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Keynote Presentation: OERs, Inclusion and Xerte (Simon Ball)

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<https://www.dropbox.com/s/42xft50q9x6wznb/07SimonBall.ppt>

Simon stepped in at short notice to deliver a keynote presentation on OERs, Inclusion and Xerte. See the link above to the presentation itself.

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[Dr Simon Ball](#)

7:57pm 15 February 2014 (Edited 4:48pm 16 February 2014) [Permalink](#)

Following the live presentations, we asked each speaker to respond to questions posed by audience members. In the short time available, it was not possible to put all of the questions submitted to the speaker for a response. We asked all speakers if they would respond to the unanswered questions here on Cloudworks. Here are all of the questions asked during the session, with Simon's initial answers beneath each one:

- ▶ disabled people or people with disabilities perhaps?
- ▶ This argument goes round and round and as yet there is no winning answer. There are people who argue for 'disabled people' because the people are disabled by

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OU H818 'The Networked Practitioner' online conference 2014

society's inability to cater for their needs and the disability is not, therefore, the person's issue to deal with alone. There are people who argue for 'people with disabilities' because they are people first and the disability comes second. I have worked in this field for 14 years, and NOT ONCE have I given a presentation at a conference without someone asking this question. I have seen whole conferences hijacked by this debate and it is so frustrating when there are so much more important issues to discuss. Of course this needs to be discussed, and people can be passionate on one side or the other, but there is a time and a place for it, and when you've seen the debate go round and round so many times you stop declaring a position one way or the other because you get tired of people jumping on you for not adopting their preferred terminology.

- ▶ Attending a comedy given by the deaf, for the deaf should I have expected an audio feed? I know I'm playing devil's advocat here but the signage/publicity for all that we do says how and what ways it will be communicated.
- ▶ In a logical world, an event provided by/for Deaf people should also include an audio feed for hearing people. However, the quirk of our (UK) legislation is that it is not (legally) wrong to discriminate against non-disabled people. So, whilst we must provide appropriate alternatives for deaf people in audio-based performances, there is no (legal) imperative to do the reverse in, say, BSL performances.
- ▶ Back engineering any courses is very hard work. It is better to think about accessibility right at the start. We all benefit when a course is more accessible e.g. access to transcript, online resources 24/7 etc....there is a lot of legacy material. Would be great to make this usable too. But some will cost more than other. Some more problematic than others.
- ▶ Totally agree about building in accessibility from the start. And actually in a huge proportion of cases that's not difficult or time consuming to do, if you are aware of the possibilities. Legacy material should, in an ideal world, be retrofitted to add accessibility. Practically though decisions will need to be made about what is a priority (factors such as how many people use it, whether those people are 'needs-known' or 'needs-unknown' and so on) and whether retrofitting is preferable to simply creating a new one and building accessibility in from the start.
- ▶ Cost often an excuse and shows finances driving issue rather than addressing accessibility issues
- ▶ This is the sad reality of accessibility today. There is, written into the UK legislation, a get-out for education institutions that 'reasonable adjustments' do not have to be made if doing so would place the institution in a financially precarious position. Sadly this seems to be used as a general principle of 'We won't spend money on adjustments until someone comes along as says we have to'. The argument that accessible practice is likely to increase business in myriad ways is starting to percolate through, but it is a slow process.
- ▶ How about alternatives (meet same learning objectives) recognising that some resources in use are not usable.
- ▶ Totally fine. Nobody is saying (well, they shouldn't be) that every single person has to do exactly the same thing in exactly the same way. As long as everyone can get to the same objectives, with a broadly equivalent process, that's fine. (The word equivalent is key here).
- ▶ If a technology is not accessible should it be used at all?
- ▶

