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Table of Contents

Introduction

Deep Impact: The 2015 Pacific Rim International Conference on Disability and Diversity Forum
Katie Aubrecht, PhD, Associate Editor for Forums

Research Articles

Towards Cultural Inclusion: Using Mobile Technologies to Increase Access to Audio
Description

Thomas Conway, MBA, Brett Oppegaard, PhD and Megan Conway, PhD
University of Hawaii at Manoa, USA

Disability Studies Influence on a Profoundly Altered Identity
Douglas E. Kidd, Undistracted Driving Advocacy, LLC; Harbor
University of Toledo, USA

Strategies to Create a Culturally Responsive Learning Environment
Keisha Rogers, PhD, Brenda Cartwright, EdD, and Rahim Skinner, B.S.
Winston-Salem State University, USA

Using the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) to Improve
Understanding of Disability and Functioning
Patricia Welch Saleeby, PhD
Southern Illinois University Carbondale, USA

Creative Works

Devastate/Celebrate by Steve E. Brown, PhD
Reviewed by Maria Timberlake, PhD, Associate Editor for Creative Works

Multimedia

The Spoken Word and Emotion in Communication by Karen Lee Roberts, Australia
To view the video and transcription click here: <http://www.rds.hawaii.edu/its-not-easy-being-green/>

Disability Studies Dissertation Abstracts

Introduction

Review of Disability Studies (RDS) **Deep Impact: Pacific Rim Forum**

Katie Aubrecht, PhD
Associate Editor for Forums

The International Pacific Rim Conference (Pac Rim) on Disability & Diversity, held annually in Honolulu, Hawaii, has been widely recognized over the past 30 years as one of the most diverse gatherings in the world. The event encourages and respects voices from diverse perspective across numerous areas, including: voices from persons representing various disability areas; experiences of family members and supporters across various disability areas; responsiveness to diverse cultural and language differences; evidence of researchers and academics studying disability; stories of persons providing powerful lessons; examples of program providers, natural supports and allies of persons with disabilities; and, action plans to meet human and social needs in a globalized world.

This RDS Forum represents a sampling of outstanding disability studies presentations from the 2015 Pac Rim Conference, themed "Deep Impact." The 2016 conference, "From the Margins to the Center", will be held at the Hawaii Convention Center on April 25th and 26th (additional information on the conference can be found using the following web link: www.pacrim.hawaii.edu). Across the four research articles, the multimedia piece, and the poem selected for inclusion in the Forum, a conception of disability as an *identity juncture* emerged as a common theme. Disability is imagined as a critical and decisive turning point that disrupts unexamined relations to self, other and society, and conditions the possibility of new ways of relating. Each of the works takes up the 'deep impact', the social and symbolic significance of this juncture in different ways.

In "Using the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) to Improve Understanding of Disability and Functioning," Patricia Welch Saleeby describes the global impact of a powerful way of identifying and responding to disability and disabled people. The ICF is a framework developed by the World Health Organization (WHO) to measure health and disability of individuals and populations that includes health domains and environmental factors (WHO, 2015). As Saleeby notes, problematic aspects of the ICF have been raised in disability studies. For example, Rob Imrie (2004) suggests that one of the limitations of the ICF is that it has been undertheorized, and that there are components of the ICF that require further conceptualization and clarification. In her descriptive analysis of the ICF, Saleeby suggests that components of the ICF align with a social model of disability and shows how the ICF can be used as a tool to understand the relational and contextual dimensions of disablement. Her reframing the ICF as a tool that directs attention to the social and environmental dimensions of health and disability has implications for how disability is identified within public health and social service perspectives. It also has the potential to 'impact' how the WHO is identified and understood within the field of disability studies – as a body that is both medical and oriented by a social model of disability.

Keisha Rogers, Rahim Skinner and Brenda Cartwright engage the identity juncture via a critical examination of the systematic oppression of culturally diverse students and faculty within university environments in their paper, “Strategies to Create a Culturally Responsive Learning Environment.” The figure of disability as the product of a failure to recognize and respond to cultural difference animates in their analysis of a workshop titled, *Keeping it Real: Illusions of Equality and Injustice on College Campuses*. Their interest is in the impact that personal accounts of discrimination and exclusion that are shared within the context of culturally responsive education and training programs and practices can have on the treatment of culturally diverse and disabled students and faculty. They conclude their paper with a list of strategies for environmental and cultural change within universities that promote self-reflection and transformational learning in the interest of supporting equity and reciprocity of relationships.

