

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Hello. Welcome to You Got This!, a podcast about teaching and learning and pivoting to digital for the whole TRU community. I'm your host Brenna Clarke Gray, Coordinator of Educational Technologies. This podcast is a project of your friends over at Learning Technology and Innovation. We're housed within Open Learning, but we support the whole campus community. I record this podcast in Tk'emlups te Secwepemc within the unceded traditional lands of Secwepemcú'ecw, where I hope to learn and grow in community with all of you.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Today, I'm thinking about accessibility from a whole bunch of different perspectives. Let's just get into it. I was in a meeting last week. Someone mentioned that it seemed as though requests for accommodations through accessibility services were up. I think there might be a lot of reasons for that. I think oftentimes, students will try to push how far they go, how long they go without actually pursuing accommodations. I suspect last semester with increased cognitive load and the challenges of learning remotely, I suspect a lot of students were pushed to access the resources that they needed to access. So, that's one thing.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I also think, teaching and learning online is such a different beast. It's very likely that students who may have accommodations but not use them, because they feel like they're managing okay in a traditional classroom, came into barriers in the online learning that made that more difficult perhaps. I'm thinking about it a lot, because there's a population of students I have always been slightly obsessed with, which is the population of students who need accommodations but aren't able to access it. So, as you probably know, most institutions, most policies require that students have documentation of disability or ailment or confounding factor that gives them access to their accommodations.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

For many students, that work is done often when they're in the high school system. When they're minors, they first get an EAP or some diagnosis that gives them access to services. But for students who don't get that as minors, which can happen for lots of reasons, right? Culture within the family maybe or just preferences around parenting choices, could be cultural. Perhaps they weren't in the school system here and didn't have access to the same resources, could be expense, right? Even though a lot of those tests are covered as minors, some of that becomes out of pocket expenses. There's lots of reasons why students don't get the documentation they need. Those students, that population gets bigger as they age.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

If you don't recognize a learning disability or an additional need until you're an adult, well, suddenly, the testing gets really expensive. I've heard of students with bills in the \$2,000- or \$3,000-range for getting their diagnosis that they need in order to access relevant services. This always makes me think about a population of students who may be hidden from us, students who may need or wish they could pursue accommodations in their learning, but they don't have access because they don't have the diagnosis. It's thinking about students in those scenarios that first made me interested in Universal Design for Learning.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Universal Design for Learning, you may well be familiar with. I'll put some links in the show notes. It's the idea that we design for accessibility up front and more students have access to our courses. They require fewer accommodations as a result. So, this can be really simple things like posting our course content in multiple formats. So, that a student who is using a screen reader and as a student who is not can access the same materials and get the same information out of it. This includes things like captioning our videos or providing transcripts for our podcasts. So, that students, even just with different learning preferences, can access the material in different kinds of ways.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Universal Design for Learning is often sold to us in the way so many good concepts that need to give themselves a sales pitch in the neoliberal university are sold to us, which is that it's a labor saving device. We choose Universal Design for Learning. We make our courses accessible upfront, and then we aren't required to do a lot of accommodation after the fact. Anybody who's taught a heavy teaching load knows that accommodations can be incredibly labor intensive. So, that argument, it makes a lot of sense. It's also gross, right?

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I think the real argument for Universal Design for Learning is that we all need an equitable chance to work our way through course materials. Things like whether or not a PDF is accessible or whether or not we read quickly enough to move through a multiple choice exam, those don't actually have anything to do with our capacity for learning the content. So, with Universal Design for Learning, we try to strip away those things that are barriers that have nothing to do with our course content. It's a perspective on teaching and learning I've always really respected. I'm not surprised to hear that more and more students are reaching out for help.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

