

PODCAST Episode 268

📅 Mon, 1/10 9:54AM ⌚ 1:05:23

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

braille, students, blind, learning, elevator, reading, educators, literacy, people, challenge, education, years, thinking, canada, learners, adults, rob, vision, article, audio

SPEAKERS

Rob Mineault, Steve Barclay, Lis Malone, Ryan Fleury, Adam Wilton

- R** Rob Mineault 00:39
Hey, and welcome to another episode of AT Banter
- S** Steve Barclay 00:44
Banter, banter.
- R** Rob Mineault 00:46
Of course, this is a podcast where we talk with advocates and members of the disability community to educate and inspire better conversation about disability. Hey, my name is Rob Mineault. And joining me today for the first time in 2022 .. Mr. Ryan Fleury.
- R** Ryan Fleury 01:06
I'm back.
- R** Rob Mineault 01:09
And of course, what would Ryan Fleury be without Mr. Steve Barclay?
- S** Steve Barclay 01:15
I'm guessing happy.

—

R Rob Mineault 01:20
And wait, that's not all. Also joining us as the newest member of our Motley Crew ... Lis Malone.

L Lis Malone 01:28
Hey, happy New Year.

R Rob Mineault 01:31
Indeed, how are you guys doing in 2022 so far?

R Ryan Fleury 01:36
Fabulous.

S Steve Barclay 01:38
Fine and dandy.

L Lis Malone 01:39
Beautiful.

R Rob Mineault 01:40
Well, you know, not only is it the first day back to work for a lot of us, it is also World Braille Day.

R Ryan Fleury 01:51
It is.

R Rob Mineault 01:52
And of course, when you dear listener are listening to this, of course, it won't be World Braille Day, but it'll be been a week passed. But that's okay. Just pretend. In any case, it is World Braille Day. And for that momentous occasion, we do have a special guest. Ryan, will you do the honors, please?

R Ryan Fleury 02:11

R Ryan Fleury 02:11

Well, our guest is very special because our guest is Adam Wilton, who was our very first guest ever on at Badger podcast. So five years ago, Adam made his debut appearance on this show. So we would love to welcome back. Adam Wilton, from the Provincial Resource Center for the Visually Impaired.

A Adam Wilton 02:34

It's great to be here. Ryan, thanks so much for having me.

R Ryan Fleury 02:37

Glad you could make it. I can't believe it's been five years.

A Adam Wilton 02:43

On this auspicious of days, world Braille day 2022.

R Ryan Fleury 02:47

That's right

A Adam Wilton 02:48

213 years since the birth of Louis Braille.

S Steve Barclay 02:51

How bout that

L Lis Malone 02:55

Oh, he doesn't look a day over 40. Right.

R Rob Mineault 03:01

Sorry, that's what it says on his Tinder profile. But yeah, he fudging it a little I think. Well, hey, listen. So what we thought the plan was, and what we'd love to talk to Adam about. And honestly, when we when we sat around and thought, "What the heck are we going to do for World Braille Day this year?", Adam, your name was sort of the top of the list of people who

that we could we could have on the show, and to just talk about Braille, because I feel like put put all of us in a room and bring up the topic of braille, and we can just talk for hours. So that's exactly what the plan is.

A

Adam Wilton 03:39

How much tape have you got Rob?

R

Rob Mineault 03:44

Yeah, I got an external hard drive. We're good to go.

R

Ryan Fleury 03:47

Awesome.

A

Adam Wilton 03:48

Well, I guess I'll just kind of fill in a little bit about who I am and where I'm coming to this conversation from, just because I think it might be helpful. First and foremost, I just want to say just in the interest of identity and representation, I am not a braille reader myself. I'm a teacher of students who are blind or have low vision. I have been a teacher of the visually impaired for the last 15, almost 16 years. And I've been the manager here at the Provincial Resource Center for the Visually Impaired for the last five, almost six years now. And so I come to the topic of Braille as an educator, as an ally and as an enthusiast, but not as a user myself, although I do read Braille visually, just because if I didn't, I wouldn't be very good at my job. I also wouldn't I'd also have a back room, a warehouse full of bumpy paper.

R

Rob Mineault 04:50

So maybe we can just sort of start the conversation, because it has been it has been a few years since we talked to you last and it has been a while since we've actually really talked much about Braille itself. But can you kind of give us a little bit of a snapshot of just, you know, what, what is kind of what is the state of Braille education these days? Is it getting better? Is it improving? Where are we at?

A

Adam Wilton 05:15

That's a really great question. You know, when we, when we last chatted, I think that a trend that we were starting to see in the field of blindness education, was thinking about Braille for a wider range of students, not just our students who maybe are more academically motivated, and they're out there, you know, reading Harry Potter cover to cover or, you know, they're out there, you know, writing great essays and whatnot, I see a major shift, and it's very, very exciting that, you know, we're, we're thinking of Braille and Braille literacy for a wider range of

students who are blind or visually impaired, you know, it's not, it's not just for those students who are, who are more academically motivated. And so, but coupled with that, it's also a move to think of not just Braille for a wider range of students. But think of, like, what Braille means to to that wider range of students, you know, we used to call it, we still something we called functional Braille. And that was where, you know, students would learn functional skills, like making shopping lists, and labeling personal items, or, you know, other kind of independent living skills tasks. But the really exciting thing that I've seen in the last several years is that for students who might have a visual impairment, and let's say, a more complex profile, you know, we're not just teaching these students how to create a shopping list, you know, we're working on more meaning centered approaches that really, that really help braille to meet them where they're at. Rather than thinking, okay, we're either going to do a shopping list, or we're going to do a Harry Potter cover to cover. So that for me has been the really the, the exciting piece that has grown since we last spoke. So Braille is very, very much alive in kindergarten through grade 12. Even though compared to the rest of the population, a relatively small number of students are reading braille in their elementary and secondary years.

