



Technology Feature

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Post-secondary students access assistive technology with help of parents

— By Alice Havel, Laura King, Maegan Harvison, and Christine Vo

In May of 2017, the Adaptech Research Network hosted a three-day conference at Dawson College, focusing on stakeholder perspectives regarding technology and its accessibility for students with disabilities in post-secondary education. This was the second of five international conferences organized by the Ed-ICT International Network, under the leadership of Jane Seale of the Open University of the United Kingdom, and funded by the Leverhulme Trust.

The goal of Ed-ICT is to explore new perspectives on how post-secondary institutions can better use technology to remove the ongoing barriers and exclusion of students with disabilities. Along with representatives from five countries (Canada, USA, UK, Germany and Israel), there were local participants from various stakeholder groups including students with disabilities, disability service providers, faculty, computer tech-

nology staff, digital publishers and senior administrators.

Six post-secondary students with disabilities were invited to participate in a panel discussion on the topic of technology, responded to questions such as: what barriers have you encountered in using technology effectively, who should be involved in making technology accessible and usable to students with disabilities, and who and what had helped them access and use technology? Their responses were insightful, varied and in some cases, surprising.

One student who experienced a lengthy rehabilitation process as a young adult, due to an acquired motor impairment, shared that her parents point out potentially useful new technology to her. She researches their suggestions on Google or YouTube to judge for herself whether it is worthwhile to pursue further. An-



Members of the student panel at the Ed-ICT International Network Conference held at Dawson College in Montreal, May 2017. (Photo credit, Catherine Fichten)

other student, blind since infancy, described how her parents advocated for her until she was old enough to advocate for herself. They made sure that she had access to assistive technology, and taught her to use the right tool in her technology toolbox for the right job.

These two students reminded us that it is not solely the responsibility of rehabilitation centers and educational institutions to help individuals access and use technology; parents are also key stakeholders. Some parents may find this

daunting, as they don't feel adequately informed.

Fortunately, Adaptech provides parents with bilingual, updated information on free and inexpensive computer technologies for post-secondary students with disabilities (<http://www.adaptech.org/en/research/fandi>).

Adaptech describes built-in accessibility features, software and hardware for Windows and Macintosh computers, as well as mobile apps for Android and Apple devices. The database is categorized by need (adapted keyboards, writing tools, screen readers) which makes searching easier for non-techie types. Since the conference taught us that parents often pave the way for their children's academic success, checking out this database is a must for parents who want to expand their own toolboxes.

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