

The New Disabilities of ICT

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Abstract

There is a common idea that ICT would give new possibilities to people. Especially disabled people are expected to benefit much from the new technologies at their disposal. This is simply not true. Or, at best, it is an oversimplification of facts.

New technologies, including the new social 2.0 ones, are constructed, tested and designed for people without disabilities. ICT empower people with new abilities, but heavily rely on the existing ones. Telephones depend on the capacity to speak and to listen, computer screens on the ability to see, navigation system on the ability to control its commands, to see and hear. And so on. Any new technology brings with it a new power for those who can use it, and a new disability for those who cannot. Once the use of telephone became a standard procedure, people who could not use it learnt a new disability. The same applies to any new technology.

Dyslexics experience specific learning difficulties, which impede their ability to recognize and comprehend written words, and in most cases hinder the acquisition of a second language.

Since most social web relies on written words, people affected by dyslexia will experience a new disability, as stronger as more spread is the use of the web 2.0. The more people take for granted the use of the social and semantic web, the more they will grow the expectation that it is normal to use it. Who cannot use it properly is excluded. As the ICT extend the communication over own language borders, the poor abilities in learning second languages, especially English, cause an additional fallback. A new disability is born.

ICTBell (ICT Content Integrated Online Business English Language Learning for Adult Dyslexics) is a project addressing the issue of the new disability investing dyslexic adults, founded with support from the Lifelong Learning Program of the European Commission. It contributes answering to these problems constructing a Business English language learning environment and takes for granted just the abilities, which are common among adult dyslexics. It uses an innovative ICT-based methodology, which supports the language learning facilitating the personal development of the participants and giving the dyslexic learners the opportunity to finally understand a full web 2.0 experience. The partnership that is implementing the project is formed by organizations and experts in the areas of dyslexia, language learning, European projects and ICT enhanced learning, operating in 5 European countries: ONECO, Spain (promoter); Infoart, Bulgaria; English at Work GmbH, Germany; GNW, Hungary; in Italy, TUTOR European Centre for the Development of Advanced Expertise and Liceo Linguistico Internazionale. The project will end in Autumn 2010, contributing to the topic also with many available resources (http://www.tutor-italia.com/content/en/eu_progetti/ictbell_resources/).

ICTBell will give back to technology its meaning of empowerment, also for dyslexics.