**A transcript of content from *(Critical) Blindness Studies : Current Debates and Future Directions***

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## Roundtable #8

**Teaching and Learning: Pedagogies of Blindness, Part 2**

**Chair: Bruno Liesen**

**Moderator: Noëlle Roy**

**Speakers: Susanne Commend(Université d'Angers, France)**

**Heidi Lourens (University of Johannesburg, South Africa)**

**Dannyelle Valente(Université Lumière Lyon 2, France)**

**Noëlle Roy** 00:01

So I'll introduce myself again; I’m **Noëlle Roy.** I'm French; I’m speaking from Paris. I'm a white woman. I'm 70. And I'm not going to tell you how I'm dressed. So I'm moderator for this roundtable 8, the second in a suite of two on blindness, and education, and rehabilitation. And this roundtable is devoted to teaching methods, touch systems, and training. So this roundtable is chaired by Bruno Liesen. And we'll be welcoming **Susanne Commend**from **Angers** University in France, **Heidi Lourens** and Leslie Swartz. I don’t know if both of them are here, or just one of them, Heidi is from Johannesburg University, and Leslie Schwartz from Stellenbosch, both in South Africa. And lastly, **Dannyelle Valente,**the University **Lumière Lyon 2** in France, and the University of Geneva in Switzerland. So first of all, I'd like to thank everybody, to switch off their cameras, and you'll be able to ask questions after listening to the speakers and they've had a discussion together. So I'm now going to hand over to Bruno Liesen.

**Bruno Liesen**

Thank you, Noëlle. I hope everybody can hear me. So thank you. First of all, I'd like to thank the organizers of this conference, Marion, Hannah and Vanessa. I'm really very honored and touched by their invitation to take part in this conference and to chair this session. I'd also like to congratulate them on all the work in preparing this conference, a huge amount of work, no doubt. And we can see the result with these days, which have been really effectively organized but with a lot of conviviality. And so I'd like to congratulate them for that work. And now I'm going to present each of the speakers in this session beginning with **Susanne Commend**, who is a researcher, postdoctoral researcher at University, **Angers** University, with a Marie Curie grant from the European Commission, who's doing research on transnational history, on disabled children between 1950 and 1990, particularly the role of the National Children's, Children's Center. So I'm familiar with this name, because 20 years ago now at least, Susanne published an important paper on the history of blind people, the history of the InstitutNazarethetLouis*-*Braille and I was able to report on that for a magazine. And she has recently published a 2021 broader work on the history of children with disabilities in Quebec, called *Vulnerable*, entitled *Vulnerable, Tolerated, Excluded: The History of People with Disabilities* *in Quebec in the 20th Century*. I won't say any more, but I'm waiting to hear what she's got to say by time research. And now I'll hand over to her.

**Susanne Commend**

Thank you for this presentation. So I'm very touched by that. Yes. My work on blindness studies dates back to many years ago now. And talking about the InstitutNazarethetLouis*-*Braille, the first Institute in Montreal, founded in 1961, and I worked on the history of ideas of children with disabilities. But then I will now, come back to the history of children with disabilities and coming back to my first love exploring the history of parents’ associations for children and partially sighted children in Quebec. I've started some work and I'd like to speak a little bit about that today. And so this is research, which is an embryonic stage and I'd really like to develop this more. And so I'm going to say a little bit about it. So I wanted to study the parental strategies for two blind and partially sighted children in Quebec and the mobilization of parents through an association for parents of partially sighted children. And so this really began for children from 0 to 20 years, and the help that parents gave each other. And so the AQPEHV fights to improve school services and rehabilitation services for their children. And rather than seeing children having a blind approach to child as passive victims, the AQPEHV insists on resilience, and to help children and the actions they've undertaken to accept their baby was different and to regain power over their lives. Based on the movement on disabilities, the study is at the crossroads between the geography of social movements and families; it must lay out milestones for blindness, listening to the experiences of sighted parents with their blind children during their childhood. The main sources that I've explored are the archives of the archive this association, AQPEHV, parents’ association, so information, papers, periodicals, and I've also done interviews with some key people in the association, particular former members of the executive committee and the director. The target period is the first two decades through to 2005. And so it's in the context of this for the claims of disabled people that the association was founded in 1980, shortly after the adoption of a law for the rights of people with disabilities in Quebec in 1978. And so the parents get together, or got together at that time in the early 80s, to promote the academic inclusion of their children and services for rehabilitation with the Louis Braille Institute, which was the main institute in the region of Montreal, and the development of mutual help between parents. So, in the first few decades, there was the defense of rights to education, which were put forward by the AQPEHV, and the parents really fought to have the development of services in all regions throughout Quebec. So there were families whose children, who didn't have the right to be included in school, particularly in Gaspé*,* which is a long way from Montreal. And so there was a family that had a child who was refused a place in their local school. And in 1990, the association supported the family and played an important role, because the family, when the family decided to remove their child from school, and it was this, was an iconic battle of those years, which, er, it was in the media a lot, and the family won. And it was following this battle, that access was increasingly possible in the different regions. Going beyond this context, the level of integration increased quickly. It was around 45% of children in primary schools in the 80s and it went up to 70% one decade later, in the beginning of the 90s. But going beyond these successes, academic successes, the main pitfall of school inclusion was socialization with other pupils. And studies show the isolation of blind or visually impaired children during recesses and social activities with other children. And it was in this context that the association, the AQPEHV, developed more and more activities for families, a mutual help network, and activities to enable their children to have a social life. They had annual events, so meetings, themed workshops that were organized to enable the development of bonding between these families who were isolated, and the children, that, who could also be isolated and didn’t know any other blind people, for example. There are services that were organized around young children too and a worker who does home visits and breaks down the parents’ isolation and the children's isolation. And she says that she's met the mother of a child or a baby, just a few months old, who has a lot of anxiety, what will my child be able to do, what kind of a job can she have? And so she talks about how she was able to reassure the parents, and put them in touch with other parents to form a support network. And there are also other resources that have been developed by the Association dedicated to information that played an important role too. At the beginning of the early 2000s, the Association redirected its services, it was doing more, more promotion of rights, and in the early 2000s, went towards an offer, so direct services to the families. And this was done during a period where the state was withdrawing from family policies and services and so there was a vacuum that had been created. And so they played a role of a first provider of services. And this was funded by the Ministry of Social Services, and from that period onwards. And so I just wanted to lay down a few quick milestones, but we could talk about other topics later on in the discussion. So I'll stop there. Thank you for your attention.

