8. Working with students with lived experience of disability to enhance inclusive and accessible learning

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Introduction

Much work has been done in higher education to create inclusive learning environments and reduce barriers to participation for groups that have historically been excluded. People with disabilities are one such group, and although accessibility is now 'on most people's radar' in universities (Wood et al., 2014, p. 147), more work is needed to ensure staff have adequate knowledge and skills to provide accessible learning environments for all students. Unfortunately, people with disabilities continue to face ableism in the form of barriers that prevent their full participation across all levels of society, with disability rights violations ranging from violence and exploitation, to a lack of services that allow people with disabilities to have autonomy over their lives (Young & Thorne, 2023).

Ableism manifests across the university experience for students in numerous ways, such as: low participation and completion rates, higher levels of student debt than non-

disabled students, inadequate resourcing for accessibility accommodations, and frequent reporting of stigmatisation and discrimination (Dolmage, 2017, pp. 20-24). For people with disabilities to have equitable access to higher education, the development and maintenance of accessible learning environments is vital. University staff, both professional and academic, play a crucial role in fostering an inclusive culture that prioritises and provides access for people with disabilities. We define an accessible learning environment as one in which students with disabilities can learn, participate and engage without being hindered by access barriers. While there is crossover in the aims and values guiding our work with those of learning designers and educators, our position is professional staff providing learning and teaching support and guidance to academic staff. Our accessibility projects, especially those involving students, tend to happen in what is often called the 'third space', in which professionals work across the administration/academic threshold (Smith et al., 2021). In the course of this work, we have found that the process of developing effective services for staff often necessitates the input of students, who are able to provide unique insight into existing issues and collaborate with us on solutions. This informs our approach in being facilitators of existing processes, and inviting and encouraging students to be active partners in (re)shaping them.

In our experience, encouraging staff to learn about and adopt accessible practices can be a complex endeavour, yet it also offers additional opportunities to involve and empower students with lived experience of disability. Our approach follows an increasing desire within higher education to collaborate with students. Some of these approaches include **co-design**, Students as Partners (Mercer-Mapstone et al., 2017), inclusive pedagogies (Stentiford & Koutsouris, 2021) and listening to the 'student voice' (Seale, 2010). These are not

strictly methodologies, but rather flexible approaches that may significantly vary in their delivery across different institutions. These approaches typically involve a staff and student exchange or collaboration at some stage of the learning or design process, with the aim of using direct feedback from students to inform and enable a better learning experience and to enhance student life more broadly.

Our role as providers of, and advocates for, accessible learning environments and practices has concentrated our efforts on producing instructive content for staff to create and maintain such environments. In this chapter, we explore why accessibility in higher education would greatly benefit from the engagement of university staff at all levels, why collaboration with students who have lived experience of disability is essential for effective results, and we further offer advice drawn from our own experience in collaborating with students for an informative campaign and suite of resources aimed at university staff. We present our project 'Students Explain Digital Accessibility' as a case study and model for working collaboratively with students to incorporate their lived experience into accessibility advice for learning and teaching staff.

Accessibility and social justice

Accessibility comprises many different things, ranging from our legal to our social and ethical obligations. It helps to understand the historical and political context we are building on when working in accessibility.

In 1998, American author and disability rights activist James Charlton published the seminal text, *Nothing about us without us: Disability oppression and empowerment*. The title evokes

a clarion call that was beginning to gain prominence within disability rights movements worldwide, capturing the argument that people with disabilities 'know what is best for themselves and their community' (Charlton, 1998, p. 14). In over two decades since Charlton's call, the slogan 'nothing about us without us' has continued to reverberate across activist spaces, despite broader cultural attitudes often being slow to change. For us as professional staff, this framework forms the basis for our approach in advocating for accessible learning environments for students and bolsters our commitment to consultation with students who have lived experience of disability.

