**BRG – CAST\_0001 – Module 05\_Adult Panel \_Transcript**

**Amanda:**

Just like with the students, we wanted to bring the adult participate together to have a conversation as a group. This next segment you're about to watch is an engaging and dynamic discussion about accessibility and the future of technology. After watching, we will transition and hear directly from our panelists. But before I go, I want to remind each of you to keep sharing your questions and comments in the chat. Ensure your voice is heard. And remember: never silence your roar.

**Lori:**

I thought it was really important to be involved because our mission at the Institute for Community Inclusion at UMass Boston is to make sure that everyone is included regardless of their ability or disability. And so for me, when I'm developing technology for a student or instructional technology for teachers, it's so important to make sure that we look at it through the lens of Universal Design for Learning and that we make sure that students and teachers have access regardless of the programming.

**Simon:**

I think it's important to be part of the project because the topic is one that has been largely ignored or certainly underserved, especially in the areas of special education. So although technology is able to do wonderfully sophisticated things, it seems that people who have various forms of different abilities are often left out in terms of the designs that are necessary to help people to be able to access those environments.

**Wendy:**

Why am I so interested in this project? Because the world is full of wonderfully diverse people. However, not everyone is on equal footing yet. I look forward to continuing my work to reduce disparities and fill the gaps, For example, to ensure that everyone receives the same information, whether it be through ASL, or the same information, through captioning or through other languages or modalities. And what is a bonus of this work is technology, which we can develop with the goal of reducing inequalities and ensuring equal access for everyone.

**Jon:**

For me, it was important to be involved in this project because you guys are working with tech producers. You guys are working with big names in technology. And I and my students use technology every single day. We use technology, both that is specifically designed for blindness and exceptionalities. And we also use technologies more universal like the iPhone or video game platforms or things like that. So for me, it was important because this directly impacts what my students and I do every single day inside and outside of the school. And I just thought it would be a good chance to get our voices heard

**Wendy:**

I'd say let's start with the past. When I was young, captions were not available on TV. At that time, I would watch a black and white TV and my parents refused to buy the new color TV. They waited until Sears became the first store selling a TV with captions. Once we bought that, it was a totally new experience. And I felt that there was a sense of belonging there, which was amazing. So it's so important to feel that sense of belonging and remain connected. It's neat that so many things improved afterwards. So when I think of the word accessibility, I think about how to enhance relationships between different, diverse people and ensure that they continue to be involved.

**Jon:**

So for us, isolation is a big issue. One of the things that we said kind of tongue in cheek is that COVID is one of the worst things that could have happened. But there's a silver lining. You know, one of the best things that could have happened is that it's increased use of technology. We've had to. So using things like Zoom or Microsoft Teams or different things, my students and I were able to get in touch to do assignments. We were also able to communicate and have social time and to just really keep in touch and, you know, expand or expand our world a little bit. One thing that we also discussed, Amanda, was how some of my students who have residual vision will play video games, and even my students with blindness will play video games like text adventure games, or some games that are designed for the blind or some games that just have different salient features. And how video games, especially for secondary students, really serve as a social mechanism because when you have something like a social event or a sleepover or something, there's always seems to be two things pizza and video games around which people socialize. Yeah, technology is a big factor in how we socialize and how we connect to one another, I think.

**Lori**:

It's really fairness. It's not leaving that one student behind who might have a cognitive disability or hearing impairment or visual impairment. It's making sure that every single student or every single individual is having the same access for each other. So that they can all dream big, that they can all have the same experiences regardless of that ability or disability that they have. Well, in my life, I work with, you know, students and teachers. And so accessibility to me is to make sure that when I'm teaching students that I include them using accessible technology so that all students can access materials, whether they have a print disability or they have a hearing impairment or you know, autism, whatever they might have as a student with a disability. But also teachers on a higher level. You know, I do a lot of training on Universal Design for Learning and making sure that they understand that if you include these accessible features with alt text and you know, teach text to speech and speech to text and turning on closed captioning and using those kinds of resources, that they're not only meeting the needs of that one student that might need an accommodation, but they are meeting the needs of everyone, regardless of they're disclosing whether they have a need for an accommodation.

