

**Educational Technology Users Group**  
**Why Incorporate Accessible Practice into your Classroom?**  
**November 4, 2022, Session 4**  
**Presenter: Jamie Drozda**

ANDY SELLWOOD:

Okay, welcome back everybody. So I have the pleasure of introducing our next speaker. Who is ETUG's own Jamie Drozda, who's the Coordinator for Educational Technologies at Thompson Rivers University. And she is going to be talking about Why Incorporate Accessible Practice into Your Classroom. So I'm going to hand things over to Jamie.

JAMIE DROZDA:

Hi. Yeah, thanks, Andy. I'm joining from just outside Kamloops in a small town called Salmon, B.C., which is on the traditional and unceded territory of the Secwepemc. I want to say, I'm kind of nervous today. So this could be a little bit messy. It is scripted to relieve my nerves, but sometimes plans, they just don't work out so well. So I really, I'm really trying not to talk about myself and my needs. So I do hope that this is well received.

So today we will cover why is engaging with technology and accessible practice important? The stigma behind accessibility requests. And what we can do. So, why is engaging with technology and accessible practice important? It is important because there are likely more accessibility needs in your classroom than you know. It's not always easy for someone with an accessibility need to come forward with their needs requests. Because when they do, they often feel like they are singling themselves out and subjecting themselves to negative attitudes. This often feels like you are more of a disadvantage than you would've been if you did not disclose your accessibility needs at all. Often, even if there is not one need in your classroom, your students will benefit from accessible design, which is often referred to as universal design. And we'll get to that in a bit.

In an article I recently read, there was much discussion regarding whether or not to allow students to use laptops or other devices in the classroom. And in the article it read, If an instructor honors official accommodation requests and lets the student be the exception with a screen, it forces students to out themselves as a person with a disability, which can come with considerable stigma. I know this firsthand, not regarding whether or not we should allow screens in the classroom, but about what it's like to be outed as a person with a disability. When I was six years old in grade one due to illness. I can't say which one because I was a very sick kid. I had all the childhood diseases plus some extra ones just because. But at six years old, I lost 98% of my hearing in my right ear and about 10% in my left ear. When this happened, I was moved from my desk near my friends to the front of the classroom. And I remember hating it. I remember all throughout elementary school, my mom would inform my teachers that I was hard of hearing and I would be instantly moved from my desk near my friends to the front of the classroom. And every time that happened, I felt embarrassed and humiliated. And I was often teased for having to sit at the front of the class. But back then, I wasn't able to tell anyone what I was feeling. Probably because I was young and didn't know how to put those feelings

into words, but I could, and I did put my feelings into actions. And what actions did I take? you might be thinking. Well, I simply remained a sick kid. I never wanted to go to school. So often. I would tell my mom that my ears hurt and she would keep me home those days. If she took me to the doctor, I would be diagnosed with an ear infection and that would get me a few more days off school. And the funny thing is, that was just an excuse. I actually remember being quite surprised that I had an ear infection because, like I said, hurting ears were just an excuse to get out of school. Now, if I did go to school, then often I would tell the teacher I was sick. So they would let me call my mom and she would come and pick me up. But one time in grade four, my teacher told me I wasn't allowed to call my mom and go home. She said I had to stay at school. And I remember being upset, but I remember turning around and going back to my desk and then I threw up on it. And then she let me go home. And the thing here is, I don't actually remember being sick until I wasn't allowed to leave the school. So good days. And there were lots of good days. They were when my dad would be at the shop across the street from the school working. And I would tell my teacher I was going to see my dad and I would leave. And now he never worried about time. So he always just assumed school was out. And he would put a welding helmet on me and give me some scrap metal to cut up. I would be content playing there while he worked on logging trucks. The only downside to this was when the school would call my mom and she would show up a little bit angry and make me go back to school. I felt extra lucky on the days I would wake up when my dad was leaving for work. I would get up and I would ask if I could go with him. And he always said yes because remember, he really never kept track of time. He would make me a lunch and write my mom a note so she knew I went to work with him. I'd feel like I'm pretty darn fortunate that there were no cell phones or any way for her to get a hold of him because I am pretty sure she would've met us on the road somewhere and she would have driven me to school. She would be upset when we got home. And my dad would just say, Well, I thought she didn't have school today, thought it was one of those pro d days. So let's fast forward here a little bit to high school. And things actually became worse in high school. I went from a class of about 15 students with mixed grades and a whole school population of about 60 students to a school with hundreds of students, and each classroom was very, very full. In high school, I remember walking out of the classrooms into the hallways, which were packed with yelling teenagers. I remember my heart racing. I would become clammy and sweaty. And then I would leave. And I think I was pretty good about leaving. I would call my mom from the pay phone. And yes, it actually was a pay phone. And tell her what I was doing before I left. Then I would go and I would sign out at the office with some odd excuse. So most often I would pop a brace off one of my teeth and say I was going to the orthodontist to have it glued back on. And I actually went to the orthodontist and had it glued back on. And every day., I remember coming home from high school, getting off the bus and begging my parents to let me quit. And eventually, much to their dismay, I was able to get a full-time job and drop out of school. So back then, I think anxiety, disability, accessibility. I think they just weren't recognized. And I hope if I were a child and teenager today, it would be much different. So I want to say things were much better when I returned to school as an adult. They were harder because by then I had three girls ages 12, 11, and 8. but better because I was an adult and I kind of had a handle on my anxiety. I think here it's important to say that it took until I was 35 years old to have the confidence to state my needs in the classroom. And even at that, I have only ever done it once.

