Teaching via Human Avatar: Enlivening Delivery Through Students Acting as Proxies for Remote Lecturers

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Abstract

PURPOSE: To report upon experiments with teaching via a remote guided human surrogate.

OBJECTIVE: This method is being explored with an intention to bridge the geographic and social distances between groups of co-located students and a remotely located lecturer.

This paper reports upon a novel learning delivery format: the remotely located lecturer transmits words to a student wearing headphones who attempts to clearly repeat their teachers’ utterances to the student's co-located peers. Monitoring an audiovisual stream of the lesson allows the lecturer to guide both the words and actions of their proxy in response to events in the classroom. The role of acting as the surrogate teacher is rotated amongst each student in turn so that every student is temporarily empowered to act as the facilitator of the learning session.

The repetition or relay of the lecturer's words causes a delay which reduces the quantity of information that may be imparted in comparison with face-to-face instruction or standard video-conferencing. However, initial trials in Scandinavian higher and further education institutions suggest various possible learner benefits. Students appear highly engaged through being taught by surrogate teachers with a variety of personalities drawn from their peer group. Acting as the lecturer's “avatar” requires intense concentration and thus may also scaffold the development of presentation skills.