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Letter of Support: Dr. Tak-Wai Chan's proposal on "Building Learning Companion in Learning Context Supported by Wireless, Mobile, and Digital Tangible Technologies"

I have reviewed Dr. Chan's proposal to explore how "digital learning companions" can play a critical role in supporting the digital children of today as they learn. I find the proposal to be most provocative and promising. I strongly urge that this proposal be funded.

For digital age children, mobile, networked, tangible devices are an integral part of their dress, their social interactions, their personal entertainment, and their learning activities. Dr. Chan proposes to examine how software-based virtual companions can aid these digital children to develop deep understandings and develop effective skills. Interestingly, the idea of a digital companion is an old one. Dr. Chan is proposing to revisit that old idea and re-invent it to be more applicable to the current context. In fact, the digital companion idea did not have much impact in its original form; however, it is clear that as we move forward, the need for a new generation of digital companions is critically important. As children are learning in "unstructured spaces" – outside of school – they definitely need the guidance and support of an experienced agent. Dr. Chan's proposal, therefore, to relook at digital companions is very visionary and prescient. I think his proposed effort is just what is needed to enable mobile technologies to be truly effective at supporting learning. And, given Dr. Chan's successes in the past, I have no doubt that he and his team will develop useful and thought-provoking ideas and products during the execution of this project.

I look forward to my continued interactions with Dr. Chan and his team of researchers and educators. Should there be funding, I stand ready to actively participate with Dr. Chan in this important effort. As I said at the outset, I strongly support the funding of this proposed effort.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Cathie Norris". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Cathie" and last name "Norris" clearly distinguishable.

Cathie Norris, Ph.D.
Professor