For all university staff involved in shaping learning experiences in higher education, inclusive principles are vital for responding to current student demographics, ensuring that curriculum remains relevant for contemporary demands, and improving the learning environment to cater for a diverse (and continuously diversifying) group of students. Beyond the university context, inclusive higher education experiences are an important factor in setting students up for success and graduation, and they contribute to building a more diverse workforce. Students living with a disability report lower rates of satisfaction with tertiary study and are more likely to drop out of university before they complete their studies (Cherastidtham & Norton, 2018; Li & Carroll, 2019). While poor learning experiences may not be the sole cause for student attrition, they are an important factor that can be improved with clear guidelines and adequate resourcing.

Inclusive practice in the context of higher education should be conceived as creating a space for learning that is effective and appropriate for all, and particularly for those who have experienced barriers to education and general social participation. The assertion that such spaces cannot genuinely exist without the involvement of, and consultation with,

students who have lived experience is relevant beyond the realms of disability rights and encompasses other marginalised groups who have historically been excluded from higher education. Additionally, while inclusive design practices respond specifically to the requirements of certain groups, in almost all cases, inclusive design holds benefits for everyone, simply by providing a wider range of options and pathways for learners to engage with educational content. This approach also fits within the framework of Universal Design, described by Jay Timothy Dolmage (2017) as a method that, when employed in the context of education, allows 'teachers to structure space and pedagogy in the broadest possible manner', a way of 'building community, building better pedagogy, building opportunities for agency' (p. 118).

In education, this framework is articulated as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Universal Design for Instruction (UDI), both of which have been shown to improve accessibility and experience of students with disabilities (Black et al., 2015). While UDL and UDI share common goals with digital accessibility, tensions exist between these approaches, namely that a 'universal' approach does not specifically address accessibility requirements or comply with recommendations for digital accessibility. UDL can provide value for students with disabilities when implemented alongside accessible practices and may reduce the need for individual accommodations (Ableser & Moore, 2018). As our work focuses on the experiences of students with disabilities, our approach is based primarily on digital accessibility practices.

Benefits of working with students with lived experience of disability

Lived experience provides unique insight

Various student experiences in the higher education sphere, whether they take place in person in a physical classroom, in digital spaces via online learning or in the wider university campus, are not necessarily designed inclusively. That is to say, often these experiences are designed to fit assumed social norms. When those doing the designing lack the lived experience of someone who does not fit these norms, crucial elements may be overlooked and present insurmountable barriers for students with disabilities. Working with students who have lived experience of disability can often reveal shortcomings that designers in any field may be completely unaware of.

Rosemarie Garland-Thomson (2011) utilises the concept of the misfit to describe the social positioning of people with disabilities in this context. In arguing for the inherent value of the misfit, Garland-Thomson states that 'the concept of misfitting as a shifting spatial and perpetually temporal relationship confers agency and value on disabled subjects at risk of social devaluation by highlighting adaptability, resourcefulness, and subjugated knowledge as potential effects of misfitting' (2011, p. 592). In developing our project, we purposefully sought out students who identified as having lived experience of disability (noting that these students may not always identify with the terms disabled or person with disabilities), anticipating that the opportunity to hear directly from them about the barriers of inaccessibility they had encountered in their studies would reveal unknown shortcomings of a learning design project.

Student agency

A positive outcome of involving students in the design process for any type of work is that it increases the likelihood that students will endorse the final product. Shelley Wright (2012) argues that 'powerful learning begins to manifest when students take responsibility and ownership for their learning when they become co-creators of their learning experience, rather than their education being something that is done to them. True student empowerment and engagement begins when we cross the threshold of co-creation' (2012). While our project was not a learning design project, this is a valuable approach for design of any element of the university experience.

The students we worked with often expressed a desire to be able to tell their teachers when they encountered problems with inaccessibility (or in some cases, for teachers to respond to and respect their accessibility requirements when they were informed of them). Our goal in the project was to act as facilitators for students and connect their messages with the staff audience – bringing into action the crossing of the threshold discussed by Wright (2012).

Accessibility is crucial

Although the students we recruited for the project were sought after for their accessibility expertise, their contributions also provided important insight into aspects of the student experience unrelated to accessibility. For example, while some members of the group required captions for their learning to be accessible, most appreciated the provision of captions and found them helpful for other reasons. In our discussions, students pointed out the ways that functions often regarded

as accessibility features provided important support for many students, and for different reasons (such as the usefulness of captions for students who speak English as a secondary language). Alt text was not only important for students with vision-related disabilities, it also provided information for students who might not be able to load images due to a poor internet connection. The benefits of accessible practices, including overall improvement of digital learning environments for anyone who uses them, form the guiding principle for our messaging on accessibility.

