Individualisation

Neil Selwyn   My name is Neil Selwyn and I'm the author of Education and Technology: Key Issues and Debates. This is a short recording following on from chapter 7 of the second edition, where we considered the increased individualisation of education in the digital age. We finished the chapter with a number of questions that tried to unpack the idea of education being increasingly individualised and personalised, through the use of digital technologies. So to get us thinking about these issues, have a listen to the thoughts of another academic who researches and writes on the topic of education and technology.

Michael   I'm Michael Henderson, Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at Monash
Henderson   University, in Digital Technologies.

Neil Selwyn   For this chapter of the book, I asked Michael a deliberately provocative question: how genuinely individualised and personalised can technology based education be?

Michael   I think, particularly in the massified higher education context, there's a push for the
Henderson   ratio of students to lecturers to be such that we have less and less opportunity to engage in a personally meaningful way with students. Cause often that boils down to an impoverished dialogue, particularly in relation to feedback and assessment. I think we have a large challenge ahead of us in trying to figure out how we can establish relationships with our students to make our comments and our interactions to be individualised. So it's dealing with the student's particular learning needs, but also in recognition of the personalised context, so in recognition of who the students are, their histories and their aspirations.

Neil Selwyn   Now Michael gave his answer from the perspective of higher education, but much of what he said was applicable to schools, colleges and most other areas of education provision. One of the themes that underpins his answer is the distinction between individualised and personalised. For example, he argues that individualised treatment of students does not equate with personalised attention. He talks to the difficulties of moving education more and more online, without losing sight of who students are; in other words, their interests, their backgrounds and their histories. Michael also seems concerned with the possibility of technology being used to support what he termed 'impoverished dialogue' and poor quality interaction with students. Clearly Michael is hinting at some of the human qualities of education that we have also highlighted throughout the book. Technology in education is not simply a technical matter that can be resolved satisfactorily. Instead, the social challenges of education will always need to be factored in to any enthusiasms we might have for potential technical benefits.