

**Transcript for Supporting Accessibility Improvements: An intentional and staggered approach
2023 ETUG Fall Workshop: The Evolving EdTech User (November 10, 2023)
Presenters: Briana Fraser and Luke McKnight**

MODERATOR:

I'm happy to welcome back Briana Fraser and Luke McKnight. Maybe we should give a quiz to see if you remember where they're from or what their positions are. But of course they're from Langara. They will be sharing with us the topic of supporting accessibility improvements: intentional and staggered approach. I look forward to hearing about their processes and also appreciate how much Langara's been sharing with us today about their work. So over to you, Brianna and to Luke.

BRIANA FRASER:

Thanks, Bonnie. I'm going to do most of the talking today because I know you've heard more from Luke than from me. Just to acknowledge just quickly again that Luke and I are both on campus today, snəwəyət̚ lələm̚, Langara College, which is on unceded territory of the Musqueam Peoples. I think I'll start maybe by telling you a little bit about our department and the role that we play in supporting accessibility. I always assume that people know, but of course, why would you? Langara's Educational Technology Department, so we call ourselves EdTech, supports faculty and instructional staff at the college, helping to find, task, implement, and integrate learning tools and technologies. Our department is made up of 15 members, which includes non-instructional faculty and support staff. Some of these folks work with us on a part-time basis, but many are actually full time. We have a pretty big department. One of the 15 people is Luke McKnight, our assistant technologist as I'm sure you all know. Luke was first hired in 2021 as part of an assistive technologists pilot project. The project was funded with a grant from the Ministry of Advanced Education Skills Training as part of their projects and programs to support students with disabilities. For quite a few years, they had a pot of money that they made available to institutions, and you could apply to get the grants. The overarching goal of the pilot project was to address accessibility issues by providing support in student use of assistive technologies in conjunction with our learning environments, platforms, and resources. The pilot was a success right from the start. We got two subsequent years of grant funding from the province. And beginning this fiscal year, our department EdTech received a budget addition for a permanent full-time assistant technologist. As many of you who regularly attend ETUG workshops know, we've kept Luke busy. However, within Langara itself, we've tried to keep him as hidden as possible. Luke, of course, was meeting with students and some instructors, but we mostly kept him locked away in EdTech, occasionally meeting with Accessibility Services and a few other people because we didn't really want to let people know that he existed if we weren't going to be able to keep him. I was always like, I never want to have to take something away whether it's a tool or a person, so until we got the money and we knew we had ongoing funding. We took advantage of his skills, but we didn't really release him to support everybody else in a way that really we wanted to. In any case, this has changed. We now have Luke. He's with us, he's full time. In addition to that change, as part of Langara's accessibility plan, the EdTech department was identified as a key training hub for improving

accessibility. To meet this call to action, Luke and I and a couple others developed and launched an initial series of workshops aimed at improving accessibility of teaching and learning materials. We've made the workshops open to the whole institution because many of the workshops focus on commonly used applications, Word, PowerPoint, and then some others that are, of course, more focused to teaching and learning, for instance, the HTML templates that we have with our LMS. We really want to encourage that wider audience, just beyond the usual suspects, to actually participate in these sessions. Over the summer, we chatted about the best approach, and we decided to scaffold training wherever we could. We'll talk a little bit more about this, but in previous sessions where I've talked, we recognize that in addition to a need for accessibility improvements, there's also a need for digital literacy support. We've tried to combine those two things. That's probably the most important reason for scaffolding. This approach appears to be working well and it's something that we hope to continue to build upon.

I thought maybe we could share an example of something that we think has worked particularly well in terms of scaffolding the offering. And that's the workshops that we developed around PowerPoint accessibility. The workshop, there's two workshops. The first is offered synchronously online. This is usually a conversation that we have in EdTech. Do we want to offer a workshop online or in person? If there's a benefit to being in person, we do it in person. If not, we opened up more widely and have it online. If we do it in person, we also have a limited space. That's another consideration. The first one is online. It's focused on demonstrating best practices. Again, no need to meet in person. The workshop is called How to Create Accessible PowerPoint Presentation, Slide Presentations. In the workshop, Luke creates the slides for the presentation live, demonstrating and discussing accessibility best practices for PowerPoint as he goes. Luke, can you tell us what the workshop looks like?