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- ▶ It can be, as long as there is an accessible version or equivalent alternative. See response above about equivalence.
- ▶ In sports coaching we learn to 'see or identify' the strengths and play to these ... what a person can do, rather than flagging what they cannot do and trying to offer them a version of that. Who is going to take care of the learners? The educator, the SME, or the institution ... or the person with the disability (or their parents and supporters).
- ▶ Personally I think playing to an individual's strengths is a very positive way to go. Almost all disabled people have skills in particular areas that could be used in employment, study etc if circumstances were adjusted to facilitate it. As for who takes care of the learners, it has to be a joint effort by all concerned. I would expect a disabled learner to feel patronised and unconsulted if the institution or educator made assumptions about their needs and delivered what they thought might work without bringing the learner's own opinions into the equation. On the other hand I would expect a disabled learner to work with the institution to find an appropriate solution, rather than simply saying 'this isn't accessible' and then waiting for the institution to do something about it on their own.
- ▶ It is a two way thing - those with accessibility requirements are and should be supported to have the means to see, hear and engage.
- ▶ Indeed, see response above.
- ▶ Context really is king here. We and can't don't create content with every possible context in mind.
- ▶ It is impossible to create content that is suitable for every possible user. Utterly impossible. For a start, some people's needs are directly opposite to others (for example a large proportion of people with dyslexia prefer high contrast but without the glare of black and white; while there are significant numbers of vision impaired people who find the black/white contrast easiest to read). The key here is flexibility - allowing the user as much control over things like font, size, colour etc as possible, and where not possible providing as range of alternative or equivalent versions/experiences.
- ▶ We also can't assume we know how students with disabilities will address the resources. Same disability can be supported in different ways
- ▶ Absolutely. Never assume. Build in flexibility, and if the users are a known cohort, consult with them (if not, try to gather a user group to cover as many likely needs as is appropriate to the scale of the project).
- ▶ Who is thinking of this from the point of view of the 'creator'? Can a writer or artist or musician be expected to be looking over their shoulder at accessibility issues? In education, yes, accessibility is necessary ... but there has to be a balance and the issues need to be a contribution made by those qualified to reversion. Working in TV it is easy enough to add a transcript or a signed version ... but had these issues been considered at the briefing stage I wonder what the creative output might have been - unsatisfactory for all?
- ▶ A writer or artist or musician is under no legal (UK) obligation, as there is no legislation stating that 'products' have to be accessible, only 'services'. It is absolutely anathema to the very concept of accessibility to think about providing an inferior service for most users to justify making it accessible. We saw this when the Disability Discrimination Act (UK) was first applied to education in 2001, and many

institutions responded by removing all audio/video/images from course materials in order to make them 'accessible' - which actually just made them less usable for everyone.

- ▶ If you allow adaptation then are you running the risk of making accessible resources inaccessible in reuse
- ▶ This is true, but you cannot use this as a reason for not opening materials for reuse. An OER is like a balloon - once released you have no control over how it is reused. However, the Accessibility Passport idea may be a way to help avoid this (each OER has a short web-based form associated with it detailing accessibility features built in (or not), user testing conducted (or not) - then reusers can add to this if they enhance the accessibility features or otherwise adapt it in a way that will affect the object's accessibility.
- ▶ so should we have more technologies available tailored for accessibility?
- ▶ In an ideal world, yes. What is more important though is that educators are trained in how to use them to produce accessible materials.
- ▶ 'I have friends who celebrate their 'disability' - they don't want to read, they don't want to hear ... or understand the world outside the parameters in which they operate. Not a scientific example but it is of my experience of resistance from some, while there is a desire for solutions from others. This is like understanding a language ... do you provide multiple language versions, or support people to understand the common language?
- ▶ This is a much bigger debate than we can get into here. There is a distinct 'culture' associated with some impairments, especially the d/Deaf community. This cultural association, as you rightly say, is based on the principle of 'There's nothing wrong with us, we're just different, so why should we adapt to your society when we can interact perfectly well in our own' (I paraphrase and apologise if I haven't expressed it well).
- ▶ My worry is actually at the production or output stage - faced with the hard enough task of answering a creative brief you can be unnecessarily so tied in knots that the output will be unsatisfactory for everyone - though accessible to everyone.
- ▶ This is why accessibility needs to be a PART of the design brief and the focus should be on Usability rather than Accessibility. See my earlier point - dumbing everything down to the least creative level in the name of accessibility just makes it less usable for everyone - not a solution.
- ▶ Are there statistics on outcomes of using the software for accessibility?
- ▶ I'll see what I can find.
- ▶ the importance of leadership of policies to 'staff' too - without real understanding and commitment, tokenism and 'silo' thinking likely
- ▶ Exactly - this is why the 12 Steps document seemed to be so well received by senior management- www.jisctechdis.ac.uk/12steps
- ▶ I use Xerte in preference to other platforms in situations where I know there are in my group a greater than average % of reasons to accommodate dyslexics with a scale of accessible issues.
- ▶ I use Xerte in preference to PowerPoint when I can. I just find the outputs more

flexible and more widely usable as well as being more accessible.



[Chris Pegler](#)

5:24pm 16 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Thanks for stepping in and doing such a great show at short notice and now for all these answers. The number of questions indicates how interested we were. If readers are interested in Xerte then this link gives access to examples and also videos (including Quick and Dirty series aimed at teachers)

<http://www.nottingham.ac.uk/xerte/documentation.aspx>



[Dr Simon Ball](#)

8:45pm 16 February 2014 [Permalink](#)

Thanks Chris. The Xerte Community site is also developing into a very useful resource for those getting started: www.xerte.org.uk. The free Xerte Fridays from Jisc TechDis may also be of interest: www.jisctechdis.ac.uk/xertefriday



[Jonathan Vernon](#)

8:45am 17 February 2014 (Edited 8:46am 17 February 2014) [Permalink](#)

I have used Xerte and enjoyed it. I have recommended it to the Amateur Swimming Association as we have larger than average percentage of learners with disabilities and teachers/coaches than in the general population - often something simple can address a problem that was significant for someone, in particular settings for Dyslexia, for example (like this screen, with a beige background). Though not so in the write mode ... only the read mode :)

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