



The 2017 Accessibility Conference:
**Becoming a Catalyst
for Inclusion**
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I've Seen Accessibility From Both Sides Now

Transcript from the 2017 Accessibility Conference

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It is 10 AM and everybody goes quiet, on time. Welcome to your 10:00 to 10:45 session today. I have the pleasure of introducing two presenters today who will be talking about – an intriguing session title – I Have Seen Accessibility from Both Sides Now. I would like to introduce Carin and Sam. Carin has been a tester with Desire2Learn for five years. She has been involved in access

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with the city of Guelph as well as volunteering at a literary centre. She believes everyone can succeed if they have the right tools.

Dr Chandrashekar is an adjunct professor at OCAD University, where she teaches the Master's program in Inclusive Design. She is passionate about making education accessible and inclusive. It gives me great pleasure to welcome both speakers this morning. I will hand over to them.

SAMBHAVI CHANDRASHEKAR:

A very good morning from the accessibility team from D2L. This is Carin Headrick, our Accessibility Quality Assurance Expert and I am Sam Chandrashekar, Accessibility Program Manager. D2L is an education technology company that is based in Kitchener and operating internationally. It markets the industry's number one most accessible integrated learning platform.

Who, in the audience, would like to hear a story? Not bad. We will tell you not one but two stories. Carin and I have a common experience. In our lives, we have both seen accessibility from two complementary perspectives. We are here to share those perspectives with you.

Carin will talk first about her reactions as a student when she faced accessibility problems in learning, and how she slowly began to empathize with those trying to find solutions to her problems. Now, as an important member of D2L's accessibility wing, she is a part of the accessibility solution, making sure that the learning technology we ship out is accessible to everyone who uses them. And she has some lessons learned along the way to share with you.

I have seen accessibility from the academic side and from the industry side. On the one side as an academic using a learner management system or LMS, to teach year after year to classes with a wide range of diversity including several disabilities and, on the other side now as part of the education technology industry, ensuring that technology that is developed for education and training is accessible to all instructors, administrators and learners.

Over to you Carin.

CARIN HEADRICK:

When I was trying to come up with the title, all I could think of was a Joni Mitchell song, Both Sides Now. Hopefully it hasn't ruined it for me or you forever. I have been blind since birth and use a screenreader. I went from being a consumer to being on the side of watching things being produced and I try to make sure they are accessible.

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When I was in school, I had to give some thought, but when I was in elementary and high school, sure I had some interesting challenges to deal with as far as doing my assignments, but things went smoothly. A lot of the work was not really on my side of things, and since I was born this way, it was normal for me. I would have my maths books. Hopefully the teacher wouldn't have something that would cover multiple volumes on the same day. Any diagrams I would need, either they would be created by the textbook manufacturer or my teachers would put something together or my mom got good at drawing with the hot glue gun on a piece of paper so I could feel all the shapes and are geometric, my mother had to get creative to try to explain to me how to measure a cylinder on top of a sheet or something like that.

I always used a computer to do my work although the first computer – I use them since I was eight – and the first one I used was an Apple 2II. I think you can find those in museums. I didn't have to do a lot of work overcoming the obstacles. All I had to say was that I could not see that and someone else would have to come up with how to do it. I guess that is how you should do it when you are a kid because you are figuring out how to do the whole blind thing.

Teachers would come up with interim solutions. Sometimes I wouldn't review the same book as everybody else because they could not get it for me, but teacher was call with me reviewing a different book as long as it was on the same theme. One time when a teacher said everybody had to make a collage summing up their book, the teacher was cool and told me I could make a cassette of sound effects that summed up my book and explain them to everybody. That was fun. Anyway, it didn't feel like any big deal to me. I did the work and I guess now that brings us to our next! Dum-dum-dum! I went to university and things were a little different. I got my first wake up call. I had heard the word self advocacy, but it wasn't something a truly understood.

All of a sudden, the expectations were much less flexible because who has time to customise something when you have 400 students in a psychology lecture? The timeframes were a lot tighter. There was flexibility, certainly, but they would have a 12-week semester. Let's go! Most importantly, I was in charge of my own destiny. I had support from the library centre, but if I didn't say I needed something, nobody would notice. My high school teachers, how they preach, "Nobody will chase you and tell you you have to submit your assignment." I took to the next level. "Nobody will tell you you need this book, so you have to scream for it." This stuff was hard. I was responsible for my academic success and whether I crashed and burned or succeeded totally depended on me.