In fact, I'm glad to know they are. I don't know about you, but it's been our time. I don't know if I've mentioned that on the podcast before. I can definitely see why if I was moving through learning materials and I knew there was a resource that I could access, even if I hadn't in the past, I might reach out for it. I think that the numbers should make us realize that we owe it to our students to try to minimize those barriers on our end as well. Luckily, I know some people who know an awful lot about that.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I've invited Carol Sparkes and Carolyn Teare to pop by today to talk to you about accessibility. They've been doing some incredible work looking at how to make Open Learning courses in particular more accessible, but they've been sharing that knowledge with the campus community as a whole. They had an introductory session at last year's teaching practices colloquium, and they're giving another session on this idea this year. They're also in the process of building a WordPress resource where you can go to get more information about how to make your courses accessible.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I won't speak for them, but I think they're going to give you a lot that you can think about to use in your own classroom and things that you can think about even after we leave the fully online space. I'll leave it up to them to explain.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I am here today with Carolyn Teare and Carol Sparkes who both work in Open Learning. I've invited them here to talk about some work they've been doing around accessibility. In particular, we've been hearing some reports from faculty who see the rates of accommodation requests going way up in their courses. I know anecdotally from talking to students who don't have documented issues that some of the accessibility needs are just not being met on campus. So, I thought I'd invite Carolyn and Carol to come and chat with you about how to maybe maximize accessibility in your courses, what you can do to improve things. Carolyn, Carol, can I ask you both to introduce yourselves? Maybe say what you do and where people might have known you on campus in what I lovingly call the before times. Carolyn, if you want to start?

Carolyn Teare:

Okay, I'm Carolyn Teare. I am the Manager in Learning Technology and Innovation. I've been In Open Learning now over almost 10 years but working with our production teams. Primarily, now, I work with Production and Media Teams, getting course content ready in the LMS. So, I've dealt with people on campus related to that. But prior to that, I was a sessional faculty in geography on campus and did a bit of teaching there. So, been around TRU since 2008.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Right on. Thank you. Carol?

Carol Sparkes:

Hi, I'm Carol Sparkes. I'm an Instructional Designer with Open Learning. I've been with TRU for the past three years. I work with faculty and of course, our team in Open Learning to design online courses. So, that they are interactive and engaging and the best they can be. You could probably have bumped into me, let's see, out for a walk over lunchtime to walk off the stress of sitting at a computer all day, but yeah, really enjoy working with the faculty at TRU.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Thank you for that. So, the reason I wanted to talk to you both is you've been doing so much work around accessibility and given the context of Open Learning, accessibility in online courses. I think there are some lessons there that campus faculty could take. I wonder if you might maybe start by talking to us about the genesis of the project you've been working on and maybe where you're at with it now. I know you're getting ready for a presentation at TPC in a couple of weeks, right?

Carol Sparkes:

I moved to TRU from the University of Guelph in Ontario. As you may or may not know, Ontario has implemented legislation around accessibility. So, while I was there for five years, I learned a lot about the issues with trying to make your materials accessible. It sounds like it's really straightforward, but you can have lots of little bumps in the road. So, I learned about some of the issues. They had an accessibility conference once a year, which was great to learn even more.

Carol Sparkes:

So, when I came to British Columbia, accessibility wasn't legislated, but I could see all the potential. I realized that it's an opportunity to get ahead of the game here by starting to think about accessibility

here before it is legislated. So, I knew Carolyn had mentioned that she had helped with accessibility issues for students before. So, I went to her and said, "Would you like to collaborate on accessibility research?" She said...

Carolyn Teare:

Sure. Again, so as Carol mentioned, I've come at it. Being an instructor at TRU, I would have students come with their accommodation requests. Mostly, it was a time-based issue for assessments, but then when I went into my first role at TRU, just working with course material and then as a supervisor of that area, we would get very specific accommodation requests, which would require us to go back and really look at our material and assess it to see what did we have to do. We were doing things that are on the way to make it accessible, but with that last step. Really having it come home again and again that if we have things to fix, we were trying to retrofit or go back in the course. That takes a lot longer to do than if you start to think about it as you develop and as you create your instructional materials.

Carolyn Teare:

So, it's been a journey to understand how things get done. It's a huge area and serve just academic curiosity. There's some challenges like, "Well, how do you make these certain types of material accessible? What are the best practices? What does the technology do or not do?" So, I will admit to being a bit of a techie geek in that area. So, that's partly what drives my interest as well as to solve the problem and figure out, "How do we move forward? How do we incorporate that into just building materials in the first place?"

Carol Sparkes:

I would just tap into that one as well, because you've talked about accommodation and accessibility. So, I just wanted to make a note that they're slightly different. You brought this home as well though that accessibility is done before the course is offered or the file is given. An accommodation is often done after the course is designed.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

By definition then, we can think about accessibility as being a more inclusive practice, right? Because if we're planning for it upfront, then the student doesn't have to be the one who proactively goes out and seeks that accommodation, right? Ideally, the learning materials are already accessible for a wide range of learners.

