ONLINE EDUCATION: TEACHING IN A TIME OF CHANGE

• Paper / Proposal Title:
"The Child Who Had To Grow Up": Using Scenario Planning to Prepare for Uncertain Future Contexts in Digital Education

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• Abstract (300 words):
The COVID-19 pandemic has plunged us into a period of uncertainty. Not only does the coronavirus outbreak bear enormous societal, political, and economic consequences, but our own responses can exacerbate and further destabilise the situations in which researchers, teachers, and students find themselves.

When times are unpredictable, organisational leaders sometimes make use of scenario planning. This involves methodically constructing plausible alternative futures to challenge our assumptions and highlight current blindspots. When facing situations which have no analogies to past experience, constructing scenarios allows us to make analogies to an imagined future instead. Scenarios need not have predictive value to be of use: the aim is not to hit on the one future which truly comes to pass, but identify those which would be most challenging or opportune.

In late 2019, the University of Oslo commissioned scenarios for the future of online education in Norway. A team of researchers, teachers, civil servants, and representatives of tech companies and education non-profits, came together to devise a set of
scenarios for the future relationship between learners, families, institutions, digital technology, and digital media.

The resulting visions of the year 2050, titled "Schools and/or screens", were published in February 2020. By March, Norway's response to the pandemic, and disagreements between municipalities and parents over school closure, highlighted the extent to which the scenarios had correctly identified previously unseen faultlines around healthcare in Norway's digitalised educational ecosystem.

This paper explores the use of scenarios to support researchers in a time of uncertainty, highlighting new forms of online learning and teaching which may emerge in previously unanticipated future contexts. It uses the Oslo case study to introduce the use of scenario planning in digital education research, sharing tools for exploring how future educators will engage with - or reframe - issues which concern us today.

• Author(s) Biography (200 words each):

Dr. Matt Finch (mechanicaldolphin.com) is an Adjunct Research Fellow at the University of Southern Queensland and a regular facilitator on the scenario planning course at Oxford University's Said Business School. Alongside recent foresight work on the Australian energy sector, European regional inequality, and the Norwegian education system, he has also written on the historical impact of migration and ethnonationalism on the careers of refugee scholars.