So then and now. It's embarrassing to speak of my hearing impairment. And right now, I'm sure you can see my face is red because I can feel that it's actually pretty hot. But I feel like I'm an adult now so I can force myself to speak about my needs. Whereas before, I was say a child and a teenager and I just. I couldn't. I don't think I knew what to say.

There's a lot of stigma that comes from other people's comments. I remember slurring a word, which I still often do. But I slurred a word and my sister started asking me. She said, Are you stupid because you're deaf? And after that, I was an adult then, I went to speech therapy. And later, not so long ago, someone told me that I didn't need to say every word phonetically. And I didn't really know what to say because I don't know how else to talk. I went to speech therapy as an adult and learned how to say S's and T's and Ch's and St's and so on. All the sounds that I don't hear. But I will say that these kinds of comments hurt. They actually really hurt.

So my takeaway from my experience is don't wait for students to come forward with their accessibility needs. Instead, we should try to design classroom experiences the best we can to meet the needs of all students. Even in university, teachers have power over students. And many students are not comfortable coming forward to state their needs and rocking the boat. And even worse than that, many students can't afford an official assessment and diagnosis if it's required. Plus, accessibility should not be only those who come forward with needs. Accessibility should be about the physical and digital environment. It should be about access to representation in content for all.

[NEW SLIDE] These spaces which seemingly make information more accessible to ever greater numbers, make it less accessible to many, many individual students. When I think of inaccessible spaces, I think of large lecture halls. Lecture halls can make students feel anonymous and hidden. Enough to spend the class checking social media or texting friends. Thinking of lecture halls reminded me of a chapter titled Lecturing and the transference: The undercover work of pedagogy. In it, Frank wrote, Alberta's former Education Minister, wrote that he wanted lectures given by professors to be replaced by videos scripted by academics but delivered by professional actors. We can hardly ignore the efficiency of students consulting videos that they can play and rewind. And professors then being free to spend their time updating scripts rather than spending hours delivering those scripts in front of students. Now, this reading is from 1995, and lecture halls are still very much alive and well. And that makes me wonder what would be lost if we turned all lectures into videos. I think pedagogy would be lost if we replaced faculty with actors. I think the informational asides will be lost when we replace professors with actors. I wonder, do we learn better through personal delivery and presence rather than written text and audio or video? I can see value in being present and especially if questions are answered in real time. But I can also see value in being able to go back and re-read or re-listen as many times as I need to. Even though I can see value in both. I think that lecture halls maximize space. But they do so at the cost of accessibility. They assume that the kind of people who work within those spaces have the ability to climb stairs, see and hear across long distances. Maintain, focus in large crowds, and stay awake in a darkened room.

And now, with the high cost of living and commuting and parking, that can also make the face-to-face lecture inaccessible to many. Thanks, Helena.