**Jon:**

For me, as somebody who's, you know, relatively young, it's been important for going to school, being able to go through college, being able to go through graduate school, being able to do that when, you know, traditional 12 point font or less books or even 24 point or less are too small for you to be able to read. Having access to large print, having access to inverted text, to braille and to other accommodations. Make it to where you're able to access media that you just simply wouldn't have been able to access. Or in the past, you know, somebody might have had to have read to one that they would have had to have received human read aloud for so I think having access to those materials have been helpful. And then also just moving, being independent, moving four hours away from my family for a job, using things like Google Maps, with accessibility features to be able to navigate independently or being able to look up bus schedules and being up being able to travel independently. You know, I rely so much on my... if not my cane, my cellphone while I'm traveling. So, yeah, for a number of... like being independent it's been very helpful. It wouldn't be the same without it.

**Wendy:**

Everyone wants to participate in society in general. Maybe as part of their job or their career, or maybe the person wants to be promoted in their future. How are you able to enable them to move up in their journey? For example, maybe a supervisor decides to send someone to a professional development conference. Prior to attending the conference, deaf and hard of hearing people historically have to request for interpreters or real time captioning in advance. And then they have to select which workshops they're going to, make a list, communicate with the captionist and the interpreter, and make sure that the presenters PowerPoint slides are sent in advance. There's a lot of preparation to do, and then they still have to fly to the conference, get there and follow the exact schedule because they have pre coordinated services. There's a lot of procedures that deaf and hard of hearing people have to do on their own. So many people don't realize the work that goes into this. So the use of technology such as smart glasses, being able to see the Real-Time Interpreter just in the corner of your eye while the interpreter works from home, or the same concept applies for real time captionist, means that you're able to plan on going to this professional development seminar and you're just able to have this more seamless, fluid experience. There's less things that come up unexpectedly. So that's another example of how important it is to have accessibility in everyone's lives.

**Simon:**

And one of the things that I'm very aware of is that although it's not typically thought of an accessibility support tool, I now have to wear glasses pretty much all my waking hours. And without these glasses, I would find it very difficult to navigate my environment. I wouldn't be able to read, I wouldn't be able to drive. In general, I wouldn't be able to see very well, which would have a profound impact on my life. And I realize that glasses are just a very basic technology. And today, with digital technologies, we're able to create all sorts of environments that support people and their ability to navigate the world. And one of the things that really excites me is that we're really still in the infancy of accessibility. It's only been going for a few years. And what is very exciting is to say, well, what's going to happen in ten years or 20 years or 30 years? The first thing that students when they met me mentioned was, “you know, you have to look closely at the screen just like I do, or you use a cane just like I do, or you use similar software. You hold the iPad from a similar angle as is the way I do”. So I think just seeing that you have things in common and seeing you as a role model. I live in a very small town where my residential school is set. I have my own apartment. I do my own daily living tasks, like, you know, going to the bank, getting groceries, etc.. And students see that and they comment upon it. I mean, sometimes students even come to where I live when they're doing their orientation mobility training. And they say, you know, “I hope that I'm like that one day” or “I hope that I'm able to do what you're doing”. And I mean, I don't think there's anything special about me, but I do hope that I can show students you know, you can do what we can give you the tools we can to equip you with the training, with the braille materials, with the technology, with the traveling skills. Because our population it is real, as most estimates show, that there's about 70% of blind, visually impaired people who are unemployed. And I want to show my students it doesn't have to be the case. And there are opportunities out there, but you have to learn to use the tools that you have. I think continuing to make accessibility something that's built in and something that is out of the box. One of the things I still find to be challenging for myself and for other students is oftentimes, for instance, you get a new device you go through a couple introduction, introductory pages, you have to set up the device. So and usually it's not until at the very end of the setup process that you are able to start putting in your, you know, modifications and get your device set up. You get to the home screen and then you can go to settings and then you can get the accessibility. But before that, you're even trying to get the language setup. You're trying to get the Wi-Fi network hooked in, but just trying to make sure that, you know, the whole user experience is seamless. Because when I have to take my phone or my device and put it under a digital magnifier, under athird party device, again, that makes me feel like I am being a little bit left out.