LUKE MCKNIGHT:

Yeah, we frame it as starting from nothing with no assumptions about people's experience with PowerPoint or their confidence with PowerPoint. Then build an accessible PowerPoint using lots of the common tools that, unfortunately, we think a lot of people aren't aware of that are built into these platforms. We tried to narrow it down to a few key accessibility considerations. Font and use of colour, colour contrast, templates and placeholders, alt text, link text, best practices for external media and maybe some better sharing practices. To prepare for the workshop, I built a PowerPoint seven or eight slides that had all of those key elements included in it. And then I wrote a script of what I wanted to say about each piece as it went. And then had an assets folder with placeholder text and images. And the things I was going to add. And then via Zoom, maybe out of some sense of masochism or something like that, I did build a PowerPoint live in front of a dozen people or something like that. That actually went really well, except for having people watch me type, which is just a nightmare. I did a lot of copy and pasting for the text parts. We went through slide by slide. Started with a title slide, talking about what a placeholder is as opposed to just making bigger bolder text as it relates to accessibility. Talking about those layout placeholders that PowerPoint has versus just making text boxes. Showed examples of a really stylized italic font and how that's so hard to read with

the very extravagant serifs and things like that. Talked about size of font, colour choices, dark font on a light background, vice versa. Talked a little bit about an informative image versus a decorative image. How to know when to add alt text, and a little bit about writing alt text. But that's a fiendishly complex topic. I think I spent two hours with the EdTech department and covered about half of what I wanted in another session, so alt text aside. But maybe Ian's got an answer for us on that one. I think he does, actually. Went on to talk a little bit about when you add a video file to a PowerPoint, it takes it from 2 megabytes to 300 megabytes. And whether that's the best practice. Then I also had one slide that intentionally triggered everything in the accessibility checker, just so then we could walk through and repair each one to impart that skill set as well. We finished up with some topics about sharing, never use Print to PDF. It undoes all your good work, accessibility wise. And then just a summary slide which was just, hey, check it out. Brianna was there as well as Susan Bonham to help me triage questions. I think we got some really good discussion and engagement. Susan was there. She has a Mac. She's a full-time Mac user as am I, but I did my demo on Windows just because we felt like that was probably more common. Susan was great to help with those little inconsistencies in between menu names and things like that. I think process wise, we wanted to start from nothing and build a PowerPoint just to show that I didn't go out of my way to incorporate any of this accessibility stuff. It's all just in my workflow. By just using the tools and knowing what they do, I finished with an accessible PowerPoint without really doing anything out of my way. From my perspective, I felt despite the potential pitfalls of actually building something live like that, it was just more fun than clicking through prescriptive slides about slides. I don't know, it didn't feel like the right method to impart this knowledge. We ask people to come to these workshops and be vulnerable and acknowledge that they have a gap. Or that they may have a gap in what they know about these platforms. And they may be, I don't know, hesitant or a little bit unsure. I just feel like maybe it was humanizing and maybe like a little bit leveling the playing field by myself being vulnerable and giving them a peek behind the curtain of the potential mistakes I could be making as we went. Yeah, we think we got some really good stuff from that. And also we've adopted that format for some subsequent workshops. Briana, was there anything you wanted to add about that session? You're muted.