One thing that I notice is that it's very hard to find a concrete set of examples in design standards to follow when looking for best practices for accessibility in the classroom. And I feel this is because course design will look different for different disciplines and populations. What I mean by this is a trades classroom will look very different from a lecture hall, which will look very different from a small writing intensive class. So now what? Whether your classroom is face-to-face, online, blended, or hyflex, universal design or even better, inclusive design is a great place to start because inclusive design means designing in a diversity of ways to participate to create a sense of belonging for everyone. I think we should never talk about accessibility without usability, and we shouldn't talk about usability without accessibility. And I agree with this. A common example of the relationship of accessibility and usability is curb cuts. When I think of curb cuts, I remember a time when there were no curb cuts. It was around the same time I was using the payphone in high school. So I'm pretty much disclosing my age here. I remember shopping with my aunt and helping her lift the stroller over the curb at intersections. I also remember taking my little cousins for a bike ride and having to help them lift their bikes over the curb. And I must say that I never really gave curb cuts much thought when they became a thing. But now that I have thought about them, they really do make crossing the street better for everyone. So, inclusive design acknowledges the essential nature of accessibility and proactively seeks to provide user-friendly experiences for people with and without disabilities.

One thing that can be easily implemented in your course is captioning your supplemental videos or recorded lectures. So I remember my first captioned movie. It was *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* and I watched the Swedish series. And it was amazing. I did not miss anything. I should also note that the captions were in English, so I was good there. Honestly though, I was hooked. I made Blair watch the rest of the movies in the Swedish series. And I kept telling him it was so much better to read the screen. And he kept saying that we could turn captions on if we watch the English version. But I was so happy and I felt like we were on an even playing field, so to speak. So the Swedish series it was. This is a little aside, but about two years ago, I was finally able to get hearing aids. Technology had finally caught up. And I will say the learning curve was steep. I sat in my living room with everything shut off and listened to the noises around me. And it was crazy. I had no idea that dogs' nails clipped on the hardwood floors. And I'll say it explains the scratches on the floors now. I also have no idea how loud cars were when they drove by the house. That night, that first night when we were watching TV, I heard someone at the door. So I went downstairs to see who it was. A few times. I got up to answer the phone a few times until finally, my daughter said, Mom, what are you doing? So I told her, and we all had a pretty good laugh because it turns out I had never heard those sounds on the TV before. So closed captions, they're not only for the deaf and hard of hearing, they also help learners for whom English is not their first language. Learners who access videos in noisy or sound sensitive environments. And learners who comprehend material better when text is available. Thanks, Brian.

So you've probably read or heard that you should put your Word documents or PDFs up as HTML content. Now, this doesn't have to be hard. You can simply copy and paste your content into a page resource in your learning management system. And just a side note here, if you choose to copy and paste into your LMS, then be sure to right-click and select paste as plain text. Then put all your formatting back in the headings, the list, the Bolds, italics, text, and et cetera. Sometimes you can bring across underlying XML code, which can render your course page pretty much useless until you go into HTML mode and delete that bad code. So now the reason for putting documents up as HTML page rather than PDFs, is to help those who use screen readers and students can simply click the page, open it and read on. However, this reason might not be as good as we think. I was recently chatting with my friend Briana, who is a certified orientation and mobility specialist for the blind. And she mentioned that many blind people who are using screen-reading software prefer PDFs as they are downloadable. And then they can read and listen to the text offline. Screen reading software such as JAWS, she said, is so powerful. And if the user doesn't have something like a gaming computer, then it can really bog down the performance of their computer. It's likely if they're not using a gaming computer, that their computer is operating at peak processing speed all the time. So being offline can definitely help with some performance issues there. And my friend, Brianna's top tip for working with anyone with a disability is just to simply ask the person what they prefer. As a great resource, I want to leave you with designing for accessibility for the web. It's a World Wide Web Consortium, W3C. W3C is the main international standards organization for the World Wide Web. It was founded in 1994. And it's currently led by Tim Berners-Lee. If you really want to take a deep dive, head over to the Web Accessibility Initiatives main page, and I will post a link to that in the chat. That's great Andy, I'd love to hear more about your programs at VCC.