**Simon:**

If I were around designers and developers, I would want them to be able to understand, first of all, the needs of people who have different types of abilities. And then secondly, to be able to understand what is it technology can do to support those needs because there's a tremendous amount that can be done with existing technologies to create more accessible environments.

**Jon:**

One of the things I think about is when one is becoming a teacher of the visually impaired or some sort of other vision specialist, a common practice, a common experience is to go under sleep shade, that is to simulate being blind or to wear vision simulator goggles. You know, we'll have goggles that are sort of blurred to simulate lower visual acuity or they might have splotches on them to emulate a loss of visual field. And doing that, even for myself already with significant visual impairment going under the sleep shade experience, you know, losing my vision totally for two hours or more definitely made a big impact on me. Seeing, you know, considering how would I use my phone, how would I go about navigating even around my house, let alone, you know, within my community? So definitely, you know, it's good to get the perspectives of the people with exceptionalities themselves, but also to try to see for yourself, you know, “how would I navigate my phone without my eyesight or if I had, you know, no access to auditory cues or other things that so many take for granted”?

**Lori:**

I think that you can solve some of these accessibility issues by making sure that your program works on all devices, not just app based for one device, like a like a like an iPod. I mean, an iPhone, look at me, I felt like I'm aging myself. Like an iPhone or a Google tablet or something like that. Just make sure that it's universal and you can access it through everything. I also would recommend that you use the most up to date programing code so that it can work with screen readers and different technologies that are out there right now and be open for the future. And try them with students who have disabilities. Don't just, you know, try it through a web based, you know, checklist. Actually use people who have different kinds of needs and make sure it works with them. And if it doesn't, you know, develop, redevelop it, redesign it, and make sure when you redesign it, that the student or the person who's using the technology has access to it. And then you can think about all of those needs upfront. And you won't have to reprogram later, which is costly.

**Wendy:**

Here at the university, we're fortunate to have a large population of deaf and hard of hearing students, which is really neat. Meaning their career opportunities are where they will become future contributors. You know, we're really educating them to become future researchers. And when they become researchers, they're considered underrepresented researchers, meaning that we're growing the population of minority researchers, unlike you see in many communities everywhere else. And another thought is that we're training deaf and hard of hearing students to become software developers. To increase the number of people with those technical skills. Then they will go out and train future software developers. It's like sending them out already and inculturated within their native language and already knowing what the experience of the design process should be like. And so we're increasing the pipeline of those developers who are underrepresented in the workforce. And they also have expertise on accessibility already. They're able to then broaden the knowledge of their future colleagues I would like to add one comment regarding the design process. Instead of having multiple iterations and back and forth to correct issues, even better would be to make sure to include feedback directly from the communities in the very beginning before going further in the process. This will reduce the number of unnecessary issues and steps. It's important to start thinking about including those accessibility features right away as the design has started instead of in later stages.

**Jon:**

I really feel like the technology has leveled the playing field in a way, in a way where it would have been more challenging back even 20 years ago. Because, you know, frankly, the communication is so important in the air in which we live.

**Simon:**

I have two specific pieces of advice for people who want to learn more about accessibility. One involves understanding the needs of people with disabilities, and the other involves understanding the potential of technology to be able to create more accessible environments. The first thing that I did that really opened my eyes to the needs of people with disabilities or different types of abilities was to go to a conference that displayed an enormous breadth of hardware technologies that are available for people with disabilities. And it just blew me away. I had no idea that these technologies, these hardware technologies, these assistive technologies existed. The second thing that I did was to get involved in a committee on campus. I don't know why I was asked to join the committee, but the committee was all about accessibility for the students at Penn State. And one of the really important things that I learned about them were the WCAG Guidelines the WCAG Guidelines, which have a wealth of recommendations for designers and developers on how to design and develop accessible environments to make educational materials accessible to all.

**END**