BRIANA:

As Luke said, that workshop was really about creating a PowerPoint presentation from scratch. And from an accessibility standpoint, I mean, PowerPoint really worries me. I was reluctant to offer any workshops on PowerPoint because I can see folks coming, particularly instructors, with their PowerPoint slides, or just thinking about their PowerPoint slides and freaking out once they see the accessibility checker and things flagged. And just thinking about the time and effort and energy and knowledge and skill that it was going to take to repair an existing PowerPoint. I think starting, as Luke said, from scratch was the right place. It's an easy entry point for people and they're not immediately overwhelmed. Our follow up session is designed to be what's called what we call a learning lab. So these are small in-person, hands-on, highly structured, and supportive learning opportunities. Participants leave the sessions having completed something. In this case, they're going to walk away having improved the accessibility of an existing PowerPoint presentation. We haven't actually offered this workshop yet. This is

our first group of accessibility workshops. We've had one a month. This second piece of the PowerPoint one is scheduled for December 8. But I'm feeling pretty optimistic given that the workshops that we've run so far. That if participants attended the first session, or even watch the video, the recording of the session, that they'll be ready to meet the challenges of improving the accessibility of an existing PowerPoint presentation.

This semester we also offered learning labs aimed at improving the accessibility of a Word document and the implementation of accessible HTML template centred LMS. We didn't break those sessions into two because we didn't feel like we needed to have that entry point. However, in the Word focused learning lab, Luke did demonstrate and discuss each of the accessibility considerations in advance of participants making the improvements to their own document. I think that worked really well.

So just a couple of things that we've learned. We've learned not to assume prior knowledge of accessibility, best practices, or digital literacy with regards to the tools, Brightspace, PowerPoint, and Word. Our aim is to offer entry points for all potential participants because we don't think we can really make strides to improve accessibility without adopting the scaffolded, user-friendly, inclusive approach. When we can, we really do find in-person sessions to be more effective. We really brought back in-person sessions this semester, and you immediately know when somebody is struggling. Because in this case we have multiple people in the room. As soon as we see that look come over with someone's face, we can jump up, walk over, spend some time with that person and really walk them through and make sure that they're not getting behind. Lots of time for conversations which are always great. We've been really careful to balance structured learning opportunities with flexibility, participant-centred options. For example, in the Word session, Luke demonstrates the improvements we want participants to make. But they bring their own document. They concentrate on implementing the changes they need to make and that they need to learn. They don't need to learn everything. And even Word, which people use all the time and feel really familiar with, we did get in the feedback that people felt like it was still a lot. It was a lot of information; it was a lot of things that they didn't know even though it's common things. For instance, when we were talking about adding heading H1, H2, why you add them, the structure that it adds, and then showing what that looks like in the navigation pane. And that you can use the navigation pane to just drag content to another place in your document. People were like, wow, we had no idea you could do that. That was great because it was like a hook. But also, again I think, brought awareness to us that what we think are common digital literacy skills, a lot of people who use these tools all the time may not necessarily have them. And we're in a unique privileged position and that our whole job is around technology. We can spend time learning how to do all the ins and outs of the technology, but for most people they can't do that. They don't have the time to do that. I think being able to take things slow, having entry points, and being really supportive is a great way to go. I think Luke has a couple more lessons learned to share.

LUKE:

Yeah, I think definitely tying into that, the format of in person, a little bit informal. It wasn't necessarily me standing at the front of the room, just going it's this, it's this, it's this, especially in the Word learning lab that we did. Like go in, and I could say, "Ph, I could just show a slide that shows the screenshots of how to modify a heading style" or something like that. But again, like Briana mentioned, not only did we do that, and I could see half the room was like, oh, okay, yeah, I've got that open. I know. Okay. I want to change this, but two people were like, oh, I'm not sure. We went okay, let's show that again. In this instance, Julian Prior was there with us and he's a Mac user. The same thing as in the PowerPoint one. He was there and I'd just glanced at him and he would say, "Oh yeah, it's labelled something ever so slightly different," because why there are differences, I don't know. But there are. I think part of that, if I were clicking through slides and just saying, "Oh, hold your questions to the end." People wouldn't have said, "Oh sorry, how did you get the styles pane open?" But because we were doing it in this conversational lab style, they just immediately were like, "Oh, sorry, just one second." I think that really helped. The other thing, again, this was from feedback we got. But when I was explaining the importance of using hyperlink text as opposed to just pasting raw URL's, I sat there and did a pretend robot voice of like, well, if you just paste a URL, someone who uses a screen reader or text to speech will hear "H-T-T-P-S, full colon, forward slash... And someone kind of remarked. They were like, "Oh I'd never thought about that. That like if I just do it that way, that has that tangible impact on someone." Yeah, just not just showing them, not just prescribing, hey, use hyperlink text, not raw URL's, but imparting on them why. I think had a really great impact on them. And then Briana, we had discussed maybe a few things that we've been missing going forward or what we'd like to improve going forward.

