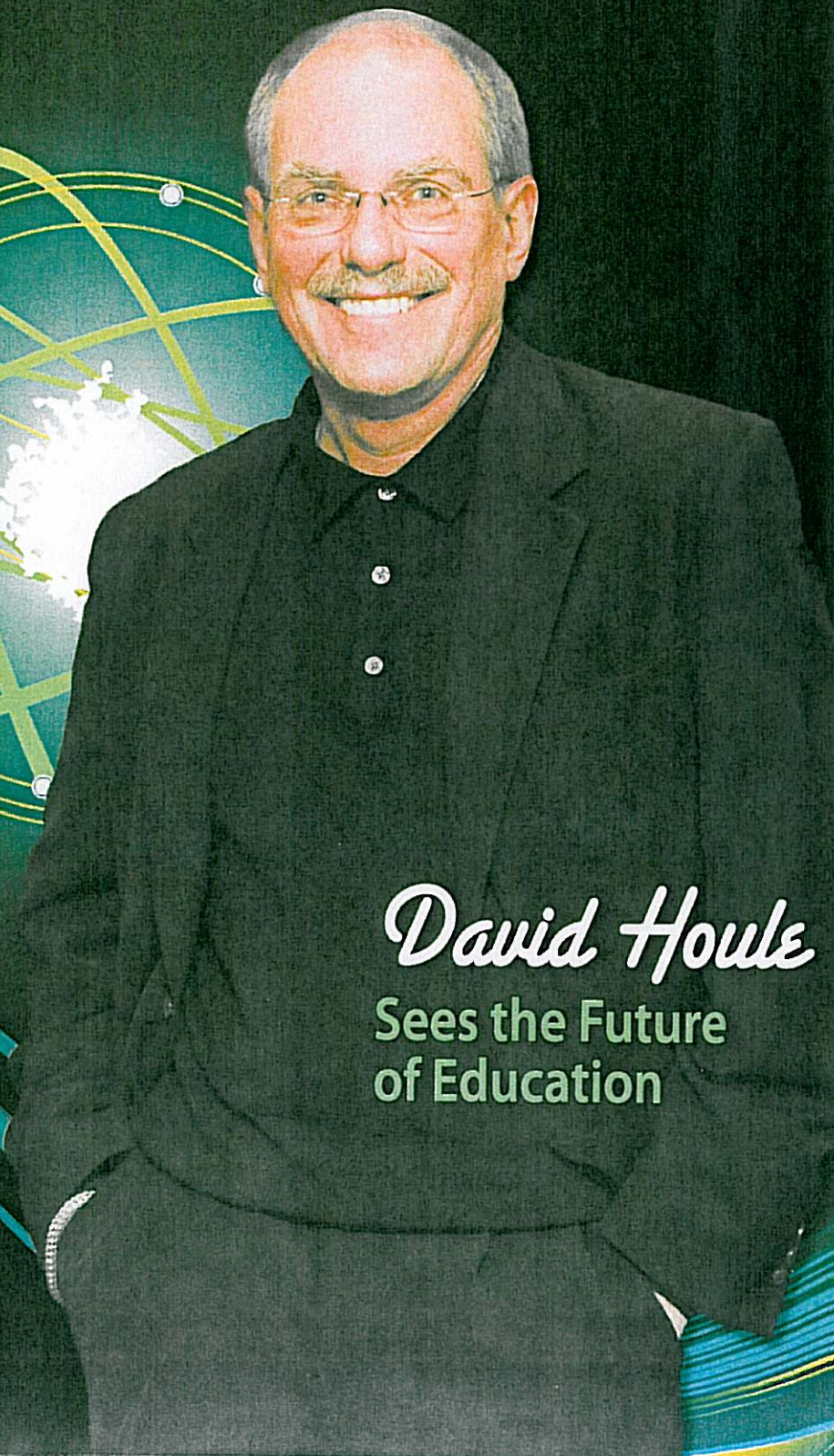


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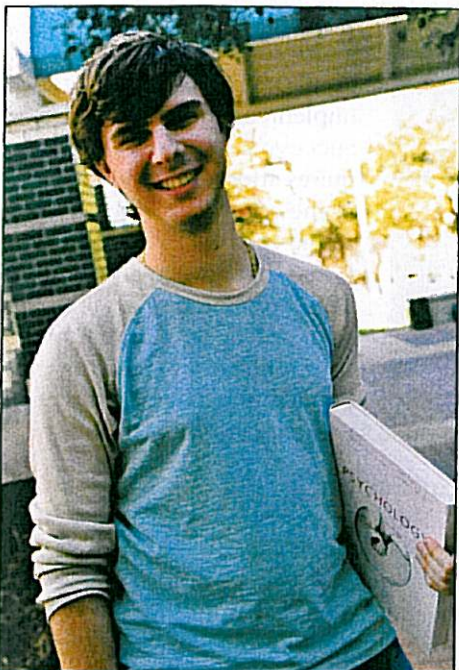


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digital curriculum

BY CHERYL VEDOE



Digital Curriculum Individualizes Instruction, Helps Schools Better Meet Student Needs

Helping students stay on track for graduation from high school has never been more important, or more challenging, than it is today. A high school diploma is essential for students to qualify for the jobs that will allow them to earn the income necessary to support themselves and a family, and education beyond high school is increasingly a requirement for the positions available in today's global economy.

