

What is a Print Disability?

Daniella Levy-Pinto (DLP): Hmm, let me see, this is it.

This is the “Outline Maps of the World,” in Braille.

I’ve been blind since birth.

My partner gave me this atlas in 2008. I studied international relations and he knew how important it was for me to understand the shapes of the countries. This volume gives me a very clear picture of where countries are in relation to other countries, the size and shape, the borders, and other features like mountains and rivers and oceans and lakes.

I always come back to this atlas whenever there is something important happening in the world ... like the war in Ukraine.

The title of this film is – What is a Print Disability?

My name is Daniella Levy-Pinto. I am a fair-skinned woman with long curly brown hair.

I’m the Manager of the National Network for Equitable Library Service or NNELS -- this is their website ...

NNELS and CELA – the Centre for Equitable Library Access are non-profit publicly-funded Canadian organizations that provide accessible reading services to the approximately 3 million people in Canada who have a print disability.

Print – or perceptual disabilities – are defined in the Canadian copyright Act.

According to the Act, a perceptual disability is: “a disability that prevents or inhibits a person from reading or hearing a literary, musical, dramatic or artistic work in its original format.”

I’ll let my screen reader finish the definition:

Computer voice:

(a) severe or total impairment of sight or hearing or the inability to focus or move one’s eyes,

(b) the inability to hold or manipulate a book, or

(c) an impairment relating to comprehension

DLP: The Canadian Copyright Act allows organizations like NNELS and CELA to create accessible versions of traditional print content – for example, by reproducing it in formats like Braille.

This is called “remediation.”

Remediation methods – like scanning a printed book and converting it to a digital format -- allow people with print disabilities to read using digital devices like computers or smartphones.

But this can be an expensive and cumbersome process that requires specialized skills and tools.

This is my beautiful guide dog, Angelo – taking a break, sprawled beside my desk. He is a yellow lab/golden retriever cross and helps me get around.

Assistive technologies like ...my braille typewriter ...screen readers, and audio books do help with reading.

But they do not always solve the problem of access for everyone with a print disability.

Melissa Castelloux (MC):

I really like print disability especially because also in French we don't like have a great word for print disability but I think this word like allow to contextualize disability, so mainly its not the person but like it's the enviroment, and like mainly its like the specific form of the print that disable some, some people ?

DLP: Melissa Castelloux is a student of political science and women's studies at the Université du Québec à Montréal.

MC: I'm dyslexic and discographic which means I have learning disability that's very specific to reding and writing. And I'm a light skinned woman with brown hair and black turtle necked jumper.

DLP: For people with learning disabilities, the task of decoding words and sentences – is not automatic.

MC: I would say like so called traditional reader would read their book and almost like forget. they're in front of their book. On the opposite, reading as a dyslexic, it's a bit like, if you need to think at every step you take in order to be walking somebody that have automatized the skill of walking, don't need to think in your head, the task goes almost by itself, and they have the energy to think about other things.

DLP: Melissa is an intellectual and a scholar. For her, keeping up with her readings can be exhausting.

MC: if you have to work double than most people at school and follow like a normal curriculum it means you gonna have to cut your social activity, you will have to cut sleep, ah, and especially if you're in academia and it means you need to do that for a long period of time and I'm maybe thinking of doing a Phd, so, um , I can't have this

mentality of like rushing, rushing, getting really tired because (laughs) I need to do that for a long run.

Tenesha T. Samuel (TS): I am very much a researcher, um, in the work that I do as a writer. Um, I do have to dig into a lot of documents.

DLP: This is Tenesha T. Samuel.

TS: A lot of journals, articles, essays, a lot of print content from, um, rea- other researchers who work in my field. And so, it's- it's best for me to use digital materials in order to get the information that I do need to do my work.

DLP: Tenesha is a writer, an artist, a politician, activist, and teacher. They are also a consultant on equity, diversity, and inclusion.

TS03-CLIP:

I identify as a disabled, um, visually impaired, hard of hearing, mad, queer, trans, non-binary, black individual. And, um, I do a lot of work within this space.

