Sesame Workshop and IBM Watson Team Up to Advance Early Childhood Education

PR Newswire

Plan to develop adaptive learning products and platform for use at home and in schools

NEW YORK and ARMONK, N.Y., April 27, 2016 /PRNewswire/ -- Sesame Workshop, the nonprofit educational organization that produces *Sesame Street*, and IBM (NYSE: IBM) today announced a collaboration to use IBM Watson's cognitive computing technology and Sesame's early childhood expertise to help advance preschool education around the world.

Experience the interactive Multimedia News Release here: http://www.multivu.com/players/English/7724251-sesame-workshop-ibm-watson-early-childhood-education

As part of a three-year agreement, Sesame Workshop and IBM will collaborate to develop educational platforms and products that will be designed to adapt to the learning preferences and aptitude levels of individual preschoolers. Research shows that a significant extent of brain development occurs in the first five years of a child's life(1), making this window critical for learning and development.

The alliance will draw from Sesame Workshop's deep educational content expertise garnered from over 45 years of research, and more than 1,000 studies on how young children learn best. This expertise will combine with Watson's natural language processing, pattern recognition, and other cognitive computing technologies to create highly personalized learning experiences intended to complement the roles that parents and teachers play in early development. Watson will continuously hone and improve educational activities by studying and adapting to the aggregate experiences of anonymized groups of students.

"We believe that bringing education together with technology is a key to improving early learning in this country and around the world," said Jeffrey D. Dunn, CEO of Sesame Workshop. "A generation ago, *Sesame Street* used the ubiquitous presence of television to reach vulnerable children who did not have access to the learning opportunities that affluent and middle-class kids did. It worked very well. Now, through this collaboration with IBM and Watson, we expect to develop the next generation of tailored learning tools. Ultimately, the goal is to provide children from all socio-economic backgrounds with the opportunity for meaningful, personalized education in their most formative years."

Echoing the late 1960s, when *Sesame Street*'s founders convened diverse experts to help conceive the show, the Sesame-IBM team will gather leading teachers, academics, researchers, technologists, gamers, performers, and media executives to brainstorm ways in which cognitive computing can best help preschoolers learn.

Sesame Workshop and IBM are currently exploring and iterating on a wide variety of interactive platforms and interfaces for use in homes and schools. The two companies plan to test and share prototypes with leaders in the education and technology community to allow continued refinement based on feedback and domain expertise.

"Watson is uniquely suited to tackling one of society's most pressing and important challenges -- the ways in which our young children learn," said Harriet Green, IBM's General Manager for Watson IoT, Commerce and Education. "The potential for Watson to absorb, correlate, and learn from huge amounts of unstructured data and then deliver very personalized educational experiences is unprecedented. Working together with Sesame Workshop, we aim to transform the way in which children learn and teachers teach, and envision having an impact on the lives and education of millions of children."

"Because the foundation of children's intellect, personality, and skills are formed in the first few years of their lives, ages zero to five are the most critical," said Todd Rose, one of the project's independent advisors and Director of Mind, Brain, and Education at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. "There are huge opportunities in early childhood education, but we need to recognize that preschoolers do not all learn in the same way. This partnership has the potential to meet the unique educational needs of every child, whether it's through customized content or kid-friendly tools that empower each child to find his or her own path to learning. Simply put, personalized educational experiences will enhance learning for every child."

Join the conversation on Twitter: *#IBMandSesame*

Visit the following link for more information, as well as to download assets, on the Sesame Workshop and IBM collaboration:
http://www.ibm.com/internet-of-things/sesame-street.html

Read a blog post by Sesame Workshop CEO Jeffrey Dunn exploring the importance of early childhood learning: http://ibm.co/21f1TqP

About Sesame Workshop:

For more information, please visit Sesame Street at www.sesamestreet.org, Sesame Street on Facebook, Sesame Street on Twitter, and the Sesame Street YouTube Channel.

About IBM:

For more information, please visit www.ibm.com/watson and follow @IBMWatson and @IBMEducation on Twitter.

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SOURCES:

(1) Shonkoff, J. P., Phillips, D. A., & National Research Council (U.S.). (2000). *From neurons to neighborhoods: The science of early child development.* Washington, D.C: National Academy Press

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