Podcast Presentation Transcript

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Theme: Voices from the Edge: Negotiating the Local in the Global.

Title: Accessibility as Aesthetic: Cripping Podcast Production

Theme 3: New media, technology, and the arts

Format: Creative Practice Showcase – podcast

Presenters: Anne Zbitnew, Chelsea Jones, Kimberlee Collins, Jennifer Chatsick with Cody Bennett

00:00-1:14 - [The "CICE Team" theme song plays]
Introduction
01:16 - **Anne:** Hello and welcome to our podcast presentation, "Accessibility as Aesthetic: Cripping Podcast Media." This podcast is part of a Creative Practice Showcase for the 2021 International Arts in Society Conference. I am Anne Zbitnew, a Professor at Humber College on the land traditionally known as Turtle Island. The city I work in is called Toronto, Canada, and I am the Project Lead for the research called "Accessibility as Aesthetic: Three Films and a Podcast." This project took place on the traditional territories of the Three Fires Confederacy.
1:54 - **Chelsea:** And I'm Chelsea Jones, the lead researcher of "Accessibility as Aesthetic." The podcast that you are listening to now is also the ninth episode of a podcast series called "The CICE Team" podcast. Here, we want to share some collective learning about accessible and artistic broadcast media-making with nine intellectually disabled college students whose work complicates—or "crips"— the ways in which we understand podcasting. We will tell you much more about this podcast over the next 20 minutes. For now, please note that we've also supplied a copy of our script on our website so you can read along, and see the sources we cite.
2:40 - **Kim:** I'm the third speaker, Kim Collins. I was an Access Producer working closely with researchers and podcasters who made "The CICE Team" podcast. Between September 2019 and October 2020, the podcasters who made up "The CICE Team" production used a variety of arts-based methods to build an expansive podcast production. Together, they drew images, did expressive writing, made sounds with their voices and with objects, and interviewed one another. The podcast itself has more than one logo, and these images are available on the website.
3:07 - **Jennifer:** And I'm Jennifer Chatsick. To understand this presentation, you need to know that "The CICE Team" podcast series was produced by college students

labelled with intellectual disability. These students are part of a Community Integration through Cooperative Education program—or CICE program—where I work. I've worked with CICE students for nearly 20 years. It is imperative that we do research and presentations in a way that is possible for CICE students to understand; we want to honour their knowledge because they made this project possible. For that reason, this podcast presentation unfolds in a few different ways. First, we take turns talking so you can hear some of the many voices behind this project. We also say our names before we speak, so you can tell who is talking. It is important to remember that although the voices of disabled podcasters will be woven in later, much of this analysis takes place without their input. There are a few reasons for that, and we'll talk about them later. Second, it is important to note that we shift between speaking in plain language and speaking in dominant language. By moving between these two ways of speaking, we are purposefully destabilizing academic presentation format in favour of the pluralities of intellectual disability-based inquiry, and to reach the very labelled people who made this podcast possible.

Researching Accessibility as Aesthetic

4:34 - **Anne:** "The CICE Podcast" was part of a year-long public pedagogy project that aimed to make broadcast media accessible at the outset called "Accessibility as Aesthetic." The project's main goal was to position students to learn about, and to re-orient toward, community-driven best practices around accessibility and disability aesthetic. Our ideas about accessibility are mainly informed by critical access theory, disability justice, and disability aesthetic.

5:25 - **Kim:** Critical access is a way of thinking about access that goes beyond standardized checklist-based approaches. Critical access also reaches beyond the usual standards of compliance, such as those espoused by universal design, which tends to ignore power and privilege when assessing accessibility.[i]

5:37- **Chelsea:** Critical access theory pairs well with disability justice. Disability justice is one framework for understanding disability's role in media in new, imaginative ways that refuse to comply with systems that privilege some over others.[ii] An early 21st century movement led by disabled and queer people of colour, and emphasizing intersectionality and interdependence, disability justice transformed the long-held disability mantra "nothing about us, without us!" to "leadership of the most impacted."[iii] We conceptualized critical access through disability justice not only as necessary accessibility, but as the justice-based process of labelled people's non-therapeutic cultural production and public knowledge creation.[iv]

6:32 - **Jennifer:** As we made our podcast, we also kept disability aesthetics in mind. Popularized by the work of Tobin Seibers,[v] the concept of disability aesthetic is, an acknowledgement that disability has aesthetic value. We combine these theoretical

perspectives to assert that critical access and disability justice can be fundamentally desirable features of their work rather than compliance-based "add-ons."

