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FOLLOW UP ARTICLE

How can People with Intellectual Disabilities use YouTube as an Alternative Search Engine on the Internet?

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Abstract

This text is a follow-up to our article published in the 2018 edition (Volume 7) of the Indian Journal of Career and Livelihood Planning (Kversøy & Kversøy 2018). The article was then aimed at exploring career possibilities for people with intellectual disabilities. In this article we want to elaborate on one of our discoveries mentioned in the article. The discovery is about how people with intellectual disabilities, that are unable to use reading, writing or voice assisted strategies, can use YouTube as an alternative search engine. It is a tremendous challenge to access and explore the internet when reading, writing and voice assisted strategies are not usable options. Our co-researcher Sofie, who has a severe intellectual disability, is showing us how this can be done. We are analyzing her actions and experiences and are seeing patterns emerging.

Keywords: YouTube, search engine, intellectual disability

Since the publishing of our article in Indian Journal of Career and Livelihood Planning in 2018 (Kversøy & Kversøy) our team has grown. In addition to Sofie Daae Kversøy (co-researcher, explorer and developer with a severe intellectual disability) and Kjartan Skogly Kversøy (researcher and father of Sofie), we have joined forces with Abdul-Razak Kuyini Alhassan (special pedagogy researcher) and Eva Daae Kversøy (action researcher and mother of Sofie). We have considered it necessary to put together a team that can participate in critical reflection. Our ambition is to extract as many nuances and perspectives as possible from Sofie's discoveries and experiences. Our larger goal is to see if some of the skills Sofie is developing can be translated to other areas

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of Sofie's life. We think this has a potential to contribute to making her life as meaningful, independent and good as possible.

The team has come together naturally through years of interaction with Sofie. Abdul has experience working with people with learning disabilities and intellectual disabilities. His research has focused on the potential of giving the basic human need for recognition and special attention when interacting with people with these types of challenges (Alhassan 2013). Abdul is a close friend of Sofie. She has experienced recognition in practice through getting to know Abdul. One example is that Sofie was the one who introduced Abdul to touchscreen devices. Sofie was in this way recognized for her special technology skills. She was very happy about the opportunity of being Abdul's teacher. Abdul is an attentive and patient student. Sofie is a thorough teacher with a lot of humor. Eva is Sofie's mother and has done relevant action research with people working with children in kindergarten and preschool settings (Kversøy 2011). Her research has been about preserving "golden moments" in the everyday interaction between children and the adults working with them. The ambition for this research was to use these positive experiences as a starting point for further development. Put simply the basic question was: "How can we further develop our kindergarten and our preschool by doing more of what we think is valuable?". Abdul and Eva's perspectives and participation are contributing to improving our reflections. Since Sofie and Kjartan published the article last year, Kjartan has been invited to give lectures on the findings from their research collaboration. At the end of this text there is a link to a YouTube video where the reader can see Sofie in action with her iPad. The video is in Norwegian, but the points discussed in this text can be understood easily.

Eva (mum) and Kjartan's (dad) initial ambitions for supplying Sofie with an iPad, was simply that she might find it entertaining. This was in 2011 when she was 5 years old. Sofie is now 14. Through Sofie's life, we (Eva and Kjartan) have been presenting her things that she might find interesting. Mostly the ambition has been to offer items she can use for fun and play. Sofie is often bored when she is not at school. As an only child she is often stuck with mum and dad as playmates. There is a limit to how much fun this is. This means that we are always on the lookout for things that can contribute to making Sofie's days out of school more meaningful and interesting for her. Our ambitions regarding this have therefore often not been very deep. We want Sofie to have meaningful days out of school and do things that not always depend on mum and dad taking part.

When we presented Sofie with an iPad for the first time we hoped it could give her something to play with that could keep her busy for any longer or shorter interval of time. In a small family of three, everyone needs a timeout now and then. We knew Sofie was fond of playing puzzles and we had noticed that it was possible to get apps that offered simple puzzles with different levels of assistance. We were aware of this being Sofie's first contact with a device with computer level capabilities, but we were not overly ambitious about her abilities to develop skills to utilize it.

Sofie became interested in the iPad to a larger degree than we had anticipated. She was also curious about exploring the iPad in ways we had not expected. We bought several more apps and she continued to explore, have fun and experiment. One day she asked if she could see a princess on her iPad. It was either Eva or Kjartan who found a video on YouTube containing a cartoon princess. As Sofie cannot read, write or use voice assisted strategies sufficiently to control her iPad, she needed help to find the princess. Sofie was both surprised and happy that it was possible to find a princess on her iPad. Sofie became engaged and seemed to continue to watch the princess video on her iPad for a long time. We thought she was watching the same video again and again. We had not thought about the feed that appears on the right side of the screen. Sofie had started experimenting right away. She was pushing on the little pictures she

found interesting in the feed and was discovering that this started new videos. She understood intuitively that the feed was a way of getting from one video to the next.

