Given tablets but no teachers, kids teach themselves – having never seen advanced technology before

Curious Cat Science and Engineering Blog

In a repetition of an experiment I have posted about here on the Curious Cat Science and Engineering Blog before (Letting Children Learn â□□ Hole in the Wall Computers [1]): Given Tablets but No Teachers, Ethiopian Children Teach Themselves [2]
The experiment is being done in two isolated rural villages with about 20 first-grade-aged children each, about 50 miles from Addis Ababa. One village is called Wonchi, on the rim of a volcanic crater at 11,000 feet; the other is called Wolonchete, in the Great Rift Valley. Children there had never previously seen printed materials, road signs, or even packaging that had words on them, Negroponte said.
Earlier this year, OLPC workers dropped off closed boxes containing the tablets, taped shut, with no instruction. â□□I thought the kids would play with the boxes. Within four minutes, one kid not only opened the box, found the on-off switch â□¦ powered it up. Within five days, they were using 47 apps per child, per day. Within two weeks, they were singing ABC songs in the village, and within five months, they had hacked Android,â□□ Negroponte said. â□□Some idiot in our organization or in the Media Lab had disabled the camera, and they figured out the camera, and had hacked Android.â□□

Nicholas Negroponte has tendency to overstate the fact from what I remember. I don't think what he claims as "hacking Android" here is what a real scientist would claim as than is a write up of the results of the experiment. He could well mean they updated a setting or some similar thing. It is a shame to mislead when the bare facts are so cool. And possibly he isn't misleading – I just am worried he is.

Also what does 47 apps per day mean? I can't understand how you can usefully (including entertainment do that in any sensible way) – I doubt I use 15 applications in a month and I use the computer hours every single day. Makes me worry that "using" is not a very enlightening piece of data – instead just trying to make it seem like using 47 must mean they are engaged; it seems more likely to me to mean they are not used successfully so they have to go try something else or they are counting "used" in ways we wouldn't.

Once a week, a technician visits the villages and swaps out memory cards so that researchers can study how the machines were actually used.

These kinds of experiments are very cool. They show how intrinsically curious we are are [3]. Sadly our schools often beat the curiosity out of kids instead of engaging it.

Source URL (retrieved on *09/16/2014 - 8:27pm*):
http://www.ecnmag.com/blogs/2013/05/given-tablets-no-teachers-kids-teach-themselves-%E2%80%93-having-never-seen-advanced-technology

Links:
[1] http://engineering.curiouscatblog.net/2010/07/19/letting-children-learn-hole-in-the-wall-computers/
[2] http://www.technologyreview.com/news/506466/given-tablets-but-no-teachers-ethiopian-children-teach-themselves/
[3] http://engineering.curiouscatblog.net/2011/10/28/encouraging-curiosity-in-kids/