

RESEARCH UPDATE



Update from the Adaptech Research Network By Jennison Asuncion, Catherine Fichten, Maria Barile

We wanted to provide an update of our ongoing research as well as our latest projects. None of these activities would be possible without the participation and support of AQEIPS members, so thank you.

Accessibility of Social Media: New Research

Our study of the accessibility of social media to students with various disabilities is well underway at the time of publication of this article. We are looking at the use and accessibility of different types of social media such as Facebook, blogs, instant messaging services, and YouTube by students and recent graduates with disabilities at Canadian colleges and universities. The goal of this research is to increase the awareness of schools, employers, and others who use or develop social media so that they take into account the needs and concerns of users with disabilities. This study is carried out in collaboration between the National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS) and the Adaptech Research Network. AQEIPS has been assisting us in spreading the word about the study. By the time you read this, we will be finished gathering the data, but will not yet have the results analyzed. Look at the Adaptech Research Network home page toward mid-summer 2010 for a report on the findings.

Information and Computer Technologies for Cegep Students with Learning Disabilities: New Research

In a second ongoing study we are focusing on Cegep students with learning disabilities and investigating the computer and information technologies they are likely to find helpful. We are especially interested in Francophone students because, in general, there seems to be more limited use of computer technologies that can help students with learning disabilities among French than among English speaking students. Once we find out what technologies students are using successfully, we can publicize these and make recommendations to Cegeps to provide these to their students. This study is being carried out in collaboration between Dawson College, Collège Montmorency, and Cégep André Laurendeau. AQEIPS is an active partner of this research.

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Graduation from College and University: New Research

What are the factors that help students with disabilities succeed in college or university? What causes these students to stop pursuing their postsecondary education? What are individuals who recently graduated or who have stopped pursuing their postsecondary education doing? We are currently in the process of investigating these questions. To do this we are looking at three groups of current and recent students: those who are presently enrolled in a Canadian college, Cegep or university; those who graduated from a postsecondary institution within the last three years and are no longer in school; and those individuals who, for whatever reason, stopped their program of study and left school altogether.

If you are currently a student at a college, Cegep or university, if you have graduated within the last three years, or if you completely stopped your program of studies and left school within the last three years, then we would like to hear from you. If you are willing to complete an online survey and share your experiences, we will send you \$20.00 as a token of our appreciation. Please go to www.adaptech.org/gradswd for more details and to complete the survey.

The POSITIVES Scale: Completed Research

We are excited to report that we recently developed and validated the Post-secondary Information Technology Initiative (POSITIVES) Scale. This is thanks to 1354 postsecondary students with disabilities from across the country who participated in the research behind the Scale's development. What is POSITIVES? In short, it is a brief survey designed so that colleges and universities can quickly and easily find out, directly from students with disabilities themselves, about how accessible information and communication technologies (ICTs) are at school, at home, and in e-learning contexts. We made it easy for schools to understand the data and to use it to make decisions that will result in a more accessible learning experience for all students.

Our findings show that students often have more than one disability or impairment which can affect how easily they are able to use ICTs. Students' disabilities also influence the specialized ICTs they use and how well their ICT related needs are being met. While the findings indicate that, overall, students' ICT related needs are generally well met, students had concerns in a number of areas. These include: inadequate availability of adapted computers in the school's specialized computer laboratories, ⇒

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poor loans of equipment by the school when their own technologies were not available, lack of training on ICTs both on and off campus, and technical support when students are not at school. Students' favorable perceptions concerned: their school's web pages, which were generally accessible; their own ability to effectively use the ICTs they need; the availability of electronic format course materials; and the accessibility of their school's interactive academic online services as well as the library's computer systems.

If you would like to learn more about the POSITIVES Scale and the findings go to <http://www.adaptech.org> and search for "POSITIVES Scale". While you are on our web site you may also want to check out our Free and Inexpensive Computer Technologies Videos as well as the Resources section. These provide information about free and relatively inexpensive ICTs that students with disabilities may find helpful.

THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT DISABILITY

In the Fall 2009 edition of *Hermes* we introduced you to the exciting field of Critical Disability Studies. We also mentioned that there are currently only three Canadian graduate programs dedicated to making disability the subject of social critique: York University, Ryerson University, and the University of Manitoba.

With no Quebec University being among these we thought it appropriate to call attention to some local scholars who have nevertheless taken it upon themselves to think critically about disability. J. Paige MacDougall, a PhD candidate in the McGill Department of Anthropology is one of such scholars. Learn more about her exciting research here.

Being Deaf/Being Maya: Sign Language and Social Experience

J. Paige MacDougall

My research investigates the role that sign language plays in the social experiences of indigenous peoples living in rural Yucatan. Specifically, I concentrate on understanding the phenomenon of sign language use among both deaf and hearing people in a Yucatec Maya community called Chican, which is located in the municipality of Tixmehuac in the state of Yucatan, Mexico. To contextualize, I explore attitudes towards deafness and communication more generally, and take into consideration the influence that colonial social history has on local models of self-definition. I explain the complexity of identity in my field site by comparing →