In “The Spoken Word and Emotion in Communication,” Karen Roberts shares her understandings and experiences of the transformative, creative and generative potential of what she describes as *spoken word*, and which she defines broadly as a performative art form that includes storytelling, music, cabaret, and theatre. Roberts describes how she has used her art as a means of crossing boundaries between self and other. In doing so, she identifies spoken word as an art form that offers an outlet for emotion and self-expression, while at the same time evoking emotion and shared understanding in her audiences.

Douglas Kidd recollects and reflects on the significance of trauma as he experienced it in the form of a traumatic brain injury that resulted from a car accident in, “Disability Studies Influence on a Profoundly Altered Identity.” Through his moving narrative, Kidd recounts his experiences of survival and living with traumatic brain injury, and how they were shaped not simply by changes in functioning, but also by alterations in his awareness of his surroundings, his sense of self, and of time itself. Drawing on Alison Kafer’s (2013) understanding of how disability renders time queer, Kidd details the emotional affects of temporal dissonance as he experienced them within the context of sudden onset of impairment, and how at times this dissonance took the form of perceived disembodiment. He concludes with his understanding of having experienced a destabilization of identity and emotions as foundational to a transformation in his relations with others and his world, and the field of disability studies as a critical support that he used to negotiate this process.

Steven Brown’s poem “Devastate/Celebrate” depicts the violence and disenfranchisement, systematic exclusion and denigration of disabled persons in an ableist society. However, Brown also notes that even as oppressive social structures and environments shape how disability is experienced, they do not determine it. Through collective struggles for rights and recognition, disability communities have redefined disability and reclaimed disability history, creating space to live, to thrive and to dance. This is cause for celebration.

In “Towards Cultural Inclusion: Using Mobile Technology to Increase Access to Audio Description,” Thomas Conway, Brett Oppegaard, and Megan Conway discuss a mobile application for audio describing National Park Service print brochures in Hawaii. They suggest that this application provides a means of enhancing the experiences of visually impaired park visitors addressing the failure of normative approaches to accessibility that treat access to

cultural and aesthetic experiences as a luxury, rather than a right.

One of the definitive characteristics of understanding disability as an identity juncture concerns the way it can turn us towards greater recognition of the power and possibility in turning, re-turning, and of having been turned towards how. The works in this Forum engage the profound impact that environment, culture, communication, contingency, technology and the law can have on social understandings of disability, and the experiences and self-perceptions of disabled people. They also suggest that what disability and disablement mean are routinely negotiated, challenged and redefined in varied and discontinuous ways, from multiple and even contradictory perspectives. The collective impact of these works is perhaps best understood in terms of their exemplification of Tanya Titchkosky's notion of disability as an "activity of perception" that can provoke a sense of wonder about how disability is imagined in the ways that it is (2011, p. 59):

"Disability is the activity of perceiving and thus representing how we orient to, for example, certainty and ambiguity. As we perceive through disability, then, all of us are intimately a part of what disability becomes in our perception. Disability exists in the midst of this perception, in the midst of people, and in the perception that flows between them. To understand disability as created in the liminal space between self and other allows us to address the confines of contemporary representations of disability, including the oppressive ones."

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Research Articles

Towards Cultural Inclusion: Using Mobile Technologies to Increase Access to Audio Description

Thomas Conway, PhD, Brett Oppegaard, PhD, & Megan Conway, PhD
University of Hawaii at Manoa, USA

Abstract: This paper describes a National Park Service (NPS) and University of Hawaii research project that is developing a mobile application for audio describing NPS print brochures for blind and visually impaired park users. The project has the potential to expand access to cultural and aesthetic material for blind and visually impaired people.

Key words: accessibility, assistive technology, blind and visually impaired

Introduction

Creating access for people with disabilities by public and private entities in the United States is most often driven by the compulsion to meet the minimum requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (Jones, et al., 2012) and other Federal and State civil rights laws. Often the focus of accessibility efforts is on the obvious and the essential. Can someone in a wheelchair get into a building to conduct business? Can someone who is blind or visually impaired independently ride the bus or read a government webpage? Access to cultural and aesthetic content is usually seen as a luxury rather than a right. This oversight deprives many people with disabilities from social inclusion, recreation, and the benefits that cultural and aesthetic pleasures bring to an individual's quality of life.

Audio description is a means of providing people who are blind and visually impaired with a verbal synopsis of visual content. Audio description has been most widely utilized as a narrative technique for providing visual access to live cultural events such as movies and theatrical performances. However, audio description is largely underutilized for more static visual material such as museum displays, outdoor attractions, and image-dependent brochures. The lack of audio-described material is due in part to the time-consuming and specialized process of describing visual content using human actors.