Yet, nearly one third of the students who enter ninth grade each year in this country do not graduate from high school with their peer group. The reasons students drop out of school are varied, and there is not a simple solution. But, for many students, there is a common denominator: They aren't being well served by the "one-size-fits-all" model of the traditional classroom.

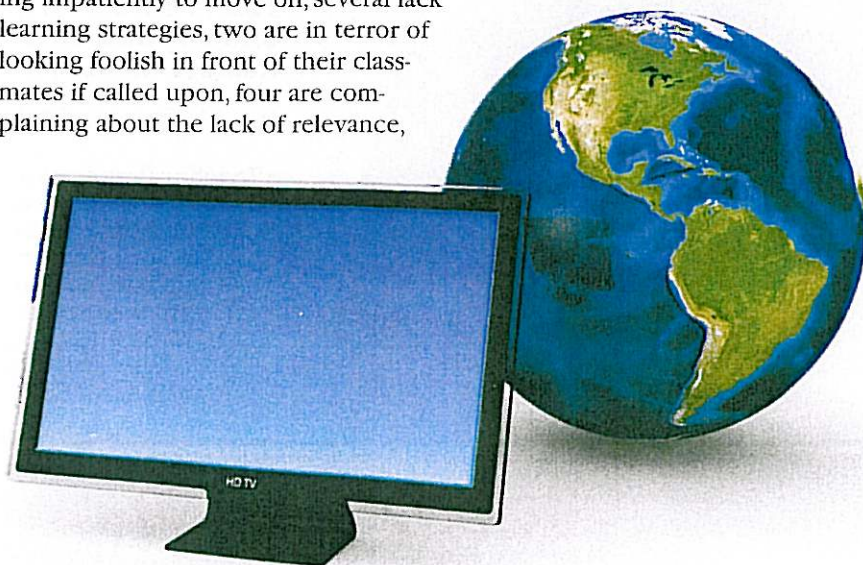
Common sense tells us that a teacher cannot effectively meet the individual needs of each of 30 or 35 students in a class — not when five are reading at a below-proficient level, three are waiting impatiently to move on, several lack learning strategies, two are in terror of looking foolish in front of their classmates if called upon, four are complaining about the lack of relevance,

and several others are watching the clock, ready to bolt as soon as the bell rings.

Adding to the pressure, this same teacher is expected to ensure that the class stays on schedule and that students are prepared to pass high-stakes state exams.

The traditional classroom is not for every student. Whereas some thrive, other students never engage. They grow impatient because the pace is too slow for them — or they need more time and fall behind. Instruction may not adequately address different learning styles or the varied levels of proficiency with which students come to school. What motivates one student may not interest another. Where some easily take to math, others excel in language arts.

It seems obvious that the best way to support every student in realizing his or her potential in school is to provide a learning experience uniquely tailored to each student's specific needs. The chal-



lenge, as the authors of the book *Disrupting Class* highlight, is to customize instruction in an education system designed for standardization. In their book, Clayton Christensen, Michael Horn, and Curtis Johnson offer a vision for how technology can be used to personalize learning and better serve students.

With a digital curriculum, teachers are able to more effectively differentiate instruction for an entire class. Multimedia instructional content provides multiple representations and addresses different learning styles, in addition to motivating and engaging students. With the ability to move at their own pace, taking as much, or as little, time as they need to master the material, students take responsibility for their own learning. Formative assessments provide teachers with valuable real-time data on each student's progress. With a digital curriculum, teachers have the time to engage one-on-one with students to address individual needs.

The future for education portrayed in *Disrupting Class* may not be as far off as one might think. Many school districts, seeking new ways to reach students who are not succeeding in traditional programs, are turning to online learning to individualize instruction and motivate and engage students.

Cherokee County School District in Georgia realized that many of their students were not achieving academic success and set out to offer new programs across the district's seven high schools to better meet the needs of these "modern learners." Cherokee's five comprehensive high schools now offer online courses for credit recovery in computer labs during regular class periods throughout the day. Students are grouped by subject area, and certified in-field teachers facilitate learning. The use of a digital curriculum allows teachers to individually teach students what they need, when they need it.

At Cherokee's alternative high school for students with behavior, attendance, and academic issues, and at the district's evening school for students requiring a non-traditional program, digital curriculum is used for both original credit and credit recovery.

Students at Cherokee County School District are responding to the online learning programs. In many instances they are experiencing academic success in rigorous, standards-based high school courses for the first time. And this story is being repeated in school districts across the country.

The most well established K-12 online learning programs are now more than 10 years old. In the early days of those programs, digital curriculum was primarily used to provide students with access to distance-learning courses that would otherwise not have been available to them. For example, to offer Advanced Placement courses at a high school without a local AP program.

Today, digital curriculum is being used by schools to meet a range of needs — from distance learning courses to fill gaps, to full-time virtual schooling, and to alternative classroom-based programs. Digital curriculum is helping schools provide new options to better meet the needs of all students.

Cheryl Vedoe is CEO of Apex Learning, a leading provider of digital curriculum.

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