R

Rob Mineault 07:34

Yeah, I was gonna ask about that, because I'm kind of curious. I was I was reading an article earlier, and it sort of it was it was an article out of out of the US. And, you know, they were saying that they figured that Braille, Braille literacy had dropped from somewhere in the in the high 50s, you know, 20 years, or 30 years ago, all the way down to like 10%. I'm just wondering, here in Canada, do we have any sort of statistics? Like, do we know how many people are sort of actively using braille? And if so, like, why not? Why isn't that something that, that some of the the blindness organizations are keeping track of nationally?

A

Adam Wilton 08:20

Well, I think one of the challenges that we face in Canada, in terms of the number of Braille readers is that we've got, we've got kind of multi sector involvement with stakeholders, whereas in the US, there's still a range of stakeholders in the blindness community, but many operate at a federal level. And so you've got these broader federal agencies that are collecting data, you know, coast to coast, in Canada, with particularly in K to 12 education, because the education is the purview of the individual provinces. I think we, you know, if you were to look provincially, we probably have a reasonably good number. But then that's further complicated, robbed by the fact that, then we've got to look at okay, well, to what, like, how are students using Braille? Because for example, you can have a student who is totally blind, who is requesting Braille every single semester all the way through their educational career. And then you can also have a student, let's say, with low vision, who reads both print and Braille is a dual media learner. And then, so I think one of the challenges we face is having metrics that are sensitive enough to be able to pick up the number of Braille users but then further to that being really clear about what do we mean when we say a Braille user?

R

Rob Mineault 09:54

Right, so given that though, like, well, so what's the general feeling, are enough people still learning Braille and still using it on a daily basis in, you know, by any metric that sort of you see on a daily basis?

A

Adam Wilton 10:10

Well, you know, it's interesting, if you were to, and this is where I think a lot of the the evolution has happened in terms of some of the thinking around Braille and what it means through an equity lens, because I actually see, I actually see the numbers narrative as being problematic. And I actually see it the I see it being problematic, because every time some there some question about the validity of Braille, the number of users invariably comes up, but as far as I'm concerned, and call me idealistic, but if I've got one student who's requesting braille, and that's their best medium for, for learning, then we're going to provide it, we're going to find a way to make it work. So I hope that I'm not dismissing the question, Rob, it's just I'm, I don't know, I'm trying to move away from this statistical narrative, because I see it actually rooted in some some latent ableism.

R

Ryan Fleury 11:17

So that stance that philosophy, then Adam, one Braille reader is a success. Is that like, just a BC mandate, philosophy that you have? Or do you think that's happening nationally?

A

Adam Wilton 11:29

I can't really say Ryan, I and I wouldn't even go so far as to call it a BC philosophy. It's a it's it's what I believe in what I tried to bring to my work, right? It I wouldn't say that it characterizes any one, you know, any one sector over another. I think, I think the really key thing to realize and to recognize at all levels, is that, you know, we say we see on Twitter, and Facebook and and online, your Braille is literacy. And, and I would go so I would go further to say, you know, Braille is equitable, meaningful access to literacy. And, you know, so then that kind of that furthers that narrative a little bit to say that, you know, it. It's not just a writing system. It represents something very, very important to a group of learners. And whether that learners is far there's five of them, or 500 of them, if we're going to be if we're going to have education systems that are that that prioritize meaningful, equitable access for students who are blind or have low vision, and Braille is their primary learning medium, then, then we, you know, need to find ways to provide it, I will say, we're fortunate here in British Columbia, that we have systems and structures at all levels that understand that, and that continue to support the provision of the not only the provision, but the proliferation of Braille in schools across the province.

L

Lis Malone 13:19

And if I could just add something to that, Adam, that that sentiment you just just brought up, I think that the system, if you will, is a little short sighted when they're very quick to dismiss the importance of Braille within the the low vision and blindness community because I think that that school of thought that things can be replaced with audio products and QR codes that will read it to them, I think they're completely dismissing the deaf blind community, that those audio products don't do anything to assist.

A

Adam Wilton 13:55

Well, and you know, Liz, that that's really tapping into kind of an age old - I'm not even I don't even want to call it a debate- I almost want to call it like a trope. You know, this, this idea that, that audio is somehow going to, you know, eventually audio access is going to, you know, supplant or push Braille out of the learning space altogether. I mean, all you need to do is ask a teacher about the differences between between reading and listening. And you can already start to see why. For many learners, there's, there's a, there's a real advantage to having a habit to having a writing system, which is what Braille is, and and, you know, with respect to the point, the means of meaningful access for our deafblind learners. Yeah, you're absolutely right. I actually I'd like to think that what I mentioned from the outset around, you know, Braille being thought of for being not only thought of, but like, supported joyfully and enthusiastically for a wider range of students with a wider range of profiles, I like to think that our students who are deafblind have been included in that in that widening of the Braille tent that we've seen, at least in elementary and secondary education in the last 10 years.

L

Lis Malone 15:31

Because I, and I definitely think that society in general, whether it's in the US or in Canada, they are very single minded and thinking that we're actually forgetting that there are persons with multiple disabilities, and they'll just see, okay, well, we have this fix for this one issue, but they don't see it as, you know, a combined, you know, state or condition that, you know, that singular solution is, is kind of null and void for.