I won't lie – I got kind of forward that bordered on aggressive. Oops! My aggressiveness was bordering on panic, that I wasn't going to make it. Sometimes the stuff was not there or it was hard to interpret because we had to do some unorthodox things to get these statistics in Braille

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because the support wasn't... The support in the software just wasn't there, so we had to do some creative Braille. You have a limited time to interpret what you have and it is weird, and it gets frustrating and you start to only see your own perspective and you feel like the people aren't giving you what you need and they don't understand the pressing deadlines and the seriousness.

There is one particular day I feel terrible about. I got a progress report on something that I needed and the person doing it said that it was not here yet, but we would live and learn. He meant that he had got it and that we were cool. I did not take it that way. I responded with, "Live and learn? I am just try to learn!" I carry a lot of regret over the way I acted that day. Poor guy.

We started facing things together. It started one summer after a particularly difficult semester. I decided I would be proactive about this. I called a meeting with the library, the library centre for citizens with disabilities and said that we needed to plan it so that I would not have to deal with it again. It was that day when I got a glimpse into what they had to deal with. It is kind of cartoonish. I got up there and sat there and had these unrealistic timelines and I said that if I had a call since of timber, I had scheduled it back in June, they should know in August and they could talk to the professor and get the books together and that we could see we had the resources and the gaps that need to be filled.

To their credit, they listen to me and waited for me to finish and then explained what they go through. I learned that, oftentimes, until just before the class starts, the Prof is TBA and the book is TBA and we don't even know what book it is, so they cannot check what book is available until it is go time. If that edition you want to use is not available, they would have to go to the last addition, see if they could fill them and take it in-house or whatever. All of a sudden, I realised it wasn't quite as simple as I thought. That meeting changed the dynamic and how we work together. I was coming to the realisation that maybe it wasn't quite as simple as I had originally thought.

After that, we started working more together. I'm sure we had frustrations still, but we would get irritated together and work through them together. After that meeting, I really felt like a jerk! So, next slide... I think, the shift.

At the end of my school years, I was starting to coalesce crazy, aggressive meetings. When I was having problems accessing online resources on things, that eventually led me to meeting up with E12 and I realised I wanted to be part of the solution as opposed to being just on the problem side. I started doing brief contracts and then moved to doing full-time... Part-time and then full-time, doing accessibility testing. Yeah.

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So, when I first started testing, I was full of enthusiasm. I was crazy, unrealistic full of enthusiasm. I thought I could test every component and catch all the problems before it was too late. You can feel free to chuckle now.

I definitely know I have made... I hope I have made ... an impact. People have seen me work. I hope it makes it kind of real. I relentlessly work with designers and developers and try to make asses of is something real, something new you can get your head around, and every now and then, I get support, get a call from a client who tells me that they cannot use the system.

But just the act of making... Turning accessible at into something fuzzy and something observable... Oh, my... It isn't the whole thing I had to learn along the way. And I am still learning. I have got a lot of empathy for the builders' side of things. When something works, it looks so easy. It is like, "Wow! They must have just follow standards and it all came together." I've learned, over the years, sometimes, even when you do things right, screen readers have idiosyncrasies and you need to figure out if the idiosyncrasy is a showstopper or if we can work around it and file bugs. In the meantime, people have to use the system.

Sometimes it is a cat and masking because sometimes the browser support something that the screenreader doesn't and you wait for the screenreader to catch up and something changes, so I've learned basically that it is trickier than it appears at first glance. It should have been obvious, considering how much weirdness I see around the Internet and then there is the fun of bugs appearing in new cannot figure out why it is happening this up you have not change anything. I remember one time a discussion still decided... Safari decided they hated our discussions tool. I don't know why. It wouldn't read anything from a thread. A lot of trial and error had to go into figuring out it was something to do with JavaScript and we hoped someone would discover how to switch it on and off until we could figure out what was causing the problem. It wasn't that we didn't label element or didn't make a list. You know what I mean?

Now when I have an app that breaks and they don't worry about accessibility, I have a twinge of empathy for those designers because maybe they did not know that it broke. The thing I learned is never to confuse lack of willingness or caring with lack of awareness. Sometimes people just don't understand how people use a screenreader. They might think you just tab around the Internet and get everything by tabbing, nothing else. If you can expend everything by headings, markup and all that stuff, it makes it easier to understand why they are asked to do all these things that make a tricky and long and detailed, which leads me to my next point of, it is better to show something than to tell it.

