Accessibility isn’t enough—for some it’s a four letter word

Fact Sheet

• One in seven Canadians aged 15 or older reported living with a disability; that is 3.8 million individuals. Of those, 1 in 4 report a “very severe” disability. (Statistics Canada)
• Around the world, 15 percent of the population (or more than 1 billion people) live with a disability. (Rick Hansen Foundation)
• Disabilities aren’t always obvious when you see someone; the types of disabilities recognized by the government include pain-related (most common), flexibility or mobility, mental-health, dexterity, hearing, seeing, learning, memory and developmental. (Statistics Canada)
• Accessibility concerns, like all health issues, affect segments of the Canadian population differently; one third of Indigenous Canadians live with a disability. (Council of Canadians with Disabilities)
• People with a disability disproportionately live in poverty and experience homelessness. (Statistics Canada)
• Experts argue that the recent surge in people with disabilities reflects greater awareness and reduced stigma surrounding those who self-identify, as opposed to greater overall incidence rates of disabilities. (Toronto Star)
• 175 nations ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which came into effect in 2008. (UN)
• The disability rights movement in Canada arose in the second half of the 20th century, focusing its energy on legislation for people with disabilities in the areas of employment, transportation, housing and education. (Canadian Encyclopedia)
• People with disabilities experience significant education and wage gaps from the rest of Canada. (CBC)
• New efforts by accessibility activists are opening up previously inaccessible spaces (including everything from concerts and restaurants to new technologies.) (Vox, New York Times, Salon, New York Times)
• The latest arena of accessibility is online; Ontario has a stated goal of being fully accessible, including online, by 2025. (Government of Ontario)

Key Terms

• Accessibility—Disability is a spectrum. In the widest definition of accessibility, it is about ensuring that products (new phones), services (buses) or experiences (a concert) can be enjoyed by people across the entirety of the spectrum. At it’s core, concerns about accessibility reflect a desire for inclusion, fairness and human rights.
• Disability—A broad term that describes a physical, mental, sensory or cognitive condition that may limit full participation in life due to environmental or social barriers
• Disability rights movement/Accessibility movement—A social and political movement that recognizes that people who need accessibility are often easily ignored; the movement seeks to affect change and empower them.
Classroom Activity - Grades 4 to 8:

Essential Question:

- How can you create an inclusive environment through accessible spaces, experiences and interactions?

Learning Goals:

Students will:

- Understand the meaning of accessibility
- Recognize that accessible spaces, experiences and interactions benefit all people
- Explore how the seven principles of Universal Design can be used to create inclusive spaces, interactions and experiences

Discussion:

1. Why did the authors write this article? Whose perspectives are represented?
2. How can communities become more inclusive?
3. What is the “learning moment” Rich Donovan is referring to?
4. What are some of the ways the article demonstrates accessible spaces, experiences and interactions?
5. The article states that when “accessibility is part of the process from the beginning, it leads to enhanced experiences for everyone.” What do the authors mean by “enhanced experiences for everyone”? Why should accessibility be part of the process from the beginning?
6. Should empathy be a part of the design process?

Dive Deeper:
Part 2

Extension: To extend students further, ask students to place themselves on the Persona Spectrum. Have them consider if they have had a situational, temporary or permanent disability. How does the Persona Spectrum help them identify their own limitations and the accommodations they require as an individual? Ensure that students use respectful language when referring to themselves and others.

Before the lesson, take photographs of your current classroom or learning space and have these ready to show students on the front board.

Educator’s Note: Students in your classroom might have or know someone with a disability. During the activities and discussions, be careful not to focus on or emphasize one specific type of disability. Remind students that some disabilities are invisible or temporary and that everyone can experience limitations at some point in their life. It is important to consider all types of limitations when thinking about how to make our schools and communities more inclusive. We are all unique, have difference experiences and preferences, and require different types of support to function as our best selves.

Educator’s Note: To extend students further, ask students to place themselves on the Persona Spectrum. Have them consider if they have had a situational, temporary or permanent disability. How does the Persona Spectrum help them identify their own limitations and the accommodations they require as an individual? Ensure that students use respectful language when referring to themselves and others.

1. On the front board show students photographs of the classroom space and ask them if they recognize the space. Do they believe that all people will find the space comfortable, safe and easy to use? What is the purpose of the classroom space?
2. Ask students to explore the classroom space and consider the following questions: Does the space meet its purpose? Is it an effective space for everyone to learn in?
3. Have students create small groups. Using Blackline Master 1: Scenarios, provide each group with one scenario that describes a student who could be in their class. Ask students to read through the scenario and assess the classroom space using the following criteria:
   - Are all spaces in the classroom easy to use?
   - Is the space easy to access? How many entrances does it have?
   - Could this student see everything in the class clearly?
   - Could this student hear everything in the class?
   - Could this student participate in all classroom activities?

Extension: To extend students further, ask students to place themselves on the Persona Spectrum. Have them consider if they have had a situational, temporary or permanent disability. How does the Persona Spectrum help them identify their own limitations and the accommodations they require as an individual? Ensure that students use respectful language when referring to themselves and others.

4. Place Blackline Master 2: The Persona Spectrum on the front board. Explain to students that the Persona Spectrum is a tool used to understand related limitations across a spectrum of permanent, temporary and situational disabilities. Its purpose is to foster empathy and to show how no one person exists in isolation. Each person can be placed on the Persona Spectrum, as each person has a range of limitations at different points of their lives.