A

Adam Wilton 16:00

Right. And so students with more diverse profiles, where, you know, we really do need to have a range of tools in our toolkit, because, you know, there's whatever kind of "typical student" with that profile, we might think, you know, the best, the best thing that uh, you know, that a prototypical understanding of a student profile is going to get us is in the ballpark, but it's not going to tell us exactly what that student needs to be successful. And so I agree 100%, these, these things need to be need to be responsive to diversity, as opposed to, you know, as opposed to a one solution per one profile scenario.

R

Rob Mineault 16:48

Yeah, and I really do think that that is a pretty big misconception that a lot of people will have. We're just used to, oh, this technology replaces that technology replaces this technology, we're kind of used to that type of mindset. And people don't necessarily understand the pros and cons of each, you know, each solution, as it stands, you know, if they're not in that community and having that lived experience. So I think that that's where, you know, education and educating people is really important, and having these types of conversations.

A

Adam Wilton 17:19

Can I give you an example? Rob?

R

Rob Mineault 17:21

Yeah, please.

A

Adam Wilton 17:22

It's a little bit. It's related to Braille, but it's more kind of a, you know, non visual access, compensatory skill type example, but the Cranmer Abacus. You know, the teaching, using the advocates to teach, you know, place value basic operations to blind students was a tried tested and true strategy. And, you know, it's, sometimes there's the perception of, oh, well, why can't we just teach talking calculators? Well, we might teach talking calculators, but we also have to recognize that this older, lower more, I'll say, might be more established, lower tech solution has value in and above. It's like it's compensatory piece. Because you're also, when you're when you're working on an abacus, you're learning place value in a way that you're not going to get from a talking calculator. So I like to use that example as a not so gentle plug for my visually impaired colleagues to keep teaching the abacus. But also, to keep in mind that, you know, some of these lower tech solutions that are more established, may have value beyond the beyond the surface level functions that are being elaborated on by whatever higher tech solution comes next.

R

Ryan Fleury 18:48

Well, and how many people do we know still rely on a slate and stylus for producing Braille?

A

Adam Wilton 18:52

Right, absolutely true. I love sitting in conferences and hearing them behind me. It warms my heart.

R

Rob Mineault 19:03

In the grand scheme of things, what are some of the roadblocks that you see to Braille education? You know, do we have enough teachers? Is there enough people that that wants to learn braille? Where are we with that?

A

Adam Wilton 19:22

Great question. You know, I, one of the kind of regular issues and we would have talked about this five years ago, and, you know, we're continuing to make progress. But one of the challenges that we do face in our community of educators of the blind or visually impaired, are the number of us and so, you know, we're consistently recruiting into our field, you know, getting educators aware that this is, in fact, a specialization. You know, and getting people

interested, you know, we're really fortunate that the educators that that come into our field, by and large are some of just, you know, there's some of the most creative and just passionate educators that I've ever had the good fortune of working with, and who tend to be in the field for quite a long time, the challenge is getting them into the field and getting them aware that this is this is something that, you know, a qualified educator can take on with the right training. So there's the there's the supply of teachers. And I also think part and parcel to that is the consideration of Braille as a viable option for a student. I, you know, I mentioned before, one of the one of the really positive trends that we've seen in the education space in the last 10 years has been, you know, meaningful consideration and engagement in braille programs for a wider range of students across a wider range of more diverse range of profiles. But the challenge with that is if you don't have the specialists who are working in those school districts, in those education authorities in those communities, who can inject Braille into the broader conversation around what access is going to look like for that student, then, you know, you might default on to other means of access that are perhaps more familiar to the classroom teachers and families, parents guardians. Things like audio access, you know, things like, you know, magnification and enlargement and strategies like that. So I think this supply of teachers is something that we're always trying to work to make sure that we have enough to provide enough educators to provide responsive service to students. And but not only to, you know, the students that they are currently serving, but also to have the capacity to take new students on to, you know, consult with, with students who might not be, you know, they might not qualify as visually impaired, but vision might be involved in some way. Just having the time space and bandwidth to be able to do that, I think is, is really important. And so it's it's a yeah, it's a challenge. And, you know, I'm, I realized I'm horribly biased in saying that it really is the best job in education, if not the best job out there. But, I mean, where else do you get to live, learn and grow with students from kindergarten through grade 12? You know, you could be finger painting at 8am and helping a student on advanced calculus by 9am. You know, it's, it's, it's, it really is, it really is one of the one of the most fulfilling most engaging gigs you can have in education today.

R

Ryan Fleury 23:08

So I do have to ask this question, and it is COVID related, but how have you guys been able to pivot with COVID, and the whole hybrid schooling, learning solutions, you know, in class one day out of class next, that that has had to have been a very tricky slope for you guys to work with students one on one, or 2 on 1, or whatever the ratio is?

A

Adam Wilton 23:33

Yeah, it's interesting, because in some ways, it's been very challenging, but in other ways, it's actually been quite, there's been a lot of like, affordances, like, there's been some silver linings for sure. One of the challenges I think, has been where, you know, where students have, you know, maybe they've been newer to braille, and they've needed more hands on direct work with exploring different textures and surfaces and exploring tactile maps and globes and images. There's certainly been the not been that challenged, but then the kind of the silver lining has been, as, as hybrid learning has come online, it's really put the entire education system in a position where they're thinking more and more about digital accessibility than ever have before. So you know, I heard from a colleague last year that her student with low vision was actually doing incredibly well with hybrid learning, because the materials were being

designed for all students to look at from 30 said 30 to 40 centimeters away on a screen, rather than that student being the only one accessing materials that way. The student having low vision, I should say. So it's like, it's been a really interesting time where yes, there's been that challenge of disruption of the more hands on direct contact piece. But then there's also been some really interesting affordances that, frankly, I hope our system can learn from and internalize. So that digital accessibility remains a priority with whatever comes next.