Our project: Students Explain Digital Accessibility

We are part of a learning and teaching support unit at the University of Technology, Sydney. As of January 2023, UTS employed 3,836 full- time equivalent staff members including casual staff, and had 44,615 enrolled students, including international students (UTS, 2023). The main UTS campus is located in Sydney's Central Business District, and courses are taught face-to-face, online and in hybrid formats.

Learning and teaching support for academics at UTS is overseen by the Institute for Interactive Media and Learning (IML), which is in the division of the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education and Students). The team consists of academic and professional staff who develop, coordinate, facilitate and advise on a range of projects and initiatives that support and improve the learning and teaching experience. The unit we are part of, the LX.lab, is housed within IML and provides direct support to academics in their learning and teaching, via face-to-face and online consultations, events and workshops, and digital content on our LX at UTS website. As well as timely support,

we also aim to upskill academics in using technologies and enhancing the learning experience.

While the LX.lab now has a dedicated Inclusive Practices team which supports and explores accessibility guidelines and assistive technologies, this was not the case when the project was carried out in 2020. Our small team consisted of a learning technologist, a content officer and a media officer. As our experience shows, a specialist role in accessibility is not necessarily required for this kind of project.

This project was developed in response to our observations of student experiences of inaccessible learning environments, and a lack of resources for staff to consult when preparing their subject materials. We had also observed that staff inexperienced with accessibility barriers lacked an understanding of the significant impacts for students. These observations were made in workshops we held, in staff requests for support, in our communication with academics from faculties across the university, and most apparently in requests for accessible alternatives and accommodations from students registered with the UTS Accessibility Service.

Previous training sessions with staff were well-received when we demonstrated an example of poor user experience by showing how a screen reader would interact (or fail to interact) with content that had not been formatted in an accessible way. Colleagues expressed interest in seeing more examples of the different ways that assistive technology users interact with content.

These responses indicated to us that for staff to understand the significance of unmet accessibility requirements for students, they needed a more direct explanation and description of the impacts from a user perspective. While we had been aware of the gap in supportive resources for staff around accessibility, the effectiveness of showing the impacts of inaccessibility from

a user perspective reinforced the importance of ensuring that the voices of those most affected should be included in filling that gap. In arguing for the concept of 'nothing about us without us', Charlton (1998) states that the slogan forces 'cultural systems to incorporate people with disabilities into the decision-making process and to recognize that the experiential knowledge of these people is pivotal in making decisions that affect their lives' (p. 25). With our aim to provide clear and comprehensive resources that we hoped would shape the practice of staff, specifically by bringing their attention to the real-world impact of accessibility, it was both an ideal opportunity and essential to work alongside students with lived experience.

Using a co-design approach

Co-design is a collaborative approach to design. It is about designing with, not for, people. It brings the expertise of the designers (or facilitators) together with the expertise of people with lived experience to create and learn about something. Co-design can be adapted and used in many different contexts, for example product design, urban planning, healthcare, technology and software development, social innovation and activism, and education – in short, anywhere that design is being undertaken to create something.

Co-design can be adapted to these different contexts, because it is not a set process. According to McKercher (2020), 'co-design is about how we are being (our mindsets), what we are doing (our methods) and how our systems embrace the participation of people with lived experience (social movements)'. McKercher sets out four key principles for co-design:

- Share power: It is important that lived experience participants are able to make decisions in the co-design process, and that they are not just there in a consultative capacity.
- Prioritise relationships: It is important to build trust and create a safe space so that everyone can bring their authentic self to the process.
- Use participatory means: It is important that lived experience participants are actively engaged and are partners during the process.
- Build capability: It is important that facilitators enable and encourage the participants to be able to engage with the process. 'Everyone has something to teach and something to learn' – and that goes for lived experience participants and the facilitators as well.