Carol Sparkes:

Exactly.

Carolyn Teare:

Yeah.

Carol Sparkes:

Yeah, it's also beneficial for those who don't need the accommodation or not formally recognized as needing accommodation. These are just really good practices for everybody in course design.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah, my favourite example of that, I've said this on the show before with regards to subtitles. I will totally cop to never having really thought much about subtitles until my son was born. He's not a good sleeper. Suddenly, if something didn't have subtitles, I didn't watch it or participate in it, so. That really made me realize just how circumscribed and need like that can make your landscape, right? I only have access to these... Speaking of the devil.

Carol Sparkes:

Perfect.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Still not a great sleeper. So, yeah, that idea that there are all kinds of needs, that they're not documentable in the way. They don't get students access to certain kinds of accommodated services, but that doesn't mean they're not tangible needs for learners, especially as we're thinking about this remote learning experience that is so strange for everyone.

Carol Sparkes:

Yes.

Carolyn Teare:

Just to add, when we look at accessibility, there is very much a continuum of practice. People often go to a very extreme, "Well, if I have to design my course for this particular instance..." But I think it's important to realize that some of the steps, which again they provide a universality to your materials, you may come up with this very specific accommodation that you may have to do more work with. But if you've done your groundwork, it becomes less of a challenge to deal with that. So, we are looking at really broad principles when we're talking about accessibility.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

This might be way too 101 question. I don't know. Feel free to tell me it's not a reasonable thing to ask. But I wonder in your work you've done so far and particularly looking at the existing courses in Open Learning, is there low hanging fruit, things that people could be doing right now that wouldn't take a lot of extra effort or planning or thinking or knowledge but make a difference for the accessibility-

Carolyn Teare:

Yes.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

... of the course? Oh, good.

Carol Sparkes:

Yes.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yay! That's my favourite.

Carol Sparkes:

Yes, absolutely. That's actually I think our focus now is to expand on our... We did a quick session at TPC, Teaching Practices Colloquium last year about basic online accessibility. This year, we want to build on that, but we want to give you the easy steps that you can take when you've got, for example, a Word document that you want to share with students. Here's a checklist of things to check for to help with your tables, images, videos, even text. So many little things that you can do that will just make the difference and making your document look polished and function properly. So, for those who, for example, might a screen reader, but even for those who don't.

Carolyn Teare:

Yeah. If I was to pick the number one thing that helps, again, in the very broad way, that would be your document or headings. So, whether that's in a print document or in a web page, having a very logical structured heading style or heading level. So, you have your top level one, and then you can tell that what's the next level under that. So, you're blocking out your information using headings.

Carolyn Teare:

Again, that helps everybody. It makes it really clear to any reader what the level of importance of the information is. When is it a subtopic? When is it not a subtopic? Just by using tools that you have, either in Word or if you're directly adding things into Moodle, it's all there. You can just quite quickly add structure to documents and to materials and just help a whole lot of people out.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

That is something that I have traditionally been really bad at, because I'm always like, "Oh, just bold the things that are headings," and not realizing that heading function in Word actually has function beyond making the text like bigger, right?

Carolyn Teare:

Yeah, there's actually coding going on behind the scenes. Yeah, that is literally putting some hidden code that basically says, "Hey, this is your heading level one and then heading level two." When I was doing assessing of Open Learning material, that part of the picture, we've got that one covered off just the way we work in developing and doing things but to get our material up for students. But when I look at what comes into my teams to process, that's the first thing we look at. When we look at the navigation in the document, is it clear? Because we base how we lay out on what those headings are. Again, if you don't have a document that's used a clear structure, Word makes it super easy.

Carolyn Teare:

So, this is important to note. It's very easy not to because Word makes it easy for you not to use those styles. When you just go with the visual look, what can happen is say you start on page one. Your first heading's really clear, but then you get to what's your next level down. You've styled it on page one one way. And then if it's a longer document, by page 10, it looks different. So, even to reader, your visual clues have now changed. You're like, "Oh, well." You can start to feel that. If you read a document that has those inconsistencies, then your message starts to get a little muddled, right? Because we use all sorts of clues to understand information presented to us. I think that's really important when we're presenting academic materials. It can go off the rails pretty fast.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

It's always fascinating to me that Word is this actually pretty powerful little tool that we all use every single day. So few of us have any understanding, particularly of document design, but there's so much functionality there that is left on the table, because I don't know. What does proficiency in Word really mean?