5. In the small groups, ask students to consider the individuals from their scenarios. Have students think about where these individuals fit on the Persona Spectrum. Have groups present their individual and where they placed this individual on the Persona Spectrum. Ask them to provide a justification of why they selected a certain place on the spectrum.

Extension: To extend students further, ask students to place themselves on the Persona Spectrum. Have them consider if they have had a situational, temporary or permanent disability. How does the Persona Spectrum help them identify their own limitations and the accommodations they require as an individual? Ensure that students use respectful language when referring to themselves and others.

7. In the same small groups, have students select two people in the video and place them on the Persona Spectrum, providing a rationale of why they fit in a certain category of the spectrum.

8. As a class discuss, what is the purpose of this spectrum? Why is it important for everyone to be aware of the types of differing abilities? How does that affect our choices when creating spaces, experiences and interactions?

Part 2

1. Have students create small groups. Ask each group to choose one section or room in the school (e.g., classroom, playground, sports field, cafeteria, administration building, science lab or library). Have each group explore their selected section of the school, take photographs, sketch and write down all the design features they believe allow the space to be accessible.

2. After the groups have returned to the classroom, show students the video “Meet the Normals–Adventure in Universal Design” www.youtube.com/watch?v=A88E4DH2asQ (6.42). Have students discuss the following questions in their groups:
   - What is Universal Design? Why is it important?
   - What is the four-step process used to create accessible design?
   - Why is it important to think about the users of the experience?
   - What did the designers think about when creating an accessible space?

3. On the front board, place the seven principles of Universal Design. As a class, discuss the following principles and provide examples of Universal Design using the space students are in.

   Seven Principles of Universal Design:
   - **Equitable Use**: the design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.
   - **Flexibility in Use**: the design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.
   - **Simple and Intuitive Use**: use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user’s experience, knowledge, language skills or current concentration level.
   - **Perceptible Information**: the design communicates information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user’s sensory abilities.
   - **Tolerance for Error**: the design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.
   - **Low Physical Effort**: the design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.
   - **Size and Space for Approach and Use**: appropriate size and space is provided for approach, reach, manipulation and use regardless of the user’s body size, posture or mobility.

4. In the same groups, have students use their photographs and notes to assess the space they previously explored using the following guiding questions. Provide them with chart paper and markers to record their ideas.

   Guiding Questions
   - What is the space currently used for?
   - What user experiences or interactions occur in that space?
   - Is the space accessible for all people across the Persona Spectrum?
   - What are the current features of the space, experience and interactions that showcase accessibility?

5. After the groups have assessed their space, have students use the principles of Universal Design and the four-step model of discover, define, develop and deliver to create an improved space that ensures all people across the Persona Spectrum will feel ease and comfort in using it. Have students consider the design and the types of technology they can incorporate into the space to ensure that it is inclusive of all people.

6. Have students present their space to the class using a diorama, a poster, a physical 3D model or a 3D model created using software such as Sketchup, Room Arranger or Minecraft: The Education Edition. Ask students to explain the choices they made in their design and describe how each choice improves the space and makes it accessible for all.

Extension: To extend students further, have them share their presentations with the school or community to raise awareness about the importance of Universal Design to create accessible spaces that are inclusive for all people.

Have students choose a place in the community and assess whether it is an accessible space using the principles of Universal Design. Have them consider their role as citizens and advocate for changes within the community.
Blackline Master 1: Scenarios

Student 1:

Hi! My name is Aly. I am nine years old and I love to play with Lego. When I was three years old, my mom realized that I couldn’t see clearly, so I went to the optometrist and got my first pair of glasses. I have been wearing glasses ever since.

Student 2:

Hello there. My name is Ludwig. I am eight years old and I love to play basketball. I was born with spina bifida, which means the bones of my spine didn’t form properly. I have difficulty walking, so I use a wheelchair to move around.

Student 3:

Hi! My name is Sabrina! I am ten years old and I am a rhythmic gymnast and ballet dancer. I competed with my local team and we won second place! It was so exciting, but then last week during practice, I fell over and broke my arm. It hurt so much! The doctor told me I won’t be able to practice for at least two months so my arm can heal.

Student 4:

Hello! My name is Laila. I am seven years old and I love to play the piano. Everyone says I am really good. I am hearing impaired in one ear, but I use the rhythm of music to guide me when I play. I use a hearing aid to help me listen to people when they speak.

Student 5:

Hi there! My name is Patrick. I am nine years old and I love to sing. I am in the school choir and I practice every day. When I grow up, I am going to become a musical artist. I play the guitar too. I lost my voice last week because I got the flu and my lymph nodes were swollen. The doctor told me I can’t talk for at least another week and no singing for three weeks.

Student 6:

Hello. My name is Dean. I am 11 years old and I love to read books. My favourite series is Harry Potter. When I was little I found reading very difficult. All the words on the page were back to front. It was very confusing. My doctor told me I have dyslexia. She gave me a special pair of coloured glasses that help me read.
### Blackline Master 2: The Persona Spectrum

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<th>Permanent</th>
<th>Temporary</th>
<th>Situational</th>
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<td>Arm injury</td>
<td>New parent</td>
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<td>Blind</td>
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<tr>
<td>Non-verbal</td>
<td>Laryngitis</td>
<td>Heavy accent</td>
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#### The Persona Spectrum

We use the Persona Spectrum to understand related mismatches and motivations across a spectrum of permanent, temporary, and situational scenarios. It’s a quick tool to help foster empathy and to show how a solution scales to a broader audience.