The *Students Explain Digital Accessibility* video series is an example of co-design, as we were collaboratively designing the videos together. We shared power with the students, by asking them to write the script based on their own lived experiences. We prioritised relationships, creating a safe space where we listened and valued the experiences of our students. We used participatory methods to ensure they were actively contributing to the process. And finally, we were able to build capacity – both of the students, by teaching them how to create video content, write scripts, write blogs and present on camera, and ourselves because we were able to learn a lot from them about accessible content, which was one of the most rewarding experiences as facilitators.

Our process

There is no set way to do co-design. However, there are several key considerations for implementing a co-design project. In

this section we detail the key stages required for a successful co-design process, using the *Students Explain Digital Accessibility* video series as an example.

The key stages for the creation of *Students Explain Digital Accessibility* were:

- planning and setting clear objectives
- recruiting participants
- creating a safe space
- collaborating and designing
- getting feedback.

Planning and setting clear objectives

It is important to have an idea of the goals you are aiming to achieve from the beginning so that you can:

- streamline decision-making by having a clear direction and focus
- align all stakeholders' expectations so that everyone is on the same page
- set your target audience so you can take a user-centred approach
- develop an evaluation strategy to measure if you are successful.

For *Students Explain Digital Accessibility*, our objective was to create a suite of videos targeting academics and learning and teaching staff to build a better understanding of the importance of accessibility in digital learning environments. To do this, we knew we wanted to recruit a number of students with lived experience of disability to help us develop the

content and appear in the videos to demonstrate how they are impacted by inaccessible content.

To help communicate this and ensure that the project team was on the same page, we developed a project brief. In our project brief we articulated the overarching principles of our project:

Extract from *Students Explain Digital Accessibility* project brief:

Our project is guided by two overarching principles. The first is a slogan often associated with international disability rights movements, 'Nothing About Us Without Us', which declares that the structural inequities produced by disability oppression cannot be dismantled without the involvement of those with lived experience (Charlton, 1998, p. 3). The alignment of our project with this statement necessitates the involvement of the people who are most severely affected by the issue that we seek to address, being students with disabilities, and positions their voices and experiences as the most essential component of the project. Our second guiding principle, which we often employ in our own accessibility training for academics, is that accessibility benefits all, is critical for some, and should be recognised as a tool for enhancing digital learning environments. This stance is well supported in scholarship on inclusive/universal design (Gilbert, 2019, p. 25).

By setting out the objectives and principles at the beginning, we were able to make decisions easily, provide clear instructions for the students we worked with and map out our project from beginning to end.

Recruiting participants

Compensation for participation

McKercher (2020) argues that in an authentic co-design process, 'co-designers must be recognised for their time and not coerced into volunteering'.

Students should always be paid for work they do, especially students from marginalised groups like those with lived experience of disability. Students should only be involved in projects when they can be appropriately compensated.

For the *Students Explain Digital Accessibility* we originally applied for a UTS Social Impact Grant in 2020. These are $5,000 grants offered annually and administered through the Centre for Social Justice & Inclusion to support researchers and practitioners at UTS to maximise their contribution to positive social change.

While our grant submission was unsuccessful (in part because the work we were proposing was best covered by available institutional funding rather than that particular grant program), we were able to secure funding through the Centre for Social Justice & Inclusion via the Access & Inclusion Plan. This demonstrates that it is worth pursuing accessibility and inclusion projects through multiple avenues and teams should not be discouraged by initial failure – in short, do not give up.

Some ideas for finding funding include:

· small grant programs either within your institution or community grants (check your local council) and
· partnering with other units or organisations that have similar aims as your project.

Writing inclusive expression of interest/job advertisements

It is important to be mindful of appropriate language when you are crafting the job advertisement or expression of interest for your co-design project. This will be the first impression of the project and project team for the person with lived experience, and it will be more effective and trustworthy for potential applicants if recruitment information is written inclusively, with clear expectations set out for the role. To make the process positive and productive for your co-design participants, or students, you need to create a safe space for them to be able to share their own experiences. This starts with the language you use when you are recruiting them, so it is important that you set the correct tone and use person-first language.