DLP: People with print disabilities, like Tenesha, know that there is a lot of print content out there --- material they might want or even need.

But, often, they can't get to it, because so much is still not accessible.

TS: Oh, it's so frustrating. Um, you know, --- whenever I encounter something that I know is going to be exactly what I need for a particular project, um, I feel completely blocked off from having access to knowledge, having access to what's important for me to get my work done.

MC: I do find formats that are accessible. But for instance, I ha- I have like five text to read, and I find one in audio book, and I find another in, uh, in e-pub, and another in PDF, and then another in print. Even if I find some accessible, the fact that I need to use, like, five different platform to read my book is itself quite demanding in, in terms of

like, I'm going ahead, but there's a need for kind of like an accessible ecosystem and, like, a consistency. Because this makes it hard.

DLP: In an equitable reading ecosystem – as Melissa calls it -- all the pieces, from the format of the original book -- to every link in the distribution chain – such as libraries, electronic-bookstores, websites and reading applications --- should be designed with accessibility in mind.

In such an ecosystem, content is ... “born accessible”.

That would enable ALL readers – regardless of ability – to choose the technology and the personalized display settings that work best for their own reading needs.

Ingrid Palmer (IP): I read using, um, accessibility devices, such as I, 'll use my phone, but I, I change the colour. So, I, I'll have a black background and have the letters be white so that they pop up. And then I can, zoom in really close, um, contrast is really sharp, then that makes it easier for me to read. Without that I can't, uh, read the words, and when possible, sometimes, I use a, um, a program that can read out, uh, what's on a site or on the screen for me.

IP: My name is Ingrid Palmer. I'm a black female, mom of three, grandmother of one, social justice advocate, and I'm visually impaired.

DLP: Barriers to print are very frustrating. For people like Ingrid, finding accessible material can be just as emotional.

IP: It's really exciting, and it's, you know, um, it's, it's something that you can, that you want, that you can have, and that you can manage on your own. But there are just so many avenues of in accessibility, so that when you have, just a clear route to something, um, with no inhibitions that you can access and manage on your own, it's, it's a happy day (laughing). It's something that you actually get excited about, and that feels really good. It can actually make your day.

DLP: People with print disabilities, like Ingrid and Tenesha, have a message for content creators.

TS: I would definitely encourage them to create content that can be transferred to multiple formats. From audio, to, um, let's say PDF, to, variants in language. Maybe, um, keeping academic language, um, to a minimum, just for people with, you know, different learning styles? So, I'd definitely say, um, have an open mind as to how you'd like to convey your message. It can be done in so many different ways.

Sheeza Amir SA: How would I describe myself? I have long, black, wavy hair, and round, black eyes. I'm currently smiling. I'm a student at Humber in the program Community Integration through Cooperative Education. The CICE is designed for individuals with intellectual disabilities to give students an opportunity to attend college.

DLP: The world of inclusive publishing has to address the needs of people with diverse cognitive abilities – like the poet Sheeza Amir.

SA: How would we consider disability? It is our responsibility / to stand up for ourselves. Seeing our abilities and capabilities, / are endless, our possibilities. Striving for being the best version of ourselves. We / are creating our legacy.

DLP: There are so many ways to make print content accessible – but there are also many different kinds of barriers -- such as those created by economic and political inequality.

Colette Poitras (CP): As an indigenous librarian I can tell you there are barriers. Libraries are very inherently colonial. They can be intimidating institutions for those who haven't grown up in libraries. I think that's a huge barrier.

DLP: This is Collette Poitras

CP: I think there are other ones--- like there's connectivity barriers in indigenous communities----and of course a lot of these accessible resources or, you know, require

assistive technology which also, there are costs involved with that. that are all barriers for those that are in indigenous communities.

CP: I'd actually like to start by introducing myself in an indigenous way or in the Metis way. So, I'll say [speaking Metis]. My name is Colette Poitras. I'm a white-coded Metis woman with deep roots in the Red River, Batoche and St. Paul de Metis areas, um And don't have a print disability.

DLP: Speaking as someone who does have a print disability – one that I can't hide – I value the work of librarians like Colette Poitras -- who know that disclosing a disability can sometimes be difficult.