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Sometimes when you explain something, what you say and what they hear are not the same thing. I remember explaining something to someone building a scheduling app and I said that I could not tab over to my shuttling button. Anybody using a keyboard or screenreader can't use it. They took that to mean I wanted to push the tab key to activate the button. Oops! Whereas, if I had been able to show them, I think they would have had a better understanding – there was a bug with the iPhone working with the menu. As soon as they saw me using it, they realised why they could not reproduce it. I know not all of us have the advantage of being able to sit down with a developer or show them a problem, but if you can make a video or audio recording or have a phone call, it could be helpful. I love the Zoom meetings. You can share your screen reader and your audio so they can hear what you are doing and it makes things a lot more real.

If you can show somebody the struggle... Nobody wants to watch somebody struggle. Nobody wakes up and says, "I will make a design that will make people scream." It makes it more real. Don't just hand out specifications to people. Explain what you are looking for and then they can use their genius to make it work in whatever way works for everybody. Sometimes it is simple and showing them a page where it does work well or an app where it works well or sometimes describing the mental map of a page that you have built naturally where things would go in the way you are expecting. That took a lot of work to learn how to do. When I was new, people used to ask me, "What are you expecting when you get to that PowerPoint? Why do you stop there? Why do you not continue?" "It is a footer. Nothing is below a footer." I had to think through those things.

It is important to give good news. You can run an accessibility checker all you want but will never jump up and down about a user interface. It will never squeal with delight when a menu works. It probably feels thankless. When you are designing something, you get to see it work will stop it loads like it should and you get to where you are going. Without needing to use it, you're not able to experience it and seeing if what you're working on is not good.

I wanted to share some takeaways from each side. Be prepared to listen to the response. You might learn about why it has been a difficult problem to solve and that they do care and not just deciding not to do X thing. Also, don't make assumptions of what people do or don't know. You can ask about WCAG. Don't accuse them of breaking it before they know what is going on. It breaks the dialogue. Believe me, it is tempting to do sometimes when I am writing to the design of a website. I am having to not assume they don't know and realise we are working together and not against each other.

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If you are receiving an accessibility complaint, again be prepared to listen. Try not to be defensive already. Imagine yourself in their shoes, and prevented from accomplishing something, not because of anything you couldn't do but because of an outside force. Imagine how that might make you feel and realise that they are frustrated, not with you specifically, but the interface. Maybe that makes them a little easier to deal with, I hope, and the as sincere as possible when you explain about something needing to be fixed. If you hear standard, "Thank you for your feedback." It makes you wonder how seriously you are being taken. It helps.

SAMBHAVI CHANDRASHEKAR:

Thank you so much, Carin. I am not as entertaining a storyteller as Carin is. Get ready to get serious. I will talk to you about two sides I have seen, one as an inclusive educator using technology to make learning accessible to students across a range, which includes disabilities and as an accessibility professional, supporting the making of technology to help instructors and learners.

Since 2013, I have been teaching in a Master of Design program in Inclusive Design at OCAD University in Toronto. This Inclusive Design program, as you might easily guess, teaches how to design inclusively. Let's call it the MDesID program. This program is run under the umbrella of the Inclusive Design Research Centre or IDRC, functioning within OCAD University.

The MDesID program does not merely teach inclusive design; the program itself is inclusive, in the sense that the recruitment process ensures that students in every cohort represent a very broad range of diversity.

In every class, there are students who are blind and use a screen reader or who have low vision and use a screen magnifier; who are deaf and use sign language or who are hard of hearing and use an induction loop system; who use a wheel chair for a variety of reasons; who have a range of learning disabilities; who have other invisible disabilities; who are from other countries with education systems quite different from ours; who use English as second language; who just passed their undergrad; who just retired at the end of their career. We even had babies being born during the program: four students so far, of whom two were women. In short, diversity is the hallmark of every single cohort of the MDesID program; and the associated technology needs are indeed unique.