BRIANA:

Yeah, we just had a chat about improvements that we think we can make the next time we offer these workshops. And also based on the feedback. One thing that somebody mentioned with their feedback. They said, "These were easy, simple changes." And they felt like it was really manageable. But they also wanted something that they could, the top five takeaways that they could use to refresh themselves when they were actually creating a Word document. Although we do share links to resources, maybe we need different, a lot of our links are around accessibility-related things, but I think we need maybe to include links to more of those basic digital literacy skills around Word or PowerPoint. And share those as well. Because, you know, as I said, people did remark this was a lot, right? So we want them to be able to go back, either come back to us or if they can't find out what they need when they need it. I think that was all. Yeah, we think this approach is really working. And if you want to find out more, if you'd like to come to one of our workshops, you're more than welcome. Our registration is open to anybody.

LUKE:

And I'm just going to put a link to the recording of the PowerPoint session just so if people are interested in sort of seeing that unique, I guess, delivery that we did or I think unique delivery that we did, more than happy to have people look at that.

MODERATOR:

Great. Thank you Briana and Luke for sharing your experiences as well as some resources. And lots of thumbs up and sharing. Jamie's mentioning that just the approach of doing it face to face really. She's echoing your experience of how positive that is. Keith asks, "Are these common application accessibility workshop materials available to share?"

BRIANA:

Yeah, we'd be happy to share them if you just want to send me an email, we have a little lesson plan thing, I can share that with you.

MODERATOR:

I actually, myself have a quick question. A lot of people here are working in institutions where accessibility is a growing and key issue. Not all of us have specialists like yourselves working with us. The uptick in your workshops, is that just coming just because people are interested or are there institutional reminders of mandates? What's that more global institutional culture like Langara?

BRIANA:

There's no mandate. For our accessibility committee, the committee that informed our accessibility plan. Membership for that committee was open to anybody in the college. And we ended up, I think, Luke, was it like 47 people on that committee? It was a huge number of people. I think that helped spread the word about, hey, something's going on here with accessibility. I think just from that and other things in the media, some people are panicked. I think that's also helping spread the word. It's not necessarily a huge number of people. If we're doing an in-person session, we actually cap it at 10 because we want to be able to fully support the people in the room. Yeah, I would like to see more people. And we're going to continue to run these, and hopefully we'll continue to have people showing up. But yeah, there have been more people at maybe the accessibility workshops than some of the others. We also, like many of you, struggle to get the butts in the seats as someone said in the chat, but we haven't had the same struggle necessarily with these. Yeah, something's going on there, but it's not a mandate and it's not coming from senior leaders that this is something that people need to participate in yet. But I think, again, we're pretty good at collaborating with other groups. We have a strong relationship with Accessibility Services, they're also communicating with instructors. I think we do have channels for getting the information out. And there's interest.

LUKE:

Just to emphasize a point that I think we've been making with a lot of our, or Brianna and I at least, that with the Word document session that we had, I think there were three or four people from the Biology Department who were tuned into the existence of that workshop by Katherine Chung, who is also an advisor in EdTech. Even just having actual connections with people around the college has been really helpful just to sort of word of mouth. Just be like, "Oh, hey, by the way, we're all thinking about accessibility and hey, turns out EdTech got something for you, so check it out."

BRIANA:

Yeah, yeah. So Heidi put the link to our PD calendar in the chat, so if you want to see how we've advertised them, you can see that wording there. And as I said, if you want to sign up for anything either online or in person, you're welcome to join us. We'll be offering the full slate of workshops and probably more beginning in January.

MODERATOR:

Great. Well, thank you, Brianna and Luke. And also for the invitation to further participate.