R

Ryan Fleury 25:34

Yeah, for sure.

R

Rob Mineault 25:35

So what age then is sort of the best to introduce braille to to a blind child. That might be a loaded question.

A

Adam Wilton 25:50

Okay, so here, here's the here's what I'll say. Literacy development, as long as like, literacy development starts from day one, in my opinion, you know, if you are gathering information about your world, you are on the path to literacy. And so when we talk about like the age to introduce Braille, I think the question has got to be as as as print rich, and as print prioritized, our environments are for typically sighted learners, they've got for our blind and low vision learners, Braille has got to be in there, similar similarly prioritized, similarly ubiquitous. And, and that also means, you know, starting on us on the same timeline. Now, the caveat to that, though, is you can acquire Braille, reading and writing at any point of the lifespan. And so, you know, we have many students, in fact, the last time I was on the podcast, I remember I was talking about the Braille Challenge, which is a Braille reading and writing competition that we host that is hosted across North America, every year in Canada in the US, and we've hosted it here in British Columbia for the last 10 years is actually our 10 year anniversary this year. Now, we're going to be entirely virtual. Just with with, with safety precautions, and whatnot. But one thing that, you know, we have it the Braille Challenge, we have students who have been reading braille their entire lives, it's the only it's the only literacy medium they've ever they've ever used. We have other students have the Braille Challenge, who might have only been learning Braille for the last four months. And so the most important thing in my mind is is is, you know, aside from the value of early rich, inclusion and immersion in Braille rich environments, I say that it's important. But then, if you've got good quality learning environments, and educators and family members who believe in the value of braille, and you've got an environment that supports that, then you know, you can really introduce Braille at any point. And that the Braille challenge, as I said, we have students who might have only been reading braille three or four, three or four months at that point, but we find a way to make it work for them. So they can have a fun day, connecting with their peers who read and write in the same way that that they do. So obviously, there's a big priority on early rich contact with Braille for blind and low vision, preschool population. But with that said, you know, it, as long as it's a priority, and that it's valued, and it's, you know, it's seen as functionally equivalent to print, Braille can be acquired at any point in the elementary and secondary years.

R

Rob Mineault 29:04

Is it ever a challenge to to be teaching Braille within say, the school system? I kind of liken it to say, French immersion, because I know that I can only imagine what it's like for a kid to be in a French immersion class. And they, they not only they're, they're learning all the regular subjects, but they also have this layer of they're also learning French, at the same time, and how, you know, really challenging. Is it kind of the same way when you're trying to teach Braille alongside all of the other regular subjects for them, like, can it get kind of overwhelming for them?

A

Adam Wilton 29:42

In my experience, it really depends on the at what point in the student's educational career they're, they're learning, when they're acquiring Braille. Because, you know, as a teacher, students who are blind or have low vision I see one of my most significant functions as working with the classroom teacher, so that I can integrate what I'm doing in terms of by specialized instruction, so that the student is meaningfully participating in what the whole class is doing. So I'm trying my best to make sure what I'm doing is integrating with what all of the students in the rest of the class are doing. So that I'm not creating this special little Braille world. You know, on the side, I'm supporting the development of the mechanical skills for Braille reading, and of comprehension, vocabulary, and all those those really key foundational literacy development areas. But I'm trying my best to do so in the context of the students environment. So in when in kind of the elementary years, I'm, I'm working with that classroom teacher to make sure that that that the classroom environment is, you know, not only accepting but is responsive to a student learning braille. In the secondary school years, it's a little bit different, because everyone else in the classroom already has really well established print literacy skills. And so the opportunities for integration are a little bit more challenging. And so if I've got a student who's learning Braille at the high school level, I'm looking to find ways to kind of jigsaw that into the students day. So that, you know, we're trying to create an organic learning opportunities as best as possible. So for example, you know, if the student has a study block, I might try to work Braille instruction in there, or I might try to find a way to have Braille offered as an independent study course between myself and the student. So that that students gonna get credit for the time that they're working. The time that they're working, because you know that what your question, Rob is one where it's, it's a constant challenge to, with with a really busy full provincial curriculum, to also find time and space and bandwidth to teach those those visual impairment specific skills, we call it what we refer to the as the expanded core curriculum. And while I wouldn't consider Braille, like Braille, to me is a core literacy skill, not the expanded core curriculum, but it is still something that will work that will, depending on the age of the student, and where they're at in their educational career, how much extra work will depend. So, I mean, I realize that's kind of a wishy washy answer, but I guess the answer is, it depends. I think too, though, we have to keep in mind that you're not going to be teaching calculus Braille code to somebody in grade five, now, or some of that scientific notation. So there'll be learning Braille, as needed as they progress and deciding which route they want to take and post secondary and so on, you know, whether it's music, Braille math, Braille, scientific notation, whatever, right. So they're not learning it all at once. There is a process there, just like language. Yeah. And that's why that's why it's really like, I realize I'm biased in saying this, but that's why it's really important to have really solid involvement from qualified teacher of visually impaired students, because this is someone who has specialized training in an experience in, in integrating all those different pieces in and setting that that trajectory for

acquiring those specialized tools and skills and devices. Because really, what we want to do is we want to have learning in the expanded core curriculum, you know, those visual impairments, specific skills and knowledge, we want to have that supporting learning in the core curriculum. And vice versa. We want to have these things as mutually supportive, not, not kind of excluding one another, because of hours in the day, or something like that.