Kjartan thought it might be an idea to pin a variety of opening videos as separate buttons on the start page of the iPad. This is a function on the iPad that permits the user to "pin" any content from the internet, for example a video from YouTube, as a "button" on the start page. The "button" looks just like any other app. Sofie soon understood how she could access the different videos in this way. Kjartan made start-up apps with different cartoon princesses, play videos, arts and crafts videos, videos of toys and a range of other content. These "buttons" became Sofie's start-up "doors" into different areas of the vast internet. Soon Sofie was able to choose between content. Every "door" gave access to a specific video and a different feed. In the current version of YouTube, when opening the app, it will contain a feed with 15 alternative videos in addition to the one you are watching. The alternative videos are presented through little pictures in a feed on the right-hand side of the iPad screen. This means that every time Sofie opens a "door", a video-app, she simultaneously opens an additional 15 videos to choose from next. The feed also changes every time you open a new video. YouTube registers your actions and the video-feed will to a certain degree adapt to your preferences.

There were many different interesting aspects to what was happening with Sofie's skills at this moment. Firstly, Sofie was experiencing an array of possibilities. This encouraged Sofie and was nurturing her ability to choose. In addition, every time she made a choice she was rewarded with even more choices. Secondly, Sofie now could, within limits, choose between many "doors" from which to enter the internet. She could decide what she specifically wanted to start watching. Sofie has become very aware of her power to choose. She seems to translate this to many other situations. She wants to decide for herself as often as possible. We think this confidence is growing. Thirdly, Sofie was experiencing the consequences of what happens when an app interacts with her choices. Sofie was experiencing how technology supported exploration capabilities were adapting to her preferences. Even though Sofie is not able to reflect over this with words, she clearly shows she is able to utilize the consequences. These three perspectives, and many more, are becoming clearer for us through analyzing her actions. We feel a sense of urgency in analyzing the aspects of Sofie's use and skills in her interaction with her iPad. We think what is happening might have profound consequences for her future life. The analysis and translation of skills seem to have the potential for developing strategies that might give Sofie more independence in her future life. We will be exploring the implications of the patterns and structures we are seeing through our ongoing project. We have discovered several skills she has developed through her use of her iPad. We are currently working on two articles about this.

Sofie has now got nearly nine years of experience using several versions of the iPad touchscreen device. If all goes according to plan, we will be publishing and sharing as much of our findings as possible in the years to come. Sofie, and the children and youth of her generation, have access to technological tools that would have been out of their reach only 15 years ago. The iPad's ability to maintain the interest and attention is impressive. It has made it possible for us to cooperate with a co-researcher with extensive experience with exploring this technological tool. It is important to point out that Sofie, and many children and youth in similar situations, would not have been willing to train and explore to this extent unless the tool was engaging. Six thousand hours of voluntary, engaging and fun use over nine years says a lot about the user-friendly interface of the iPad!

With the use of YouTube Sofie even shows that she can go looking for something specific and can find it on her own, despite her lack of reading, writing or voice assisting skills. We have a hard time

understanding fully how this is possible. What we do see is that Sofie often gets interested in and excited about something. This can be things like polishing her nails. She can get very focused on something and will not let it go. She will then often sit down in the sofa and investigate. She will search her iPad for videos on YouTube that contain what she is looking for. We are not completely sure how she manages this, but after a shorter or longer period, sometimes several hours, she will call for mum or dad to come and see what she has found. Often, she has finally found a video that contains what she has been searching for. Sometimes it seems that Sofie might have found this video on an earlier occasion and remembers how she got there. Sometimes it seems she is searching randomly until she finds what she is after. The interaction between Sofie and the app will also facilitate this happening. We even think Sofie has developed some special ways of searching the internet through the YouTube feed that can be claimed to be systematic. We are trying to understand this more in detail. What we see so far is that Sofie surprisingly often finds what she is looking for.

YouTube is showing potential as a good substitute for a search engine that is within the reach of her skills. YouTube is in addition showing promise of being a source of initiative. Sofie gets inspired and suggests actions by showing us videos that inspire her. This does not happen very often in other situations. This "get up and go" resource is not strong in Sofie's case. This is well known with many people with intellectual disabilities (Milanes 2017). We try to preserve her initiatives. We think her initiatives are valuable and important for her future development. Sofie therefore experiences that her initiatives are often rewarded. We want her clearly to experience and understand that the things she suggests probably will happen. We claim that we can see that her growing experience of her will happening is contagious to other parts of her life. Again, understanding this fully is a work in progress. We further claim that her initiative, self-confidence and autonomy is growing. Our ongoing work aims to explain this in more detail.

This follow-up text has the underlying intention and ambition to show potential. "Even" people with severe intellectual disabilities have skills, ambitions, needs, wishes and drive. We think these things can be nurtured to further development. We believe we can facilitate the flourishing of many sides of Sofie's life. Suitable tools and real participations are important key elements. We experience that the iPad is one tool that can open "doors" for people like Sofie. Getting support to live your life to a full potential and develop a meaningful life is part of basic human rights (Skarstad 2018). Our work is about challenging the way we understand intellectual disabilities, challenging roles and challenging our understanding of potential (Grue 2016; Garrels & Sigstad 2019). Our work is of special value if it can contribute to people with intellectual disabilities developing better ways of handling their situation and handling the interaction between the people they are connected to in their everyday life (Lewin 1951; Nielsen 2004). So far, we feel we have just scratched the surface of what we are exploring together. Each of us have unique roles in this project and each of us are dependent on the others. In this collaboration we are first of all fully dependent on Sofie's role as explorer and researcher.

Link

Link to YouTube showing Sofie using her iPad:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lTxq96iLl0s&feature=share&fbclid=IwAR2qyqy5g_jAkwRM45DA-7JQ03DdgLnS4sCRjrE9mwlsrBQqQFmdSllfCTk

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