There is also diversity among students from a geographical angle. Those who have the time and ability to commute come to class in person. Those who are working full time, or are unable to commute, or live far away in another city, or another country join the class via video

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conferencing in real time. Some students live in countries right across the globe, such as Korea and China. They cannot attend the class while it is happening and so require a recording of it to watch asynchronously later. Serving this level of diversity requires flexibility. Such flexibility is possible only with the use of a variety of technologies

The MDesID program thus adopts a hybrid structure, where learning happens both in-class and online through a learning management system, or LMS. Students, therefore, have the choice and freedom to interact with their assistive technology and also seamlessly attend a class either in person or online in real-time through video conferencing. Some students who are working full time sometimes attend an hour of class in person during lunch time, and the rest remotely through the computer at their work place. While returning from class to work, they continue to listen in by connecting through their mobile phone. Apparently, a number of technologies need to work together to make this possible. Seamless integration of technologies is a must for this hybrid model to succeed.

As defined by IDRC, inclusive design goes beyond disability to consider the full range of human diversity with respect to ability, language, culture, gender, age and other forms of human difference. The MDesID program adopts Inclusive Design Thinking (IDT) as a philosophy that works along three dimensions, and I will explain how I implemented each of those dimensions in my teaching.

The three dimensions are: Recognizing diversity and uniqueness; Creating inclusive processes and tools; and Enabling broader beneficial impact.

Here's how I practice the first dimension of recognizing diversity and uniqueness. I provide materials to students who sought accommodation through the Centre for Students with Disabilities in the required format within the time specified. I use multiple means to present and reach out learning content such as emailing class material a week in advance; posting them on the LMS; discussing the material in class; making a recording of the class available on the LMS; keeping a discussion forum alive and active around each week's topic,; and doing even more, depending on the topic. I encourage self-knowledge and self-determination in students to formulate their own learning goals within the overall course or program goals and enable them to work towards achieving those goals to provide a one-size-fits-one learning experience. Presentation of learning materials in a manner that reaches everyone is crucial to my teaching.

Here's how I practice the second dimension of creating inclusive processes and tools. Students who are in-class as well as those online participate equally in the class proceedings and I pay attention to both, trying to include everyone in the discussions. I make students in the class act as proxy for those online while doing exercises. I use material directly from the LMS in class and

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have students write into it. As a teacher, I need to multi-task to make sure that all these processes happen in parallel. Technology needs to work perfectly to make this possible. I also provide choice of format for expression to students in submitting their assignments by allowing them, where relevant, to create what they feel most comfortable with such as a document or presentation or video or infoviz. Unique action and expression become possible for all students through such inclusive processes and tools.

Here's how I practice the third dimension of enabling broader beneficial impact. I turn accessibility accommodations that are required to be made for one or more students into an opportunity to transform the materials/delivery into a format more easily receivable by all. To give an example, when I had a student using screen magnification software, I designed the colour contrast and contextual positioning of materials on slides and notes in such a way as to make learning easier for the entire class. I find that all effort I put in as a teacher into meeting diverse learning styles and needs only help make my teaching more useful to the entire class.

The MDesID program promotes and supports a vibrant community of inclusive designers that includes all alumni and current students. This community keeps everyone on top of the state of the land and helps researchers find participants as well as graduates find jobs. I often brought alumni and other community members into my class to support my teaching and add credibility to what I taught. The number of learning resources and accessibility tips and tricks shared in this manner is incredible. Engagement and collaboration are the natural by products of practising this value to spread beneficial impact.

In April this year, I joined D2L as Accessibility Program Manager. This role provides unlimited opportunities to work on technology that enables education accessibility. I bring to play in this role all the experience I have as an inclusive educator to make it possible for educators out there to be able to cater to diverse groups of students and ensure their learning success. I will now tell you how the principles of inclusive design work in D2L. There are different ways we do these things. I will take two examples for each.

In practicing the first dimension of recognizing diversity and uniqueness, we enable user-preferences and personalization and we provide learner analytics to promote self-knowledge. Enabling user preferences and personalisation helps personalisation of the UI for any user, the way they want it. To begin with, our technology, irrespective of screen size or device, works well and responsively. There are preferences on the UI about whether you want an open dyslexic font or not, whether you want an HTML editor or rich text editor, when you want dialogues or pop-ups. These are different options you can set. We provide ways for the learners to learn about themselves through analytics so that information can be used by the students

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and the teachers for a number of purposes, such as providing relevant content depending on the level at which the student absorbs.

In practicing the second dimension of creating inclusive processes and tools, we help the instructor in providing feedback in multiple formats: in text or through video or other different formats. We enable multiple tools for self-expression such as Capture video recorder and story builder. We provide adaptive access options to the instructors for quiz and assignment deployment. While giving an assignment or a quiz, it is possible to make different options for different students, including no time limit at all, specific time limits, grace periods, late acceptance, etc. As an example of inclusive processes and tools, we integrated the TinyMCE content accessibility checker into our system to facilitate creation of accessible learning material by teachers.