The National Park Service (NPS) is funding a research team from the University of Hawaii at Manoa to use mobile technology as a platform to offer audio described park service brochures for people who are blind or visually impaired. Mobile technologies make it possible to more efficiently and affordably create audio description content that is uniform, portable, and easily adjustable to meet the needs of individual users. Challenges include developing a best practices protocol on audio description for NPS personnel, applying accessibility guidelines, and developing a user-friendly application for both the content providers and blind and visually impaired audiences.

Need for Alternate Format Brochures

The NPS has 342 brochures that are designed and produced in collaboration with their publication house in Harper's Ferry, West Virginia. The NPS uses brochures not only to convey basic information about the park, such as park hours, hazards, and the location of campsites and visitor centers, but also to give the visitor a sense of the historical, natural, and cultural significance of the park. Increasingly, this is done through the use of highly visual media such as photographs, maps and drawings. NPS brochures are seen not only as a tool for use by visitors while they are in the park, but as an aesthetically pleasing souvenir for park users to take away with them when they leave (Hartley et al, 2015).

Currently the NPS offers large print, some Braille, and a few audio described brochures for blind and visually impaired people. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act require federal agencies to make alternative and accessible formats of information offered in print and on the web (Schuur, 2001). There are no specific mandates about best practices for achieving high quality print access (Lazar, Goldstein, & Taylor, 2015). According to the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB, n.d.), in 2012 there were over 20.3 million adult Americans with a visual impairment. In keeping with the NPS effort to offer broad access to the park system to a wide range of people, the NPS is actively developing alternative formats for their Park site visitor displays, videos, and printed materials.

Project Goals and Description

With the increasing popularity of mobile devices in the United States, using software programs via mobile technologies, such as smartphones and mobile apps, offers the opportunity to engage with alternate, and potentially accessible, applications for personal and on-demand use. Bouyed by the growing use of mobile technologies, this NPS project will develop an application for delivering audio-described Park Service brochures in an economical and efficient mode for blind and visually impaired park users.

There is limited research and real-world guidelines for creating audio described print materials (Braun, 2011; Morales, 2011). One of the NPS project's goals is to develop a best practices protocol for creating usable and current output in a repeatable and consistent manner. Existing research and documentation falls into three categories (Szarkowska, 2011): 1. soundtrack audio description options for film and television production; 2. live theater performance audio described recordings, and 3. museum tour guided programs directed toward blind and visually impaired visitors. There are currently no national or international standards for providing consistent and high quality audio description (Orero & Vilaró Soler, 2012; Morales, 2011).

The backend software program for creating content for audio output to a mobile device application will require NPS personnel to input data into an online tool, created during this process, providing an opportunity for step-by-step instructions based on a set of best practices. This NPS project will implement recognized international accessibility guidelines from the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Web Accessibility Initiative (WAI) (www.w3c.org/WAI) to bring the software applications in compliance with the ADA and Section 508 regulations and

will be used to contextualize the final best practices documentation. However, the project also will go a step further by collecting, analyzing and integrating the existing ad hoc best practices in audio description with project research on best practices so that blind and visually impaired end-users will have a high-quality audio-described brochure that provides them with the same informational, aesthetic and cultural experience intended for sighted users.

Finally, the NPS project's software prototypes will be tested by NPS personnel and blind and visually impaired users at three NPS sites for evaluation and feedback. Using real NPS sites for testing will bring together best practices protocols for creating content with blind user preferences for access and engagement. Our hope is that such research and testing in practical situations will provide an opportunity for rich dialog on improving audio description and mobile technology and thus contribute to the knowledge base on audio description.

Implications

Providing an audio-described brochure for blind and visually impaired visitors will expand NPS reach to people with disabilities wishing to experience and enjoy the parks as other visitors currently do. The National Parks offer a social context that is supposed to be educational, historical, and entertaining for all people. This project has the potential to significantly enhance the park experience for blind and visually impaired visitors by enabling them to explore and engage in the social and cultural opportunities that the parks provide. This project also will put the NPS at the forefront of the accessibility field, as media becomes increasingly visual and less dependent on the written word for communicating to the general public.

Thomas Conway, MBA is the Media Coordinator for the Center on Disability Studies (CDS), College of Education, at the University of Hawaii at Manoa

Brett Oppegaard, PhD is the Principal Investigator of the NPS Audio Description project and Assistant Professor in the School of Communications at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

Megan Conway, PhD is an Assistant Professor and the Director of Instruction and Training at the Center on Disability Studies at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.

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