Now, this section of the website I want to focus on a little bit today. Is everyone understanding the basics as it has intuitive information and much of it can be applied online as well as in the face-to-face classroom. So let me give you a direct link here. There you go. So if you navigate to that link or if you already have navigated to the page, click on the heading. Everyone understanding the basics. I want to highlight the section, Respecting participants' needs. You can build in breaks online and in-person without too much effort and without waiting for a needs requests to come in. And when I read someone with a physical disability who cannot take notes might need to record the session, I remember a classmate in [...] who recorded lectures with his laptop. And he said the audio wasn't always perfect. But he was happy he could go back and re-listen whenever he wanted. And I often wonder how many students are recording face-to-face or online lectures silently on their phones or laptops. It's really easy to do. Andrew, I'm not sure where we're at with the provincial legislation in accessibility in B.C. It's a really good question. I'm hoping somebody here can help answer that one. So if you record your face-to-face lectures and upload the audio file. Or you could record your face-to-face lectures and upload the audio file to your learning management system quite easily with very little equipment, you could use a lab mic or lavalier mic that you could plug directly into your phone and use your phone to record the audio file. So it'd be pretty simple and low tech. I think John's here, he can correct us. But I think you can find wireless lab mics now. One thing to consider, if you decide this, you could upload your audio file to Kaltura or YouTube so it will be captioned.

And if you choose to caption your videos or audio files, I just want to make sure that you go back and edit them. Machine captions, they're pretty good, but they're not 100%. And the last thing you want is your students going around calling them craptions.

So some other thoughts on how we can design our classroom to be inclusive are, unless there are prerequisites for the course, do not assume students have prior knowledge on course topics. Provide instructional supports. So this could be in the form of office hours in consistent and accessible locations. They can be online or they can be face-to-face. Or you can do a blend of both. Make sure that students know the supports that the university has to offer. At TRU, we have virtual student technical support office hours. Students they can make an appointment with a librarian. We also have a writing centre, a math and stats help centre, and an economics help centre. Another thing you could do, you could eliminate high-cost course materials or support students in using earlier editions of textbooks. You could highlight diverse individuals in your field. You could co-develop collaborative classroom guidelines with students. You can provide alternative assessments for students who are unable to attend class for health or other reasons. And as much as possible speak facing the class rather than to the whiteboard. That was the time when I actually spoke about my need in the classroom. I was in a physics class, and of course, the instructor had to write on the whiteboard, it's physics. But I couldn't hear him. And he was very soft spoken. So it was quite humiliating for both of us as he was a little bit shy too. So when I asked them to talk louder, we both had red faces. Keep an open mind about what a student with a disability can or cannot do. Try not to make assumptions. Address students directly, especially those with a disability. Speak clearly at a moderate pace and volume and allow the student to have time to respond. So make sure there is sufficient lighting and that your mouth isn't obscured, which can be hard with the pandemic and wanting to wear our mask, for sure. That's a challenge. Be prepared to repeat or rephrase what you're saying to facilitate comprehension and know that it's not considered insulting by most deaf or hard of hearing people for you to write down what you're saying. So I know for me when I asked someone a couple of times to repeat themselves, it's actually really handy if they just write it down and then I can read it and we can all move on.

So does anyone have any questions or comments or want to share anything? I think that's it for me for the presentation. And I see we're a little bit over time, so I'm sorry about that. I rambled a little longer than I thought I was going to.

ANDY:

No problem, Jamie. Yeah. Just want to say, like echo, what was put in the comments. Your story was really powerful in terms of highlighting that, and as a parent of three children and all three of my kids have had school attendance refusal issues. So I can empathize for sure. I think we've got a question from Julie Gilbert. Sure. Great.

JULIE GILBERT:

Jamie, I just wanted to thank you so much for your presentation. I've been in public post-secondary for just under 20 years and in nursing actually, and I feel very ashamed to say that back in the day, we are very specifically did not allow recording of lectures or classes because

we felt it was breaching of student confidentiality. And I sure wish I had been provided with the opportunity to develop the understanding and empathy that your story evoked today. And I would've been a much different educator. But so happy that we're here today. And just as an old person on this team that you know, how far it has come and excited to see how much further it's going to come. But thank you for your presentation. It was excellent.

JAMIE:

Oh, thank you. And it wasn't meant to make anyone feel bad about the way things were in the past. It is what it is. I think it's mostly I think it is what it, was. And moving forward, we just can just all do better.

JULIE:

Yeah. And we learn from experience.

JAMIE:

I mean, I could have done better as a student and went to school. That would have been helpful. probably for especially my mom. But like I say, it is what it is and the past is the past and we can just all move forward together. Thanks. Thank you.

ANDY:

Thanks, Jamie. Yeah, I think it boils down to maybe just thinking a little bit and being a decent person. Yeah.

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