R

Rob Mineault 34:10

So I want to shift the conversation a little bit away from from the school system and talk a little bit about adults, because, of course, blindness can occur at any age. And, and I feel like especially this idea of people thinking that screen readers or audio can replace something like Braille, I think is probably a common attitude when it comes to adults that are say that are losing their vision. And it's just kind of a kind of a two pronged question and it's more hypothetical, I think then specific just a conversation starter, but how do we how do we better gauge adults to get excited about learning braille, and in the long term is it worth it for adults to learn braille? I kind of get the feeling that it depending on who you ask, you might get a different answer.

A

Adam Wilton 35:08

Yeah, I suppose I should start with a caveat by saying that the blind adults and colleagues in my orbit are some of the most enthusiastic people about Braille on this earth. I'm glad your question was hypothetical, because I don't know that I can answer it specifically. Just because I'm, I'm very privileged to to work with and learn from Blind and Visually Impaired colleagues every day. Each of whom uses Braille and believes in its power and its relevance for students. And and from what they've shared with me in their own lives as well. With that said, I also will I also absolutely recognize, appreciate and value what some of my blind friends tell me about, you know, how most of what they do in a given day might be in, you know, might be using a screen reader or, or using some other form of, of text to speech. But I'll tell you, you know, one of the things I rarely have ever encountered is anyone who regrets the time that they spent learning and working in Braille. You know, even if it's someone who doesn't use it hardcopy Braille on a regular basis in their day to day life, you know, just out and about as an adult in the world. I can't think of an instance and of anyone who said to me, you know, I really wish they would have got me started on audio only from day one. I've never encountered that and many of my blind friends and colleagues credit Braille with giving them the skills and the literacy skills and the motivation to, you know, continue to learn and to continue to thrive in the literary world. You know, many of them credit their use of Braille.

R

Rob Mineault 37:15

Yeah, I mean, I would say that, you know, in my experience, too, I mean, I've run into people that generally say the opposite. They'll say things like, you know, I wish I wish I had learned braille sooner. Well, let me ask you this, then .. what kind of resources are out there? Like, how difficult is it for an adult to actually learn braille?

A

Adam Wilton 37:38

So that's a, that's a good question. And it's not one that I'm probably best positioned to answer just because I, I've worked in I've worked in kindergarten through grade 12. My entire, well, entire adult life. Today, I noticed that there's a lot of variables there, right. Yeah, there is, there's a lot of variables, I think one of the things that I would point to with adults is the education system has a like, if you've got a blind student who comes to us who enrolls in a school district, there's a mechanism in place to get services in place for that student, right? That may or may not include instruction in Braille and provisioning materials and technology that are Braille in Braille format or Braille oriented. I think that the difference in the adult world is that you have multiple stakeholder groups, and it really, it's really up to the individual to kind of navigate those services. Whereas in kindergarten through grade 12, you've got specialists who are kind of who are either doing some of that navigating work, or, ideally, who are doing that navigating work worth not four, but with students and families.

L

Lis Malone 38:58

I can tell you, Adam, here in the United States, what's frustrating about getting services is that it varies based on what state you live in, what services are available with proximity. And then in addition, they do prioritize you because if you are a student, or if it's considered a "job save situation", you can get your services. And I use this word loosely, relatively quickly, as opposed to just being somebody who is registered as having a disability. So being on the side of having to try to navigate that system is very, very frustrating. And then when you do get into that system, the challenge is that you're only given so many services based on your evaluation. So I can tell you when my when I start to lose my vision. They evaluated me for Braille, they, they gave me the little tests where they kind of had me you know, feel the bumps, and I was crying As her fingers are useless Oh, I didn't have the sensitivity to really feel the the dice. I'm like how many dots or am I supposed to be feeling? My fingers are just not sensitive enough or too sensitive. And so right there, they're like, No, we're not gonna we're not gonna recommend that she learned braille. So then it became up to me to kind of have to try to learn braille on my own. And, you know, as you guys were saying, like we you know, when does it become important for a person to to prioritize that, that Braille is something useful for the blind and low vision community? It's not until you frickin need it.

R

Ryan Fleury 40:42

That's the one of the issues, like you say, is access to resources. You know, even here in Canada. We can access resources through the Hadley school for the blind, I believe some resources through Perkins as well in the US, but hear in Canada, does the CNIB teach Braille still to adults? Like I don't know what resources are available for adult learning outside of the job field or education.

A

Adam Wilton 41:06

Well, one Ryan that I would point to and just one of the hats I wear is as a board member for Braille Literacy Canada, and they've got their Braille Zoomers program and it's fantastic. And Braille literacy instruction and support and resources for adults who are learning Braille by experienced Braille readers. You know, they've also got the Braille or Bounce Program, which will get donated Braille writers refurbished and into the hands of, of adults who are learning

braille. And so, you know, I'm pretty familiar with those programs. And I know that they're there. They're been really successful. And I think the hope is that those things like that can be scaled up. So but but I think that brings us back to the original point, though, that it really is, like, it's when we look at how are these services navigated? You know, Liz, I think you made a really good point that it really does come back to the to the individual. So, you know, I think there's two sides here. One, how do we better empower blind and visually impaired adults? But on the other hand, what about the system has to change because I think in 2022, expecting that individuals are going to change to suit a system is, is rooted in old school ableist notions of you know, of, of mainstreaming about how, you know, blind and low vision students will adapt to fit what's happening in the, to adapt to fit the classroom with their specialized tools and devices and whatnot. Rather than having the learning environment also adapt to the needs of the learner, I think you can take that out from the classroom level and apply it at a community or societal level as well.