Carolyn Teare:

Yeah, yeah, that's a huge thing. Ironically, it's something I test my employees on when they come in the door. I say, "We want good Word skills." They were like, "Yeah, I got it," and then I'll give them my test. They're like, "There's more to this than I thought." There is. It's both an awesome tool, because you can do so much, but the disadvantage of it is it can lead you astray. Especially, in the framework of accessibility, it can get you off track pretty fast too, because it makes it a little too convenient to do certain things.

Carol Sparkes:

Yeah, if I can jump in there, one of the things going on the heading styles, when you use the heading style feature in Word and you go to the reviewing tool, it then creates a table of contents for you out of those headings. So, it's just a marvellous tool. If you've got a long document and you're trying to see the overview and how to navigate to something and you want to jump down to the conclusions or the results, that's where to go is your reviewing tool, but it doesn't work if you don't put in the heading styles.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah. I'm thinking about documents too, because I had the pleasure of helping a student last semester, who was using a screen reader. A pleasure working with the student because she was lovely, but absolute nightmare. I mean, I had no idea honestly. Since then, I've been really encouraging faculty to download, Read&Write because we all have access to it. Take a look at what your course materials sound like when they're read by this reading software, because it's shocking.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

One of the things that she pointed out is that she sees faculty posting a lot of PDFs that are basically completely unusable by her screen reader software. She ends up having to go through Accessibility Services and have them contact the instructor and then have the materials made accessible. Is there a way to create a PDF or is there something to know about uploading documents and content to Moodle that faculty can do that would maybe cut out the middleman there?

Carolyn Teare:

There are definitely ways to make PDFs accessible. I'd have to check the reader version but the pro version actually has quite a bit of ability to convert non-accessible documents to accessible. Again, it's a transition from where you started to where you end up looking at settings. PDFs can come in two different distinct flavours, real old school PDFs. If you want a journal article and you go scan it off the photocopier, what you basically have is a series of images on pages. That is not readable.

Carolyn Teare:

You can also get PDFs that are actually quite readable by a screen reader. Adobe actually has a built-in reader within it. So, you can go find out again, "What does your PDF sound like?" It will go through it. If it's not readable, it just says, "Nothing on this page. Keep going." And then you're like, "Oh, but there is

stuff on this page." Yeah, the Adobe product actually has quite a bit that can help get there, but you do have to do some tweaking to pay attention to make sure that you're creating a readable object.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I noticed in the new version of Word, there's now an export option that specifically says it's exporting as an accessible PDF. Do you know if that is any good?

Carolyn Teare:

I haven't tried that, but I wouldn't be surprised if it... Again, it's interesting. Carol talked about having legislation in Ontario, because the United States has had legislation as a nation for quite a while. So, because of that, materials that are being created in the States or in the education industry, they are often accessible. I've even gone online into some journals. If you go through the library posting, you'll see that there's actually a button to read articles audibly-

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Oh, cool.

Carolyn Teare:

... within the library search engine or a particular journal. So, again, we're in a position where we're not reinventing the wheel. We're often trying to find out, "Oh, is there a new version?" So, that's a good example for journal articles, where we've had a scan given to us, which isn't accessible. It's like, "Is it up there now in a readable format? Can we either point the student to that or get them a copy that's readable that way?" So, things change. So, it's always good to keep looking to see what else other people have done.

Carol Sparkes:

Sorry, I was going to say, if I could jump on that idea, because we're talking about PDFs versus Word, some of the ideas or the tools that we're providing, the information that we're providing, we're using Word as an example. But then when you convert it into PDF or into something else, then that much is done and is working well. So, the headings was one example, but hyperlinks would be another.

Carol Sparkes:

So, people put hyperlinks in sometimes. So, it starts with <http://www>. The screen reader, for example, would read all that out. Even the sighted person would look at that. It would be a large, garbled mess sometimes of a URL. Most people seem to know, "Okay, I need to embed that URL into some words, so that it doesn't show up like that. But the problem is a lot of people will embed it into the Words, "Click Here."

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Oh, yeah, I've been guilty of that in the past.

