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## Chapter XXI

# Online Learning for the Visually Impaired

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### ABSTRACT

*At the society level, the Internet is a technological, social and cultural phenomenon, shared by the consensus of its users and not owned by anybody. It is a communication network than can, at any moment, bridge people from everywhere and can be looked at as a consequence of modernity (Giddens, 1992).*

*There is a growing demand and pressure coming from the technology side for adopting online learning but, in order to justify and evaluate the integration of World Wide Web techniques in education, one must attempt to answer at least two questions:*

- 1. Does the World Wide Web promote new approaches to teaching and learning?*
- 2. Will the World Wide Web increase access to education?*

*The case study that we had to do because of the context of learning within a special education department helped us answer these questions and understand and, more than that, appreciate online learning for the visually impaired.*

## INTRODUCTION

At the society level, the Internet is a technological, social and cultural phenomenon, shared by the consensus of its users and not owned by anybody. It is a communication network than can, at any moment, bridge people from everywhere and can be looked at as a consequence of modernity (Giddens, 1992). Its dynamism derives from the separation of time and space and their recombination in new forms, which permits the disembedding of social relations from local contexts of interaction and their restructuring across indefinite spans of time-space.

There is a growing demand and pressure coming from the technology side for adopting online learning but, in order to justify and evaluate the integration of World Wide Web techniques in education, one must attempt to answer *at least two* questions.

1. *Does the World Wide Web promote new approaches to teaching and learning?*

This question can be easily answered, even if we are not trying now to identify a possible need (or not) for a new pedagogical paradigm. New approaches to teaching and learning should be able to make use of the technological change and growth in the sense of enhancing the potential strength of old values in education.

Learning is an intellectual process of constructing knowledge. That means acquiring, processing, assimilating and integrating information and ideas through constructive social interaction. Constructivism is the philosophy of learning which states that learners make sense of their knowledge by adding new information to their existing knowledge. They must earn knowledge and participate in it, not simply be carried to it by their teachers. The Internet and its techniques seem to be the perfect media for making use of the constructivist principles. In return, constructivism seems to be a perfect starting principle for justifying and supporting the introduction of technological change to education. There is a wide spectrum of learning opportunities on and over the Internet, especially on the World Wide Web. The capacity for learners to add to the dialogue through this interactive medium provides opportunity for development, application and linkage of new knowledge; the Internet re-creates the meeting place in which knowledge is not only shared, but also created and re-created (Arion, 2001).

2. *Will the World Wide Web increase access to education?*

This question forms the focus of our chapter.

Technology can play an important role in increasing independence and participation through access to information and communication for everybody, including people with disabilities, but at the same time, technology can raise new barriers due to the individual differences in acquiring and using the new required skills.

Adaptive technology makes it possible for anyone to access computers and the Internet, but simply gaining access is not enough. People with disabilities can only use

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