Some tips for structuring the expression of interest/job advertisement for your participants include:

- Use person-first language, such as 'person with a disability' rather than 'disabled person', as some people do not identify as being 'disabled'. Appropriate language may differ depending on the context or the people you are working with. People who have the same disability or medical condition might prefer different language, so it is best to start with person-first language or ask people their preference.
- Start with the context of the project and the types of lived experience you need to fulfil the overall objectives of the project.
- Set the expectations of the role beyond their lived experience. For example, have criteria for the person that include the types of lived experience the project requires in addition to other skills or experiences they will need. For example: Will they need to collaborate? Will they need to

be able to share their experiences? Will they need to learn new skills?

- Include the remuneration information and how the successful candidates will be compensated for their time and expertise.
- Include a position description so people are clear on the tasks that are going to be required of them.
- Do not ask people to disclose any medical or personal information. It is none of your business. Even if you need someone with specific lived experience, outline what types of experiences you are looking for, and then ask the candidates to tell you why they would be suitable for the role. This will allow them to disclose as much information as is relevant and/or they are comfortable with.

For example, for the *Students Explain Digital Accessibility* videos in the job advertisement, where we were looking for our Digital Accessibility Ambassadors, we outlined the project thus:

> The LX.lab is looking for current UTS students, with lived experience of disability, to become Digital Accessibility Ambassadors. This is a paid, short-term role to assist the LX.lab to create video resources on digital accessibility for academics across UTS.

We were clear that we were looking for students with experience or some familiarity with using assistive technology, or lived experience of disability, and who had some knowledge of digital access requirements and accommodations. However, they also needed to be capable of working collaboratively, of reflecting on and sharing experiences and opinions, and be willing to be the voice/talent/narrator for video content and to offer feedback and critique on work.

It is also important that you make sure that the recruitment process is accessible for your potential participants, so make

sure you ask them if they have any access requirements. Be clear that this is to ensure they have an accessible experience and that the information is not going to be used to inform recruitment decisions.

Privacy is another big part of recruiting people with lived experience. Not all people with disabilities want to disclose details of their conditions or whether they have a disability, and it is vital to respect and understand people's wishes in these circumstances.

Sourcing participants

When the time comes to source your participants, it is helpful to partner with a team or organisation that helps support people with disabilities to help spread the word. In our experience, people in these types of teams/organisations are happy to share information about paid opportunities.

For this project, we were supported by the university's Accessibility Services team who are the central contact point for all students living with one or more disabilities, or ongoing medical or mental health conditions. For *Students Explain Digital Accessibility*, we were able to share our job advertisement for our Digital Accessibility Ambassadors with the Accessibility Services team to send out to students who are registered with the service. We also shared it with the Careers Team, in case there were students with lived experience of disability who were not registered.

Depending on your context, recruitment might look different. If you work in the tertiary sector, you could ask whether your in-house accessibility support staff are able to assist you with distributing job advertisements. If you do not have an in-house accessibility team that you could partner with, you could look

into organisations that help support people with lived experience of disabilities. Some Australia-wide organisations include:

- Australian Network on Disability
- Deaf Australia
- Hearing Australia
- Neurodiversity Hub
- Vision Australia.

Creating a safe space

An effective co-design experience requires that all your participants feel psychologically safe, so that they are able to bring their authentic selves and collaborate and engage freely, without the fear of judgement. In order to do that, you need to prioritise relationships with your participants (one of the principles of our co-design approach). This includes giving your participants the space to be heard, and genuinely listening to them.

Some other considerations to be mindful of include:

- modelling inclusive practices (beyond accessibility)
- implementing inclusive practices and everyone's access requirements
- structuring sessions in a way to encourage collaboration.

Modelling inclusive practices (beyond accessibility)

People's lives and experiences are intersectional, and so it is

important to model inclusive practices outside of accessibility, while also considering the ways in which intersecting identities can affect a student's accessibility requirements. For example, an Acknowledgement of Country that recognises the traditional owners of the land on which you are holding your sessions is generally a respectful gesture (particularly in an Australian context, though this can also be appropriate in other locations). You can also be inclusive of LGBTQIA+ participants, and if you are comfortable to announce your own pronouns, include pronouns on name tags or on the online platform you are using like Zoom, provide opportunities for participants to specify their own pronouns, and ensure that you use the correct pronouns when communicating with participants.

