Chapter 14
Is There a New Norm for Online Education?

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ABSTRACT

The COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted education, especially at the tertiary and upper secondary levels, altering the dynamics between learners and educators. However, this situation has also brought forth new educational experiences and opportunities. We must explore how to organize and access these opportunities. Shifting away from real-time classrooms to individualized and convenient learning times challenges traditional notions of education and relationships. Yet, we must be cautious about the potential for online education to widen the gap between the privileged and disadvantaged. While access to advanced technology may benefit some, others may suffer. By questioning fundamental assumptions, educational options can be redesigned to be more inclusive and appealing. Disadvantaged learners might struggle with accessing Wi-Fi, but they may already have existing support systems. The pandemic prompts rethinking of what is considered "normal".

INTRODUCTION

Tools and Support

Ex-rugby player, Rob Burrow, is probably the most extreme example of rediscovering a voice. He has a severe form of motor neuron disease and is paralyzed, apart from the eyes, with a life expectancy of about 2 years. He recorded a book while he

could speak, and it forms the memory bank accessed by Eyegaze (Eye Controlled Assistive Technology) that Rob uses to identify individual letters and slowly build up words in his own (old) voice. He read Tilda Tries Again by Tom Percival (2021) as the 6.50 bedtime story on CBeebies tv (3/12/22), about a young girl whose world turns upside down. Rob feels literacy can be accessible to everyone, irrespective of disability, through various technological innovations like Eyegaze. His own voice bank means he kept his accent and character. He can communicate directly, express his views and maintain his identity. Rob's electronic voice mimics the functions of his natural voice, much as a substitute body part like an artificial hip can function. Most people with a smart phone or laptop have delegated tasks to them, while texting may be the most common mode of communication. My laptop functions as a memory check (10% brain injury impairs my short-term and processing memory) bridging gaps through visual, aural (including rhythmic) as well as discourse/textual efforts to solve my cognitive mysteries, while making me aware of a wider range of sources to tap and prompts to put in place, again supported by more flexible online response time than in a natural conversational exchange.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) "is the science and engineering of making intelligent machines, especially intelligent computer programs. It is related to the similar task of using computers to understand human intelligence, but AI does not have to confine itself to methods that are biologically observable" (McCArthy, 2004). programs that learn from their experience and activities to improve their skill set and performance, perhaps most commonly for security by identifying and disarming intruders, arguably have a sense of self-awareness, a sense of process/progress and development. They are more than tools that can operate only if directed by a human being at every level of input/awareness. They can co-operate, interact, support on an emotional as well as cognitive level. Robot animals can evoke emotional responses in elderly people without demanding anything from them or having any of the more troublesome aspects of caring for large live animals like ponies. They are programmed to respond (with noises) when stroked and patients with dementia who "may struggle to connect with other people" (Scott, 2018) are able to interact with animal robots, to express feelings of pleasure. The social, interactive profile of AI and the internet has expanded but Covid19 restrictions have undoubtedly focused and accelerated its potential.

Interaction and Communication

Computer-assisted programs, robots, devices, learning tools can be seen as filling a gap, answering a need, in many cases, more efficiently than in any other way. Distance learning can be considered more economical, flexible and efficient than class-based learning. Online resources may address individual and different learning

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