Carol Sparkes:

Right? So, one thing that I learned at the accessibility conference was somebody who uses the screen reader and has most of their life said, "I don't know if anybody realizes, but the screen reader, you can ask it to read out all the links on a page." So, if they all read, Click Here, Click Here, Click Here, Click Here,

it's not helpful in their ability to navigate and choose one of those as the place that they want to go. So, I think that's been a real eye opener is what some of the screen readers can do. I mean, we don't use a lot. We don't use them at all. So, it's like another language.

Carolyn Teare:

Just to follow up on that, if you think of where the Click Here came from, it's really early web, where we didn't have the idea even of a hyperlink and what did it do. I think that's what drove, "Okay, we need to say Click Here, because people don't understand." Well, we've moved well beyond that point technology wise. People look at things and say, "Oh, it's a different colour. I'm supposed to click that." But our wording hasn't matched what we can do these days, because the words could say anything. It's usually most useful if it actually says what it is that you're about to click, because really, a screen reader might say link and then it reads the text.

Carolyn Teare:

So, if it's like an article, it might be just the article title. Or if it's a Word version of something, we'll put in a title with, if it's a Word document, word. So, that people would know what it is. Again, for someone who's not using a screen reader, that also provides useful information. Click Here doesn't really... Again, you have to read the surround to understand what the Here is. Just by embedding the actual description in those words gets you to the point a little faster.

Carol Sparkes:

Well said.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

It sounds to me that a lot of this comes down to thinking about how your materials are going to be used and trying not to make assumptions about how they're going to be used. I wonder when you folks are working with, for example, subject matter experts over in Open Learning, are there things that you can tell them ahead of time that helped to make the accessibility piece easier when it comes to development? I guess I'm trying to think of an analogy for when you're planning out your course in the early stages or gathering up your materials, if there are things you could be keeping in mind at that stage that would make the course more accessible as it develops.

Carolyn Teare:

I think so. The first thing that comes to mind is if you have videos in your course or want to put videos, are there transcripts to go with them, or even if they're auto generated transcripts, do they make sense? I've had The Simpsons translated by Auto Translate. It was quite amusing. But again, it's not just actually for someone who is... You're not addressing visual impairment. You're addressing anyone who works better with text, whether it's a language barrier. It could be a learning style or disability. There's a whole range of people who can benefit from having a text version of a video.

Carolyn Teare:

In my case, I get bored, because I can read a whole lot faster than a video. If it's not a demonstration video, it's just someone talking, then it will engage me more. So, again, you're going to be putting all this effort into your course materials with your goal that you're giving it to students, because it's valuable. It will enhance their learning, help them understand the subject you're teaching. But if you haven't considered that, you could be putting a lot of effort in it. People are just skipping by that because it isn't

presented in a format that can help them. Or if say someone doesn't want to be online all the time, a transcript just allows them to do it in an offline mode, so.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Yeah, it's interesting to me to see a real shift in some of the stuff I'm reading about so-called Generation Zed learners and their expectation that video will just be captioned because they live in a media ecosystem where video is always captioned, right? I've got [inaudible 00:32:35] in the room with me and he's watching something, but the captions are also on because they just seem to be on by default on Netflix, right? It's great, because he's working on language acquisition. So, bonus. I think that that's something that faculty are still catching up on. I think we've seen captions as a nice to have or an accommodation or an accessibility issue. I think increasingly, for learners now, they're just an expectation. They should be there, right?

Carolyn Teare:

Yeah. Again, when you start talking about this at the beginning, is that you do have students who do have... They've gone through the process, and they do actually have official accommodations. We know that's increasing, but there's also this very large group of students who probably don't have that, but who just benefit from these steps, right? Again, for my thought, it does take so much time and effort to develop good quality material for your subject that you do want to optimize that time for yourself, because you don't have time in life really.

Carol Sparkes:

If I could add into that, I think that the caption's one thing, which is seen as the extra mile because the transcripts are more easily created, but also including the length of time that a video is, what the title is. So, sometimes the links go dead. If they know what the title is or what it's about, then they can search for it if it's a third-party video. Yeah, sometimes it's just watch this video and you don't know what it is, what it's about, but the links did.

Carolyn Teare:

I'll add to that, who presented it? Because if you Google something, you'll get a whole range of material coming back at you. It's like, "Well, what perspective was being presented with me?" I've had to try and find replacement links or trying to figure out what resource went down. It was like, "Okay, I wonder what was the intent that we were going for? Which source would be the reputable source to replace it?"