Implementing inclusive practices

Before the session:

- Create accessible workshop materials.
- Share documents and slides beforehand to give people time to prepare; especially if they use assistive technology, it is good for them to have a copy that they can use with their assistive technology.
- Ensure the room and facilities are accessible, e.g., if you have students who use wheelchairs or other mobility aids.
- Turn on captions (this can be useful in hybrid, face-to-face and online sessions).

During the session:

- Use a microphone for hearing augmentation and to enhance sound clarity.
- Give participants multiple ways of engaging with the session (e.g., by writing/typing as well as verbal).

- Provide opportunities for people to reflect individually before discussing in smaller groups.
- Schedule regular breaks during the session and encourage people to take breaks whenever they need.
- Narrate what is on the screen. Do not assume everyone can see what is happening on your screen and describe essential visual content.
- Provide clear instructions, with unambiguous, specific questions.

Implement access requirements for all participants

Once you have asked participants about access requirements that might impact their participation, take the time to make sure that these requirements are met.

If you know that someone is using assistive technology, make sure you adjust the technology you are using so it will work for all participants. You can also make sure that in their group they have a scribe and/or reader, and that they can also read other people's responses (it will not be enough to only assist with input of information; they will also need to know about other participant contributions to be able to fully participate).

Getting feedback and sense-checking with participants

As co-design is about designing with and not for, it is important that participants are given the opportunity to provide feedback on the final product/service/video that is created.

The structure of the Students Explain Digital Accessibility co-design process

We ran three collaborative sessions where we as facilitators were able to learn from the students, in addition to providing opportunities for them to learn new skills and connect with one another. The following list shows how we structured the sessions and phases of the project:

- Collaborative session one: responding to the accessible content practices
- Project team: content planning
- Collaborative session two: script- writing
- Individual: script- writing and check-ins
- Individual: filming
- Project team: editing
- Collaborative session three: feedback and blog- writing workshop
- Individual: blog-writing
- Launch event

Collaborative session one: Responding to the accessible content practices

During the first session, we ran an icebreaker activity to ensure that our five Digital Accessibility Ambassadors were introduced and felt comfortable working together.

We then provided context for the type of work we do in the LX.lab and our proposed plan for the videos. As we were intending to put the videos on the LX at UTS website, alongside our accessible content practices, we provided participants with an overview of each of the content practices. We then asked

them to individually draw on their own experiences, explicitly stating that there were no wrong answers and that they should not feel pressured to come up with answers if they were not sure or did not have any personal experience with a particular practice. This was completed in a shared Google doc.

After allowing ten minutes for individual work and reflection on each accessible practice, we then discussed it as a wider group. This provided the students with multiple ways of engaging in the session, in addition to having time to collect their own thoughts and ideas and prepare for the group discussion.

This section created space for participants to share their expertise based on their own lived experience. We were there to learn from them, to create a safe space and facilitate the conversation. Listening and valuing participants' experiences is a key task for a facilitator.

Project team: Content planning

After the Digital Accessibility Ambassadors shared their thoughts and opinions on the accessible content practices, it was our opportunity to provide our expertise in video creation and online content. The project team used responses from the students to plan and structure the videos – their expertise also helped us to refine our scope. For example, we removed a video from our plans when we found that the topic did not resonate with the participants.

During this time, we created our script template that would remain consistent across the series. This template, or shell, was used as scaffolding for the students to articulate their own experiences.

Collaborative session two: Script-writing

During our second collaborative session we shared the template script with the students. We provided advice on script-writing and allocated time in the session for individual work on scripts. The participants made decisions and were in control of the content of the scripts that would be used in the final videos.

The second session was also adjusted to meet changed access requirements, as one participant needed to attend online. This introduced us to the process of creating an accessible hybrid meeting. While our set-up was not particularly well-suited for the purpose, we were able to make adequate changes to ensure that accessibility requirements of both the online participant and those attending in person were met. Our lesson from the experience was that it is always worth taking the time to explore different ways of providing accessibility.