7:02 - **Chelsea:** This theorizing also considered the inclusion/ist boundaries of higher education. Inclusion is upheld as an important, long-fought-for goal for disabled communities hoping to access education.[vi] In Canada, CICE programs are part of this legacy. Yet, a critical tension lingering throughout any pedagogical project linked to inclusion is the risk of inclusionism. Inclusionism refers to the ways in which educational institutions undermine social justice by merely tolerating disability without demanding change to their own disabling conditions or considering its intersectional facets.[vii] We argue that intellectually disabled people's place in higher education remains extremely precarious; it is possible for labelled people to experience real benefits of inclusion while also being folded into the assimilative agendas of institutional inclusionism. By engaging in arts-based, multi-method approach to podcast we tried to usurp this tension.

8:13 - **Kim:** Our primary method for this research was podcasting. Embedded in podcasting were many other methods: drawing, expressive writing, storytelling, and making music among others. To research "The CICE Podcast," we engaged in participant observation and focus groups. As we gathered data, and reflected on the podcasts, we came away from this project with several key takeaways for doing intellectual disability-based research and media production. The three we'll discuss now are: 1) Research around intellectual disability-led media-making must be prepared to pivot and change in the interest of media-makers' interventions on the medium; 2) Re-imagining accessibility is an ongoing process, led by intellectually disabled people who are already "knowing-making" in ways that resist oppressive higher education structures; 3) There is value in creating something like a podcast for its own sake, at its own pace, and at its own volume—even if that means silently. Now, we will tell you about these lessons, beginning with a story of "the fuzzy mouse."

"The Fuzzy Mouse"

9:26 - **Jennifer:** Our first takeaway from this project is that research around intellectual disability-led media-making must be prepared to constantly change in the interests of media-makers' interventions. There were many examples of these moments—moments where podcasters changed their minds about what their show should be about. In three instances, over the course of a few months, we had to return to both our funders and the college's Research Ethics Board because podcasters decided they wanted to participate in research in unexpected ways. All of this meant that we, like other critical disability studies researchers before us[viii], had to be flexible, and willing to improvise.[ix]

10:14 - **Anne:** One stand-out moment happened when podcasters were taking turns holding up a large "boom" microphone and introducing themselves. A "boom" mic is the kind of microphone that sometimes appears on film sets—it is a tall, hand-held mic that we hold up over our heads to pick up sound. A Humber Broadcast Radio and

Television program student, who had lots of experience with the "boom" mic, told the group of podcasters that this type of microphone is sometimes referred to as a "dead cat." The CICE student podcasters laughed at first, but they did not like picturing a dead cat. So, they decided to re-name the microphone "the fuzzy mouse" as one way to make the podcast their own. A student researcher named Cody Bennett wrote about this moment in his observational field notes. Here's Cody.

11:12 - **Cody:** The students ask about the equipment and the podcast lead explains to them what each piece does and what they are called. Of all the equipment the one that makes them the most excited and engaged is the "dead cat." They are in an uproar and begin to question why. They decide this needs a new name. They put forth "dead rat," "fuzzy rat," and "fuzzy mouse." "Fuzzy mouse" becomes our winner. I just hope it trends in the film industry. Then, finally, we achieved what we'd been aiming for this whole time: a podcast by the students, about the students. Our lead told the students how to hold the boom pole, and explained techniques about how to get less tired, and they took charge. Each would swap out and take turns being the interviewer and interviewee. And here there was no silence. They naturally went into conversations about their lives and interest. Our resident 'Mountain' took charge and focused on the minute details you experience while walking. Unfortunately, this was our only true chance to have the students be fully in charge of their stories. It was a great first step and showed a lot of promise. But with Covid-19, everything went into lockdown and they weren't able to run the podcast again as intended.

12:17 - **Chelsea:** What we learn from this experience that the ability to participate in learning through arts-based media production involves the availability of choices around technology—including the choice to reclaim, rename, and hack technology to fit one's needs.[x] Here, we witnessed an interchange of learning: CICE students are learning industry terms, and actively renaming and reclaiming their own equipment, while a broadcast student was challenged to rethink the universality of dominant language. By resistively renaming "the fuzzy mouse," podcasters expanded the communication possibilities in the room.

"Knowing-Making"

13:01 - **Kim:** There were other moments in this process that reminded us of our second take-away: re-imagining accessibility is an ongoing process, led by intellectually disabled people who are already "knowing-making" in ways that resist oppressive higher education structures. The phrase "knowing-making" comes from Aimi Hamraie and Kelly Fritsch.[xi] These authors say "knowing-making" is a political way of world-building and world-dismantling "*by* and *with* disabled people and communities" that respond to the things going on around them; disabled people are not "users," but experts in their everyday lives, who have the skills and wisdom to alter inaccessible worlds.