Carol Sparkes:

Another thing that we can do to help our subject matter experts when they're preparing courses is to think about when they're using images as well as video. What do they want the student to know? Sometimes they use images from a textbook, for example. If you've got a complex image, we call it, such as say, the digestive system or the human vascular system, what can you talk to this picture about? Don't let it just be self-explanatory and include the description from the textbook. But take students through a few paths through your picture. If it's a flowchart, for example, continue the discussion. Don't just think that this image is going to cover it all.

Carol Sparkes:

One other thing around that besides an alternative text, which of course is really hard to put in for human digestive system and get a full sense of what it is, is that we use a template for creating the

modules. I think that's something that instructors could do with creating assignments for their students is give them a template that already starts with headings in it. So, that they've got a sense of the layout. Well, that's for our modules.

Carol Sparkes:

But yeah, teaching them about how to build things excessively, sharing with them so that they learn not just how to write a document, but how to write it so it's accessible for not only themselves, potential colleagues in the workplace, but their peers, even if they're sharing something on a discussion forum. It should be accessible. If you're sharing video, you should include a transcript with it.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

It's interesting, because something I've learned a lot from working with both production and with the IDs is the idea of... Well, I don't know. I think sometimes it comes down to respect for student time, right? Saying, "Okay, this video is going to take 20 minutes for you to watch." I'm going to approach that video differently than when that's only going to take two minutes, right? Maybe I have to make dinner for my kids in 15 minutes. So, I'll watch the two-minute video and make some notes. I'll come back and watch the 20 minute one after they've gone to bed, right? Just that sense that you guys are so good over at Open Learning of making it clear to students how to move through the material. That's something I've learned a lot.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I can see the difference for student navigating material on their own between a well-designed OL course. Oftentimes, in the before pandemic times, our Moodle shells on campus side were really just repositories. It's just where you dumped a bunch of stuff. That transition, I think, has been a big learning experience for instructors. The other thing that I'm thinking about, especially Carolyn as you were talking about just a straightforward preference for text over video, for example, something that's been a recurring theme on this show in the last few weeks is the idea of getting our egos out of the way we deliver material to students.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I had the experience a few weeks ago, somebody emailed me and they thanked me for always providing the transcripts for this show, because what they like to do is, they listen to the show at double speed. And then they go back and they look at the transcripts for the bits that interested them. At first, I was like, "Okay, thank you." It's a little bit humbling, right? Maybe I'm very boring. It's really important to recognize that everyone interacts with, here's that web 2.0 term, content differently, right? It's okay. People don't have to necessarily access the material the way you expect them to for them to get something out of it.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

As instructors, we come up in the system where it's like everybody lectures. That's just what you do. You're the person with all the knowledge. You stand up here and you lecture. I think letting go of that and giving students control over how they move through the material, that has been a big step in this pivot to digital that we don't really talk about, right?

Carolyn Teare:

Yeah, it is pretty big. I think it's important to note that to me, accessibility is a journey. It doesn't like you flip a switch and then yeah, tomorrow, all my stuff is good. What Carol and I presented on last year and what we're going to be presenting on this year at TPC is really to get you familiar and to think about things and what you can try and do to improve it, but realize that it's going to be an ongoing thing. We were just talking about a course we're working on the other night. We're trying to make sure it's all accessible. There's just things that "Oh, I forgot to do that."

Carolyn Teare:

There's degrees which can help. So, it's not a black and white thing. There is a lot of grey. Not see it as a daunting thing is just to say, "Okay, first steps, what can I do to just get my process going?" But it's really starting just to get you to think and think about your students and think about, "Yeah, how are they accessing those? What are my assumptions about it?" Another big thing right now when I look at assessing material is, "What type of device are they looking at?"

Carolyn Teare:

I'm designing and often looking on a dual screen desktop-based machine. And then the end users are using a phone. So, that's a very different thing. So, that's things that are always going, "Well, what does it look like to the student? Are they using it on a bus?" At the end of day, I want them to know and get what they need out of the content, but I have to go to them and consider what it is they are trying to do.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

On a really baseline level, accessibility is the highest form of student-centered learning, right? We throw that phrase around a lot. But when a course is truly accessible and students can navigate it the way they need to to meet their needs, that is student-centered design.