R

Rob Mineault 43:12

That is such a great way to look at it.

A

Adam Wilton 43:14

Yeah, I you know, it's it's, it's funny, you know, I, I've been talking to some of my my blind friends about this recently, we were talking about how well they were talking about the, you know, the fact that every time there's an article in a popular news media outlet proclaiming the death of Braille, every one of us whether we're a Braille user, or in my case, a Braille enthusiast, and educator. You know, everyone in our social media will send it to us and say, oh, did you see this? And I used to respond to those articles with education, and awareness, and I still do, but I'm also starting to look at them through an equity and discrimination lens as well. And thinking about, you know, how much of the, how much of the proclamation of the death of Braille is really just rooted in old school Ableism?

S

Steve Barclay 44:17

Yeah, there's a lot of assumptions made by the media and it's not just around Braille, too. It's oftentimes about things like, you know, guide dogs. I mean, I've seen a couple articles where, you know, they, they've said, oh, you know, people aren't gonna need guide dogs anymore, because, you know, they're gonna have robots who they're gonna have this, we're gonna have that. It's like, shut up, because really, all they're doing is they're just taking donations away from Guide Dogs.

A

Adam Wilton 44:41

Well, Steve, on that note, one of the challenges that you want, and this is with something that I've been really kind of interested in and looking at, in the last year or so, is this idea of co-design. And you know, when you look at the because I think I know The robot guide dog that you're that you're speaking of. And, you know, the person testing it in the video is someone wearing eye shades. You know, and and now, I don't know, perhaps this group of developers

and designers did, in fact, consult with actual users. But in my mind, these days, the only thing that gives a development credibility is the extent to which it was co designed with users themselves, with users being centered in the process, and not just being kind of a, you know, oh, provide us feedback as an afterthought. And I think that idea of co-design, that idea of inclusive design is something that we can apply not only in education, or orientation, and mobility, but across any product that's available to, you know, just the wider the wider public, whether it be a, you know, a smartphone app, or a new kitchen appliance.

S

Steve Barclay 45:58

Yeah, I recall, years ago, when Mike Bay was first going around showing GPS technology for the blind that had been developed. You know, he came here to Vancouver, did a thing. And the next thing we knew there was an article saying, Oh, they're blind people aren't gonna need guide dogs anymore, because now they've got GPS. It's never underestimate the posit the likelihood of the media to get things wrong.

A

Adam Wilton 46:25

It's really in my mind, I think important to on the one hand, like really be, you know, recognize and value the enthusiasm that comes behind some of this. But then there's also just as you said, Steve, a lot of assumptions, it's also really important to critically look at some of the assumptions that are behind some of these messages. And, and to be critical of those of those messages. And kind of taking that a step further than looking to say, okay, is this something that was designed with users? Or was it something that was designed exclusively for users? And then if that's the case, who is this really benefiting? Is it benefiting the cause of equity and anti discrimination for blind and low vision users? Or is it benefiting the broader sense of our collective sense of goodwill, in terms of what has been done for but not with and circling back to our conversation around Braille, Braille literacy and instruction? Some of the greatest allies that I have, as an educator, are my friends and colleagues who are Braille users themselves. You know, I have, I have a very close colleague and friend, who I've worked with for many years. And I can tell you that when I was a itinerant teacher of students with visual impairments teaching a student to read Braille, I, there was one day where I asked this colleague to come in, do a lesson with me. And, and also, could we have a conversation with the students family as well. And I have to tell you, that students family getting to talk to someone who has a job, who is a successful Braille reader, someone who identifies as, you know, someone who enjoys reading, who is a voracious consumer of literacy materials. Getting that family talking to that, to that to my colleague, was so much more powerful than me, a typically sighted educator saying, you know, this is what I think we should do. So, I think I think we should all find ways to meaningfully center the perspectives of of users. Because it's just so much more powerful than the alternative.

R

Rob Mineault 48:59

Well I would, I would call this another successful appearance.

A

Adam Wilton 49:07

Thank you. Thank you.

R

Rob Mineault 49:08

It's just too bad that we couldn't have you in person around a table like last time.

A

Adam Wilton 49:13

We'll get back there.

R

Rob Mineault 49:14

We will. We will. Once we're back on the guitar dungeon.

R

Ryan Fleury 49:17

Maybe we have you on again, when you're about to do the Braille challenge?

A

Adam Wilton 49:22

Oh, I mean, I'd love to come back and talk about the Braille Challenge it now that's coming up in February, so that was gonna be a little quick, but maybe, maybe, who knows where we'll be next year in terms of whether it will be in person hybrid or online. So you know, maybe I'll have you know more to talk about at that point. I was gonna say, though, that I this is how I'm going to parcel out the timeline of my life now AT Banter podcast appearances.

R

Ryan Fleury 49:51

I was just gonna say we're not gonna wait another five years to get you on.

A

Adam Wilton 49:54

No, I'm marking the passage of time now between appearances.

S

Steve Barclay 50:01

Well, you really need a dog.

R

Rob Mineault 50:06

Well get him a robot dog.

A

Adam Wilton 50:08

There you go. There's a use for the robot dog.

R

Rob Mineault 50:13

Well, let's see my 2021 resolution was to learn braille. And I got to H, so Z, I'm coming for you.

L

Lis Malone 50:24

It is one of those things, though, that if you if you don't use it, you lose it?