13:46 - Anne: We knew that two podcasters did their own "knowing-making" by writing stories with pen and paper. So, we asked if they might be interested in reading their stories for a podcast, and they agreed. In this episode, podcasters explained when, where, and how they prefer to write and offered advice for other writers. Here is a clip from the episode:

14:12 - Episode Clip:

Podcaster 1: Well, back in the … most of the stories I wrote was back when I was still in the Philippines. And back home in the Philippines, I used to go upstairs to a separate room because when we were at the Philippines before, me, my brother's room and my room were upstairs. So that's usually where I wrote stories before. Just to help me focus on what I'm writing.

Researcher: Okay. How about you? Do you have any advice for people who may be interested in writing?

Podcaster 2: If you feel like writing, if you feel like something is coming to you, towards you, and you feel like writing in on paper or in a book, you should go for it! If you've got, like, something that you imagined. Yeah.

15:42 - Chelsea: Throughout this podcast, the speakers read their stories and say more about their writing process. The podcasters' engagement with expressive writing demonstrated the multimodal field of relations, knowledge, and practices that inform intellectually disabled people's artistic practices. In contrast to dominant forms of production *for* disability that too-often inform disabled people's participation in arts-based media making, we leaned into the "knowing-making" of these storytellers as they navigated intersectional systems of power revealing these podcasters to be authors designing their own stories outside of our project. By embracing "knowing-making," we found one way of honouring podcaster's already-existing knowledges and artistry, rather than only positioning them as technology "users" to be trained in podcasting.

Silent Podcasting

16:23 - Jennifer: The third take-away from this research is this: there is value in creating something like a podcast for its own sake, at its own pace, and at its own volume—even if that means silently. Sometimes during this project podcasters were completely silent. This made our podcast very unusual because usually podcasts use a lot of sound and spoken words.

16:49 - Anne: At first, we did not know what to do about these silent podcasts. I remember writing in my field notes: "We are making a podcast and there's no sound! How is this going to work?" But we knew that even when they were silent, podcasters were still contributing to the project. For example, podcasters used markers and paper to draw a logo for "The CICE Podcast." So, even with silence in the air, we remembered that silence—like accessibility and aesthetic-- is political. Being silent became another

way of "knowing-making" through podcasting. Silence became a key characteristic of our podcast.

17:33 - **Chelsea:** Our backgrounds working with intellectually disabled people left us familiar with silent moments, and we decided that these moments should not only be included in our research but should characterize the podcast and contribute to its aesthetic. Researchers elsewhere show concern that people who communicate silently, or in ways that cannot be recorded by traditional modes of data collection such as audio recordings, might be dismissed in qualitative research.[xii] There is a field of qualitative research inquiry that argues for silence as a critical and meaningful part of research.[xiii]

18:15 - **Kim:** Moments of silence exist in this research and contribute to the sensorial experience of listening to "The CICE Team" podcast as sound comes and goes. Silence characterizes the production. Following Lucia Carlson's music-based work with labelled people, the podcasting experience is one that can be "valuable and valued for its own sake" without having to be therapeutic, inclusion/ist, or contained by dominant language and expected broadcast forms.[xiv] The integration of silence into the "The CICE Team" podcast asserts a new form of communication that we recognize as embodied, creative, and expressive as it comes from intellectual disability "knowing-making" that has yet to be fully described.

Conclusion

19:05 - **Chelsea:** Earlier, we mentioned that the work of CICE podcasters "cripped" podcast production. The word "crip" is an activist/artist reclamation of the term "Cripple," and is meant to expose how disability and difference can disrupt the everyday in creative, productive ways.[xv] By engaging in the "knowing-making" that manifests through the reclamation of methods such as the "fuzzy mouse," plus the embrace of people's already-existing artistry such as writing, and within the possibilities of a new type of silent podcast, we notice the possibilities for "crip" podcasting as demonstrated by the CICE podcasters.

19:55 - **Anne:** Even so, there remain insurmountable gaps in our understandings of "crip" podcasting involving intellectually disabled people in higher education largely because their perspectives are peripheral to this article. The reason for this is that we lost access to people when the COVID-19 pandemic hit. At this time, CICE podcasters began working from home, and since then many of them have graduated out of the CICE program. For these reasons, we consider our reflections unresolved and necessarily incomplete.

20:34 - **Jennifer:** However, a final take-away from this project is this: while podcasting is a vital and vibrant method on its own, intellectual disability-based podcasting takes this form further by introducing multiplicities: "The CICE Podcast" offers a flexible show filled with multiple logos, multiple stories, and multiple names for the technologies

used to produce this work. This recording will serve as the ninth episode in this series, and we invite you to take a listen to the eight episodes that come before this one.

21:16 - **Kim:** Moving forward, it is our challenge as educators and researchers to support and involve labelled people in all stages of knowledge production processes, and to advocate for their "knowledge-making" as we engage in arts-based, multimedia research.