Carol Sparkes:

Yeah, absolutely. There's small things that they can do. We were talking about how we might title our presentation or website that we're looking to create to hold a lot of this information is. Perhaps it's one step closer, because we don't want it to appear too daunting. So, asking questions, "Do you have a table? Okay, if you have a table, consider these things. Have you put in a header row that gives the title of the columns? Because the screen reader will want to read what the title of that column is to indicate which cell it's referring to." So, does your sighted reader. What is in the column, right? Have you put a title on the table, or are you just saying, "This information is below," right?

Carol Sparkes:

So, if you put a title on it, then that helps to clarify what exactly this table is about. We were looking at some resources, because of course, we're still learning about all this. It suggested putting a link at the top of the table saying, "Skip this table," because the screen reader if it needs to go through all the cells and describing them and everything that's in it, the option to skip the table all together was there. But then our question was, "Okay, but they still need the information for the table." So, then we were going to put it in an alternative format. So, that it was text and perhaps listed according to the columns and the rows, so that it was more readable. But then if you didn't have a title for your table, what would your link say when you're asking it to show a text format for the table?

Carol Sparkes:

So, there's a lot out there. Some might say, "Well, there's lots of websites out there," but we've also found that they're full of lots of additional things and aspects and other types of documents and files and concerns related to this and can get difficult to find the key information that you're looking for just to make your document work better.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I am looking forward to this resource that you guys are working on, because it will make a lot of what we do a lot more straightforward for people, I think. I'm really excited.

Carol Sparkes:

I think the screen reader element is an aspect that we're excited about learning more about as well. That a screen reader doesn't pick up colour. So, if you're using colour as your distinguishing element or you're saying this is highlighted in yellow, the screen reader doesn't pick that up. If you're asking them in their assignment, highlight all the verbs in green and highlight all the nouns in red, for example, that's beyond the colour blindness of red and green all looking like grey, but the screen reader doesn't pick that up. So, you need to have some character or word that indicates what those colours mean in each of the places. Yeah, but who thought? Who would have known?

Brenna Clarke Gray:

That's exactly it, right? So many of these things are things that we can attend to, but we just don't know that we need to.

Carol Sparkes:

Exactly.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So, I'm grateful that the two of you are out there doing the work. I will put a link in the show notes to the TPC session coming up, so that folks can check it out if they want more information.

Carolyn Teare:

Great. Thank you.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Thank you both so much for your time today. I'm grateful for all of it, but I also think it's just going to be a really eye opening discussion for folks to hear about the things they could be considering if they don't know.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

So, that's it for Episode 19 of You Got This! As always, if you want to write to us, you can email me. I'm bgray@tru.ca. I'm also on Twitter, @brennacgray. In both cases, that's gray with an A. All of our show notes and transcripts are posted at yougotthis.trubox.ca. Of course, you can always comment on individual episodes there. Just a production note on today's episode, I've had some microphone issues this week. My beloved Yeti, my best pal, many hours of podcasting and many hours of recording ill-advised demo tracks in my office. I think it might have given up the ghost. So, I've been swapping between mics for this episode. I hope it hasn't been too distracting.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

I'll leave you today with a Tiny Teaching Tip. Carolyn and Carol talked about small steps that you could take to make your course more accessible. I think in the spirit of the reflective practice we've been encouraging on the show, I'm going to ask you as your tiny teaching tip this week to take a good hard look at your course right now and choose one thing you could do to make your course more accessible. And then I want you to do it. So, do you have some videos that need captioning? Do you have some Word documents that need design and structure? Do you have some PDFs that aren't really PDFs? They're just pictures of text. Whatever it is, pick one small thing, just like Carol was encouraging you to do and start there. Make one choice to make your course more accessible. I encourage you to pick something that you're going to keep using. We talked last week about some persistent resources. Maybe this is a video you'll keep using even if we move into hybrid or face-to-face. Maybe this is an assignment that you've used before. Whatever it is, pick something that the work will really reward you, because you'll keep using it into the future. And then if you're still feeling enthusiastic, maybe you could take the time to make a list of other things that you can do to make your course more accessible. It's something that you can work towards. Tiny bites, right, just like Carol and Carolyn said.

Brenna Clarke Gray:

Thanks for joining us today. I'm grateful to be at a place where I can have this discussion with faculty, because I think it's so important. I'm grateful that you're here for it. Take care of yourselves. We'll talk soon.