R

Ryan Fleury 50:28

Well, not necessarily, to a certain extent. Yes, I know, like, because I, yeah, I can still do the alphabet and the numbers, but I've lost my grade to, right. And then of course, along came UEB, grade one, one and a half, two. And, you know, they go and change the whole whole code on me. But you know, I was just saying to Rob the other day that one of my biggest beefs, when we're doing this podcast is if we do get email, or there's a news article I want to read, it is a pain and it's impossible to have my speech, read it to me, and then we try to relay that back during a recording of a podcast, right? If I can reinforce my Braille skills, or get back to where I was, then I could actually have that in front of me on a Braille display and actually read that.

L

Lis Malone 51:13

I love that your ambitions are so much higher than mine, I just want to be able to go back to pressing the right button on an elevator.

R

Ryan Fleury 51:21

Even if it's just grade one Braille, I'm fine with that. Or even just the basic UEB grade two, I don't care about contractions and all and punctuation and stuff. I just want to be able to read the text of an email, or something similar, right? I'm not gonna be fluent enough to read a book.

L

Lis Malone 51:35

Adam, I have a suggestion for a course it should be elevator 101. It's a real thing. It's an issue. It's the struggle is real.

A

Adam Wilton 51:45

I mean, that that's a that's it? That's a really, it's a it's a great idea. And, and, you know, all joking aside, because, you know, I think I mentioned before, one of the things that, you know, we kind of as a field in K 12, have gotten away from calling it like, what we used to call functional Braille, but there's still a place for it. It's just, we're getting we've gotten away from being this binary, right, is that you're either you're either doing the elevators and the shopping lists, or you're doing War and Peace. No, I'm serious. So that was a major, that was a that was a dichotomy that was causing a lot of students to fall off, fall out of Braille or never even making it to Braille in the first place. So I think, you know, it's, it's, it's, it's really important, and you know, Ryan, there's a, blind English professor in the US. She wrote this gorgeous book around about a hurricane. It was part autobiographical, but it was also part kind of looking at how blindness and Braille are reflected in literature and culture. Right. And she, she, she gives us example, from our own experience that like, still brings me to tears whenever I think of it just in its beauty. And its point in how poignant it is. But you know, she was reading some a book that was really emotionally salient to her and she remembers, because she's someone who had lost her vision as a young adult. And she talks about how, you know, she used to when she would read something really poignant. Bring her eyes off the page and look off into space and contemplate, and you can't do that with audio. No, you got to fumble and find the pause button and click it off. But with Braille, she could just let her fingers linger. Right? She had that moment. And, you know, it's just, it's, it's like things like that, or hearing your, your, you know, your example of being able to read while in podcast mode. Just, you know, it really drives home for me the fact that, you know, we need to have responsive, we need to work with our students on having like, responsive toolkits that are not exclusionary, to the point where, you know, they've got one or two tools as opposed to a range of them.

R

Ryan Fleury 54:20

Well, I think if a student wants to become an English major, you know, or a historian or something, you know, they're going to do the whole War and Peace, right? But, you know, there is a place for somebody who just wants to be able to Braille it their recipes.

A

Adam Wilton 54:33

Absolutely. Absolutely. And I think, you know, the broader the broader movement right now is to recognize that these things that these profiles don't exclude one another. They could be the same person, you know, yeah. Can can be can be War and Peace one day and grocery shopping it the list the other day, right. So, yeah,

R

Ryan Fleury 54:56

I'm going to check up Braille Zoomers. Rob, maybe you should join me.

A

Adam Wilton 54:59

Yeah. Braille, Braille Zoomers is great. It's it's it's really like, it's just it's it's informal but its informal in its in its kind of vibe but not in its quality

information in its kind of vibe, but not in its quality.

R

Ryan Fleury 55:16

And I think we've had Braille Literacy Canada on before at least.

A

Adam Wilton 55:20

I'm, yeah, I know that, you know, the, one of the I think that's where, you know, you get a one thing I love about Braille Literacy Canada is you've got a real cross section of people from across kind of the, I would just say the lifespan, right, in terms of their experience and their connections to Braille. And, and and yeah, so I know that, you know, Natalie, our president is a real strong, strong advocate. In fact, one thing I'd recommend to you all, she just put out a Daily Hive article today, in honor of World Braille Day titled "six ways to become a supportive ally to Braille readers". Oh, yeah, it's a great article. Recommend checking it out.

R

Rob Mineault 56:07

Hey, well, listen, hey, on that note, anything else you want to plug?

A

Adam Wilton 56:14

Yeah, so I mean, the Braille challenge is something that anyone who's listening can just google, it's, it's, um, or look up. It's, it's sponsored by the Braille Institute of America. And it's, like I said, it's offered over Canada and the US, there might even actually be some sites this, this this coming season this this year, from outside of Canada in the US, which is really exciting. Like I said, we do our event, we run our event here in British Columbia, we have for the last 10 years, the last two years, we've been virtual just with COVID. But usually what we'll do is we'll get students together for a fun day of games and pizza, but also have competitions well, and so they they they do things they get the challenges are reading comprehension, spelling, charts, and graphs, speed and accuracy where they have to transcribe Braille based on audio track they're listening to, and then the top 50 students from across North America, top 10 in each age category, get invited to Los Angeles for the finals. And we're, we're really fortunate in British Columbia that we've, our students have been among those to represent Canada virtually every, you know, almost every year. And so yeah, we've got some, some some real high fliers in the province, but really the days is about is about fun, and community. And so yeah, it's just the, if you just, you know, throw Braille Challenge into a search engine, you're you're gonna get a lot of really good information there.

R

Rob Mineault 57:51

We want to thank you so much for coming on again. We will not we promise we will not wait five years to have you on again. Let's reconvene and talk more Braille, very soon.



A Adam Wilton 58:03
I would love it. Thank you all so much for having me.

