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Multimodality, AI and Education: an interview with Professor Fei Victor Lim[1]

Multimodalidade, IA, e Educação: uma entrevista com o professor Fei Victor Lim

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Resumo
This is an interview with Fei Victor Lim (FVL) by Antonia Dilamar Araújo (ADA), Clarice Gualberto (CG), and Michelle Soares Pinheiro (MSP), in which Professor Lim outlines his view on Multimodality, Artificial Intelligence, and Education.
Palavras-chave
Multimodality; AI; Education; Fei Victor Lim.

1 Interview with Professor Fei Victor Lim

Clarice Gualberto (CG); Antonia Dilamar Araújo (ADA); Michelle Soares Pinheiro (MSP) – In a recently published paper (Lim, 2024), you used Artificial Intelligence as a tool to analyze "students' signs of learning and measuring engagement in the learning process." In times when so many

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practitioners around the world have been feeling overwhelmed by the numerous possibilities of AI, it is incredible how you managed to find a way in which AI worked "in our favor" instead of "against" us (teachers). Could you elaborate on that idea – that is, the upside of AI?

Fei Victor Lim (FVL) – It is important to recognise that the development and use of AI are inevitable. As such, researchers and educators need to engage with the possibilities and problems that AI brings with it for teaching, learning and assessment. Indeed, much focus has been on the ethical challenges such as plagiarism. However, it is also useful to understand how the affordances of AI can enhance pedagogical practices and enable new pedagogical possibilities in the classroom.

Here I discuss two exciting promises that AI can potentially offer. The first is realise the holy grail of education – the personalisaion of learning. Personalisation of learning has been impossible in a class where one teacher has to teach many students. However, with the advent of learning analytics, adaptive tutoring, as well as timely feedback from AI powered assistants, students can learn, not only at their own time and their own place, but also at their own pace. Through learning analytics, AI can provide timely and specific feedback on the students' strengths and weaknesses based on the data collected from the students' use of the learning platforms. Students can be recommended to specific learning resources and receive additional practices on topics which they need more help in. AI-generated feedback on their work can be timely, comprehensive, and individualised. These developments contribute to the greater personalisation of learning for students.

The second is being able to move beyond sole dependence on the product (student's writing or artefact created) as the only source for teachers to assess their students' learning. With AI, learning analytics, and the data collected, we now can have information on the students' learning processes, that is the struggles they have at specific juncture, the questions they encounter, their engagement with the digital resources, as well as the development of mastery as they work a writing or multimodal composing data. All these information allow the teachers to move towards what Staffan Selander and Gunther Kress have, from a social semiotics approach, described as 'learning as design', beyond the traditional notion of 'learning as competence'.

CG; ADA; MSP – In the same paper mentioned before, when discussing the use of AI in education, you bring to our attention "the need to develop policies and guides on the ethical considerations surrounding data privacy, bias and the role of AI in the design of students' online learning experiences" (Lim, 2024, p. 34). Although we agree entirely with that statement, we would like to move beyond the focus of your very insightful paper and discuss ethical considerations around plagiarism and authorship for both written texts and images. How could the area of education be actively involved in this issue?

FVL – I think at the fundamental level, many universities and schools have, by now, established some forms of guidelines on how AI can or cannot be used in the students' assignments. These guidelines are helpful as they provide clarity for students so that they know when and how they can use AI.

However, I am more interested in the larger question of how researchers and educators should reimagine teaching, learning, and especially assessment, with generative AI. Such tools are now easily available and accessible to all and students will be using them certainly. In fact, the future workplace could also demand that the employees have the knowledge and skills to work with GenAI. As such, the responsibility and challenge must be for researchers and educators to rethink what are signs of learning from our courses which we can observe from our students' now that GenAI will be most likely be used by students. If a student can easily use GenAI to complete the assignment the tutor has set, I think the assigment is probably now no longer fitting to assess the students' learning in today's digital age. In other words, we need to rethink assessment carefully - recognise the constraints and explore the new possibilities that GenAI now offer for us all.

YCG; ADA; MSP – How could multimodality and education be involved in broader issues involving other crimes with AI, such as digital child pornography, deep fake, and even discrimination?

FVL – I think with every technological advancement, there are potential for it to be used for good as well as for bad. For example, the last wave of concern was directed towards social media.

I think it is the responsibility of researchers, include us in multimodality and education as well others, to apply their expertise towards exploring and understanding the possibilities that these new tools bring as well as at the same time mitigating some of the problems they cause. I find the concept of 'semiotic technologies' to be helpful in recognising that a level of critical multimodal literacy is needed when we work with these tools. This is the focus of my new project exploring the use of GenAI for digital multimodal composing through the lens of semiotic technologies and I hope to have more to report later.

CG; ADA; MSP – We know the issue of plagiarism and authorship requires constant debate and reflection, so we will ask you one more question concerning that matter. Many teachers have been facing problems with students using AI to write essays, papers, and even dissertations. What is your view on this? Do you think it is time to rethink the traditional forms of assessment?

FVL – Absolutely and I have expressed the same view earlier. We had, in the past, privileged essay writing as the main indication of students' signs of learning from our course. Perhaps, it is time to explore other indications of students' signs of learning. With GenAI, text creation is now cheap. While we had often focused on students' production literacies in the past, we should now rebalance it with perhaps a greater emphasis on students' critical reception literacies as they will now encounter more and more texts, including multimodal texts, cheaply generated by GenAI. As such, the ability to analyse and evaluate texts in order to discern their quality, veracity and values, have become even more vital.

CG; ADA; MSP – In this last question, we would like you to talk about the relationship between multimodality and AI and its implications in education. How can we integrate Multimodal approaches of research to AI studies?

FVL – Multimodality is a broad area of study with many scholars exploring different aspects. In my own interest and work, I have focused on the importance of developing students' multimodal literacy. This has become even more important as students need to create specific and effective prompts to work with GenAI as well as to critically evaluate the texts generated by GenAI. I also mentioned earlier about the lens of semiotic technologies being possibly productive in

helping us explore the semiotic choices, interest, and values in GenAI platforms and the social practices they nudge us towards. I would say that each multimodal researcher should draw on their own expertise and apply them to engage with the developments of AI. The impact of AI on education should not be left only to computer scientists but, even social scientists and educators like us, can contribute our voices and efforts towards collectively influence the developments of AI in education - each drawing on our different expertise, as members of the intellectual community.

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