In practicing the third dimension of enabling broader beneficial impact we provide the ReadSpeaker tool for reading aloud and the story builder tool for visual expression. ReadSpeaker allows the content to be read aloud by students who prefer oral inputs. Story Builder allows use of visuals for building assignments by those who prefer visual outputs. These are meant for students with different learning styles. However, these tools are popular with most students, thus increasing their impact.

Whoever of you is from the education field would have kind of heard Universal Design for Learning or UDL while I was talking about inclusive design dimensions. UDL has three principles, that is to provide multiple ways of presentation, multiple means of action and expression, and multiple avenues for engagement and collaboration. I want you to see the connection between inclusive design practice and universal design for learning.

Recognising diversity and uniqueness in students prompts content presentation in a variety of formats. Creating inclusive processes and tools affords students to express themselves in multiple ways. Enabling broader systemic impact happens with multiple ways of engagement and collaboration. Therefore, practising inclusive design principles promotes universal design for learning, and that is something that we at D2L believe in and practice, and we try to reach every learner through this approach.

The takeaway is for educationalists and technologists is, please practice inclusive design principles, and through that, promote universal design for learning. That is a sure way to inclusive education. I believe diversity, inclusion and accessibility actually mean these three things: diversity is to make sure there is a good mix. Inclusion is to enable that diversity, that makes to work well together. Accessibility is to provide the environment for inclusion to happen.

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With that, Carin and I are ready to take any questions.

SPEAKER:

I wondered if you could expand a little more on what you were saying about using learner analytics for the student. Can you me give an example of what that looked like from a student perspective?

CARIN HEADRICK:

I guess it would allow the instructors to see who is struggling and help them out and allow them extra materials or maybe if somebody is doing really well, they can see additional information to enrich their experience. Yeah, just sort of being able to tailor things to what people might need to make their learning more tailored, would be helpful, I guess.

SPEAKER:

Thank you for that. I loved those perspectives. Sam, a question for you – I work not in an education environment, but do you have any tips on how to promote universal design for learning in an environment which isn't an educational environment? I find that there is a lack of awareness around diversity and inclusion in government and corporate environments.

SAMBHAVI CHANDRASHEKAR:

We sell our platform to higher ed, K-12 and corporate, as well as non-profits because education does not have a strict definition. Wherever there is somebody who shares and somebody who receives, wherever there is that interface, education happens. So you are talking in terms of, maybe a training kind of environment in the government ...

SPEAKER:

How do you promote it? Because it is a working environment, the people don't always think about making inclusive educational materials and platforms.

SAMBHAVI CHANDRASHEKAR:

Creating awareness is the first step and creating a sample would be the next. It is difficult to push, I understand, but maybe resources that will promote awareness and talks to begin with. It is a difficult thing – a culture shift in an organisation, it is quite a difficult thing. I have seen systemic processes in organisations create barriers to inclusion and that cannot automatically be removed. We need to actively work towards cultural change in organisations when it comes

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to the government and their concept of learning, we need to really be proactive in trying to provide material to the people who matter, who make decisions.

SPEAKER:

Hi. I also don't work in education. I was wondering if you have any tips or ideas on how to foster an environment of feedback. I have been producing material for 10 years or so and I don't have very much contact with the actual users. There is a bit of a barrier for me. I am wondering how I create a group where I can ask people how I am doing on the technical side.

SAMBHAVI CHANDRASHEKAR:

I think what you need is community. Are you part of the open resources community? You are most welcome to the inclusive design community list. I will take your email and add you there. There are a number of people in the community who would be ready to provide feedback. Also, perhaps the learners.

CARIN HEADRICK:

I think he said he wasn't in education. You are not in the education field.

SPEAKER:

I don't have a captive audience.

CARIN HEADRICK:

Maybe you should provide a mechanism of feedback at the end of your document, let's say, their concerns, so they can send you feedback. You know what I mean? Make it easy for people to reach out and let you know. Perhaps you can provide your email address or a contact form or something like that.

DALE:

We have time for one last question, if anyone has a quick question. If not, if you would like to please join me in thanking Carin and Sambhavi for a fantastic presentation today.

SAMBHAVI CHANDRASHEKAR:

Thank you.

(Applause)

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