R Ryan Fleury 58:06
All right. Thanks.

R Rob Mineault 58:11
I'm just still like imagining just Liz wandering around the 13th floor of any given building.

L Lis Malone 58:20
Know what they don't tell you though, is no 13th floor. Well, that's for all for all of you who think you're fine on the 14th floor. I have a little side note for you a little reality check. That's one for those of us who are not superstitious like myself, the "talking elevator" phenomenon where people say, Oh, you don't need to know braille, because the elevators talk to you now. Like they tell you like, you know, floor eight, please exit left? Well, the thing they don't tell you is that the you don't get on the elevator and it pushes the button for you still have to find the button. It just tells you but so I it's one of those other wonderful ideas that they that a sighted person came up with and never really tested out. So so now we fix this whole problem for blind people and then you get on and you still can't press the button.

R Rob Mineault 59:15
Yeah, and I don't know I like that's a pretty bougie elevator. There's not a lot of elevators that I that I experience on a any sort of level that talk. Like it's usually stands out when it when they do it's like, Ooh ...

S Steve Barclay 59:29
You know, it's funny, you should bring this up because I just this morning, and I can't find it now had a article pop up on LinkedIn about someone who was developing an app for elevators. So then, yeah, so that you don't have to touch the buttons. You can just call the elevator with your app and you can select your floor with your app.

L Lis Malone 1:00:01
But that's great that the app will work on the five out of 2 billion elevators.

S Steve Barclay 1:00:07
Yeah, exactly.

R Rob Mineault 1:00:09
Just use your sleeve like I do

S Steve Barclay 1:00:11
Down the road, it might have greater potential.

R Rob Mineault 1:00:15
But that's interesting, huh? Yeah, but then somebody will hack it, you'll have some Russian that's just messing with you and hits every button to hit every button up to the 42nd floor.

S Steve Barclay 1:00:25
That's probably true.

L Lis Malone 1:00:27
Well, I've gone on to elevators and I'm and I'm standing there and I, I'm trying to figure out the buttons. And, you know, the elevators obviously not moving because I'm not picking the floor, and then all of a sudden it moves and I'm like, Okay, well, I'm just gonna have to wait till someone else gets on.

S Steve Barclay 1:00:42
Yeah. It's called Contactless Access. Plus hands free use of traditional elevators and accessible doors controlled from your smartphone avoiding contract transmission of viruses.

L Lis Malone 1:00:53
So it's a special elevator for blind people and germaphobes

S Steve Barclay 1:00:56
Some some sort of module that you plug into the elevator I guess.

R Rob Mineault 1:01:00
This is why we have 300 and some odd episodes just because we can just we could talk for like

This is why we have zoo and some odd episodes just because we can just we could talk for like an hour about elevators.

R Ryan Fleury 1:01:07

We'll just bring him on. We'll just bring them on the show. They can tell us all about the Contactless Elevator app.

R Rob Mineault 1:01:13

I mean, in the grand scheme of things, I don't know did it who asked for that? And do we need it? I mean, maybe...

R Ryan Fleury 1:01:20

Well, then you got you know, five to 10 people on an elevator all pressing buttons on their apps, right? So this is gonna go anyway. "16, 13, no 12 no 42 failure failure failure."

R Rob Mineault 1:01:40

"We're detaching the cables"

S Steve Barclay 1:01:45

"Elevator rebooting"

R Rob Mineault 1:02:01

That's awesome. Okay, how do we get to talking?

S Steve Barclay 1:02:09

I thought it gave the show a lift.

R Rob Mineault 1:02:11

Oh, wins for all our friends in the UK. Alright, anyways,

R Ryan Fleury 1:02:25

I've got to have a mute button.

R Rob Mineault 1:02:29
Okay, you all right?

R Ryan Fleury 1:02:30
I'm good.

R Rob Mineault 1:02:31
Okay, let's do this. Outro and get outta here. Hey, Lis.

L Lis Malone 1:02:44
Hey, Rob.

R Rob Mineault 1:02:45
Where can people find this?

L Lis Malone 1:02:47
You can find us on the web at atbanter.com

R Rob Mineault 1:02:52
You're supposed to say on the 13th floor.

L Lis Malone 1:02:57
I will be on the 13th floor alone in the dark.

R Rob Mineault 1:03:03
All right. Well, yeah, okay. So and if people want to email us they can also email us at cowbell@atbanter.com

R Rvan Fleurv 1:03:13

If you have a comment, suggestion or topic for the show. You can also call us toll free at 1-844-996-4282.

S

Steve Barclay 1:03:23

And even beyond that you can reach us on those dastardly social media feeds on Twitter and Facebook.

R

Rob Mineault 1:03:31

Was that a cowbell I heard?

L

Lis Malone 1:03:32

It was like half a cowbell

R

Ryan Fleury 1:03:33

I hit it by accident. I was getting prepared.

L

Lis Malone 1:03:38

You gotta commit

R

Ryan Fleury 1:03:41

I'm a premature banger. I know. I hate it.

L

Lis Malone 1:03:47

I hate those half bangs.

R

Rob Mineault 1:03:49

I knew that was coming

S

Steve Barclay 1:04:03

No, never mind.



Rob Mineault 1:04:08

Oh my god. Okay, let's get out of here before. All right, well, big thanks to of course, Adam, for coming on our a little crazy little show. Once again. And thanks, everybody for listening. Happy New Year. Happy 2022. And we'll see everybody -



Ryan Fleury 1:04:26

There just again, premature sorry.



Rob Mineault 1:04:32

Control yourself. Try thinking about baseball. And we will see everybody next week.