Learnings from our collaborative sessions

As discussed earlier in this chapter, people with lived experience of disability have insight that can only be gained through that lived experience. While we had knowledge of generally accepted accessibility standards, online learning during the COVID-19 pandemic had revealed further barriers that had perhaps not been fully explored before this time. Some of the issues raised in our discussions throughout the project were:

- the importance of clear, good- quality audio in both recorded lectures and online classes facilitated via platforms like Zoom and Microsoft Teams.
- a typically low usage of captions and transcripts that

impacted learning, not only for students with hearing loss but also for students living with other types of disabilities.
- a feeling of disconnection and lack of engagement with online learning.
- disorganised file management in digital learning management systems, which led to issues in finding tasks and details of assessments.
- poorly formatted documents lacking in readability.

Collaborative session three: Feedback and blog-writing workshop

After filming and editing were completed, we ran our final collaborative session with the students. This involved showing them rough cuts of the videos, soliciting feedback from the group and ensuring that we were representing them in accordance with their personal preferences. This is an important part of the process and is a way to share power with your participants.

During this session we also ran a blog-writing workshop, so that the students could write their own blog posts to promote the video series. This provided further opportunity to amplify their voices and be able to tell their stories to the learning and teaching community in a more flexible format.

Student Digital Accessibility Ambassador blogs

- 'For me, accessibility adjustments equal success', by Ashley Willcox
- Stop speaking into a black abyss, turn on your video, by Bettina Liang
- To the student that's hesitant to disclose, by Elham Hafiz
- Creating accessible and comfortable learning

environments for accessibility students, by Jatin Dhanji
- Why inclusive environments are important for learning, by Jackson Tait

Other ways to enhance inclusive learning

Nothing beats working with people with lived experience and being able to fully immerse yourself in a co-design process – we cannot stress enough the richness that comes from working with people with lived experience. However, it is understandable that not all projects can be given the resourcing (both time and money) for co-design. Co-design may also not be appropriate for all-inclusive practice projects, depending on circumstances like project length, expected output, stakeholders and other factors. Consider the suggestions below as alternative ways to create and engage with accessibility practice:

Familiarise yourself with accessibility standards

Education providers have a legal obligation to take reasonable steps to enable students with a disability to participate in education on the same basis as a student without a disability. The two key state and federal legislation that you need to know about are:

- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth)
- *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (Cth)

For learning designers, this includes designing inclusive and accessible learning online learning environments.

The Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) are the

international standards when it comes to web accessibility. They are important for learning designers to know. They can be overwhelming when you first encounter them, so if you are new to accessibility you can start with the basics like the UTS Accessible Content Practices.

Try using assistive technology, or your keyboard only to access content

If you have designed a learning experience for students, try accessing it using a screen reader, other type of assistive technology or just your keyboard. While testing with a native user will provide more value, having first-hand experience can give you a better understanding of how they operate.

Screen readers, especially those designed for people with low vision, tend to require a steep learning curve, but they will provide you with a better insight for designing. A user experience that works with a screen reader is likely to work for all your students. NVDA is a free screen reader for Windows, and Mac has many native accessibility features.

Use accessibility checkers and simulators (but don't rely on them alone)

Many programs have an in-built accessibility checker. It is important to use these tools in order to capture accessibility issues that can be checked programmatically, such as missing alternative text on images, colour contrast issues or heading levels not being used sequentially. However, they cannot understand your purpose or context so they will not be able to determine if your alternative text is meaningful, or whether you

have structured your document appropriately using heading levels.

There are also a number of simulators available that can simulate different types of disabilities like colour vision deficiency, which can be helpful in selecting colour combinations.

Find information and content from people with lived experience

If you cannot work directly with students, there is still an abundance of online content created by people with lived experience. Seek out, read, and learn more.

Conclusion

Accessibility is a vital part of the big picture of inclusivity and diversity. All people working in higher education play an important role in advocating for and improving accessibility, and ensuring that the voices of people with lived experience of disability are included in planning and design processes makes this practice more effective. Learning designers are particularly well positioned to ensure that accessibility is considered from the outset, and is embedded consistently in university learning experiences. We encourage all learning and teaching practitioners to take the time to learn about accessible practices, look for opportunities to include students with lived experience and make accessibility a permanent priority in their practice.

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