CP04-CLIP: There are people with, with cognitive disabilities such as dyslexia or ADD which makes reading traditional print tough or Parkinson's, MS, um, and then there's physical, ah, sometimes barriers, like even carpal tunnel syndrome, um, and of course there's vision loss as well? And I speak completely as a library person but if, if library folks aren't aware just about just all of the options that there are available, um, It's hard for people to openly, sometimes, kind of identify them and kind of advocate for them I think that's were staff have a responsibility, kind of like information crusade that everybody should know about these, um, resources exist and then, once people might be more comfortable with self-declaration.

DLP: This is Adam Cohoonn – someone who IS a crusader for disability rights -- motoring around in his wheelchair in Toronto.

Adam Cohoon (AC): I am an artist, filmmaker, and tech tester. I have cerebral palsy and I have a print disability because I cannot manipulate paper to use the printed word. And because of my limited hand dexterity, I also cannot write, and um been a very slow typer. So that also affects my ability to work with the printed word.

DLP: Adam has lived with barriers most of his life. But the idea of “print disability” was new to him.

AC: And it wasn't until I actually went to a um, focus group pre-pandemic on print disabilities, that I learned that it was considered a separate disability and that I did have rights under the AODA to actually ask for that accommodation.

I regularly go to church and I still during the pandemic, still go online. But when I was going to church in person, the biggest problem I had was following along with what's called the liturgy. And those are the prayers and other things that you would recite at church because it was in a printed bulletin.

DLP: Adam can't manipulate paper, so following the liturgy on paper was tough.

At first, there was some hesitation at his church about how to go digital ... but when the Covid-19 Pandemic hit, everything moved online ... including the liturgy.

AC: But I knew that that accommodation would actually be probably be enjoyed, by a lot of people, I- I really don't think the image uh- that God really cares that a- / which way our eyes are looking, when we're reading off notes anyway.

DLP: Digital formats and assistive devices can help overcome barriers – and make the world more accessible for everyone.

But poor or careless design ... can actually make things worse.

Here's Adam Cohoon, trying to read a plaque about the public art in a Toronto Plaza.

AC: All the plaques with all the information for the pieces, are actually interlaid in the actual ground. So, it is harder for somebody like me to read on a sunny, bright day. And I wouldn't actually know where to look for it, if I wasn't purposely searching for that.

DLP: Thoughtless design like this make it difficult for people with print disabilities to participate in cultural life.

But it can also undermine essential everyday activities.

Here's Ingrid Palmer again.



IP: I've / banked at the same branch for a long time, and no matter, uh, which facility I go in, I'm very familiar, or I was, uh, with the machines. I knew what buttons to touch for whether I was doing a deposit, a withdrawal, or whether I wanted to check on the balance of my accounts or pay bills. All of that I did independently, um, without any assistance. And, one day, I went to the bank and lo and behold, they had replaced the machines with brand / new ones and / it was awful. (Laughs). Everything had changed.

DLP: The colours, the contrast, the layout – everything had changed,

IP: That's just another example of when, um, organizations upgrade, um, what they use, and they're not using a universal mindset. They're not thinking about everyone.

DLP: People with print disabilities need content creators and designers to think about -- us.

We need you to keep in mind the many ways in which the design of e-books, museum plaques, websites or digital technologies can be exclusive and disabling.

Eventually, Adam went online – and found accessible information about a favorite piece of public sculpture in a nearby park.

The piece is officially "untitled," ... but people in the neighbourhood call it "Lamposts".

AC: I love that sculpture. And, um, I like it because it actually lights up at night. What it is, is a bunch of different, um, lampposts. And they're all the different styles of different lampposts. And- And so it actually shows there is actually a variety around the city of stuff that / it is either there, or used to be around

DLP: It's that variety – the diverse ways in which people access print materials that we need content creators to be aware of.

We want you to make sure that content is accessible so that we have the freedom to work, travel and play, as Angelo and I do, during our breaks.

And because we want -- and have the right -- to participate fully in the life of our communities.

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