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In *Giving Voice: Mobile Communication, Disability, and Inequality,* author Meryl Alper ignites a conversation about claims of empowerment and self-representation for students with disabilities who have been provided mobile technology and applications to communicate with the world around them. She challenges these claims by detailing the journeys of families and support professionals that work with individual students who use an Apple iPad and Proloquo2Go, an app that converts pictures and text into synthetic speech. As mobile technology increasingly becomes more affordable and accessible, synthetic speech applications "giving voice to the voiceless" promise to open more doors for those with disabilities and their families. However, gaining access to and receiving support and training on the use of these devices often keeps the door closed to empowerment and self-representation for many of these students.
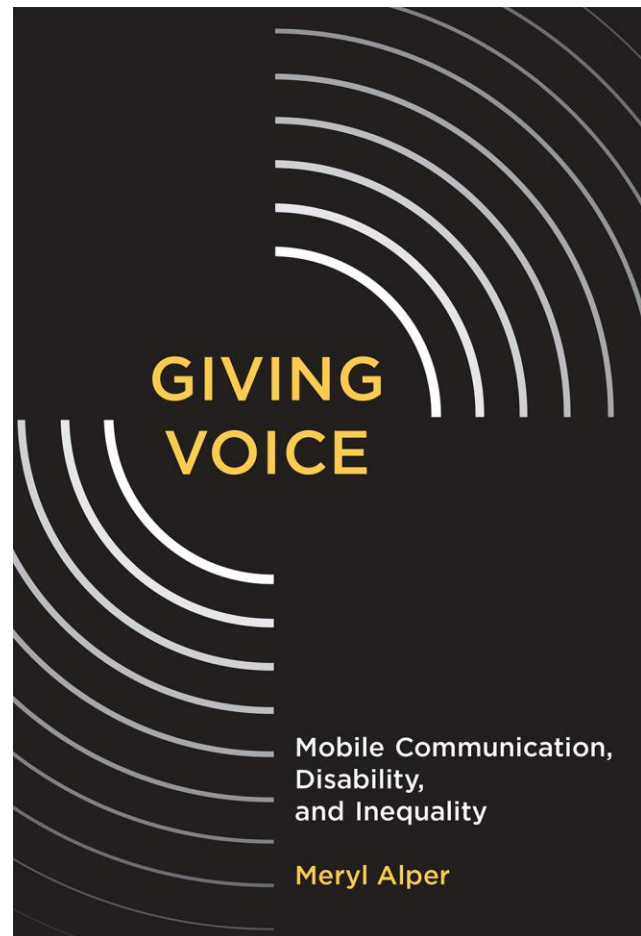
At a time when related services in special education are being hotly contended—not only at the school district level but in the Supreme Court—the ability to obtain and maintain access to assistive technology for students with disabilities is likely to become a more prevalent issue in the school and home environments. With its unanimous 8-0 ruling in the *Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District* (2017), the Supreme Court recently set a new legal precedent in the expansion of school rights for students in special education. The culmination of this decision ruled that the creation of a student's individualized education plan (IEP) must give students with disabilities more than a *de minimis*, or minimal, educational benefit. This includes access to any assistive technology—a vital support that may further these student's progress and participation in a general education setting among their typically developing peers.

Through the course of semi structured interviews and participant observation in student homes, Alper finds that, despite the claims that these devices will give the student a form of self-representation and empowerment to use their own voice, the hardware and software involved still have the potential to foster fundamental inequalities in society. Alper argues technology is not the "great equalizer" because it does not take into consideration life factors, such as the differing cultures or the socioeconomic means of the family the current state and federal laws in place for students with disabilities, and school district policies that help to reinforce discrepancies particularly for those with disabilities.

Alper effectively breaks down her chapters by posing accessible, basic questions about how the parents interpreted one aspect of their child's iPad. She asked: "What is voice?" "What is a mobile communication device?" "What is an iPad for?" "What does it mean to communicate with an iPad? And "How do the media shape understanding of

the iPad?" As she uncovers answers to these questions in interviews and conversations with the parents and speech pathologists, she sheds light into the discrepancies that occur in working and low-income families compared to upper-and middle class families. Each family has a unique story of how the technology has come into their life and how it is used on a day-to-day basis- some paying for the technology on their own, others gaining the device through non-profit agencies and school.

All of the families in this study used the same technology, yet each family approached the communication device in a uniquely different way. For example, Alper explores how the ability to purchase a quality protective case for the iPad can uncover unique differences in the way the family members interact with the technology. Some of the parents in the study had to be more proactive advocates for their child's communication needs—often researching for device cases that bolstered toughness and durability to protect the iPad in its day-to-day use. Not only was their research and effort typically the first step in getting a communication system in the hands of their child, it was also a means of circumventing the often-arduous process of assistive technology evaluation necessary to obtain these devices through a school district or their insurance company.

Additionally, this study looked at the aspect of having multiple pieces of mobile technology in the home and its impact on communication with the child. This focus exposed how families actually used the iPad in day-to-day routines—for independent play or as a means for communicating with the world. Ms. Alper took an in-depth look at the current nature of the technology that families are being trained to use meaningfully with their child, as well as detailing how the electronic voice leaving the device may sound to the student and those that are communicating with them. Through these and other examples,

Alper effortlessly ties in aspects of what the future might hold for this technology as means of continuing to level the playing field for students with disabilities.

By focusing on the experiences of a variety of families in their search for and use of communication tools with their children, this book provides a fascinating glimpse into the promise and perils of assistive technology; however, these devices do more than just go home and stay at home with the student and their families. It is just a start. With up to eight hours of the child's life in school, it would have been insightful to have a more panoramic view of the student's communication network, with possible interviews from teachers and/or paraprofessionals that work with the students in the study. This broader perspective situating students in their larger social sphere would provide clues as whether the student is able self-empower using the device within their own social circle and with their own peers. This research is particularly important since the IDEA mandates suggest that such devices help the student communicate and make adequate progress with the school curriculum.

The growing prevalence of communication devices and the push for more assistive technology for students with disabilities in the future will only grow. As a former classroom teacher and now in-home behavior therapist, I applaud Ms. Alper for banding her study with the chosen iPad and Proloquo2Go software. Over the course of my professional career, I have seen a rise in this specific technology as the go-to standard for augmentative communication after assessment.

Alper brings to life many key factors that face students with disabilities and their families in using this technology. The opportunities for future research are endless as this technology continues to grow, shift, and normalize as it searches to meet the needs of populations with disabilities and those around them. It is likely that school personnel, special education administration, speech-language pathologists, parents, and other related service providers would benefit from reading *Giving Voice*, as they will likely continue to need support and guidance surrounding the integration and use of this new technology into schools, classrooms, and the home environment. Time will tell.

References

Endrew F. v. Douglas County School District, 580 U. S. slip. op. (2017).

About the Reviewer

Jennifer Stewart, M.Ed is a current doctoral student and National Center for Leadership in Intensive Intervention (NCLII) scholar at Southern Methodist University. Her research includes academic and classroom behavioral interventions for students with autism and intellectual disability.

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