**Bruno Liesen**

Thank you very much, Susanne, for this presentation. That is a perfect summary of the contribution and which we can get more details of, we can see that in the bibliography on the conference website, and that's the case, too, for all the speakers. And so now, we're now going to have a summary of the contributions at the end of the session. But now I'd like to just check that the next speaker Heidi Lourens is with us. I can see she's on the list of participants, but I can't see her on my screen. So could Heidi let me know that she's there.

**Heidi Lourens** 14:06

I am here. Should I turn on my ...?

**Bruno Liesen** 14:15

Yes, perfect. I'll just present you. So **Heidi Lourens** is a psychologist and associate professor at the University of Johannesburg in South Africa. And her research is on inclusive education in the context of schools and higher education and also studies on disabilities and the research method of ethnography. **Heidi Lourens h**as published articles on these subjects and has contributed to several conferences, both nationally and internationally. And she's uploaded an article to the conference website co-written with Professor Leslie Swartz, who isn't with us today. But I could imagine that Heidi will be able to speak for her too. I hope I've said enough. And I'll now hand over to Heidi; over to you.

**Heidi Lourens** 15:34

Good evening, everyone. So I am speaking from South Africa, from Johannesburg. It's not the prettiest place in South Africa. But it is where I got a job. So that is where I'm at. I have about mmm longish, brown hair, and green eyes; I'm a white female. I've got a caramel colored jersey on and a maroon jacket and pajama pants. So I'm quite eclectic, obviously, I'm not at my work office, I'm at home. And I, I am at the moment on leave. It's our winter break in South Africa. So it's quite, quite cold. So I thought, to present to you my research journey, and then how the paper that I've submitted fits into my overall research journey, which has not been very long, I would say it started probably in 2011, when I started my doctoral studies. As you've heard, my work is on inclusive education. So my, I forgot to say, that I'm completely blind as well and my doctoral study was on the experiences of blind university students. So it was a very phenomenological study. And as I was researching this phenomenon, I've come to realize, and this is where my research also fits in, the research that I've uploaded, is that a lot of students felt very grateful towards the lecturers for providing them with reasonable accommodations, which is actually not a privilege but a right in South Africa since, since South Africa also signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. So students were very grateful, they felt quite powerless, because some of them weren't accommodated. And so it was clear from many of my research that actually, there were no formal standards for providing, providing support and accommodating these students. And they were, in fact, really not, not altogether included, not socially, not academically. And so, so as I was listening to these students during my doctoral study, since I was also and still, I am still, blind, and I don't foresee that changing very soon. So I was thinking I can totally relate to what they were saying, because I'm also blind, I'm also a student. But I have also things to say because, you know, it doesn't mean that if you have similar experiences or a similar, how do I put it, a disability that your experiences will be the same. And even if your experiences were similar to an extent, your outlook on it might, might differ quite significantly. And that then led me to write about my own experiences and move from phenomenology to auto-ethnography, which is really making sense of experience through, through theory. So instead of listening to others, to lived experiences, I explored my own lived experiences. Just tongue in the cheek, I am a psychologist and a fellow psychologist once said to me, well, if you're a psychologist, you're either dependent or you're narcissistic, so I thought, Okay, well, you know, doing auto ethnography is probably a testament to some form of narcissism. But anyway, so, I got, just after I got my doctorate in 2015, I got a job as a psychology lecturer. And so I started writing about the experience of being a disabled academic. And for me, that was quite different to being a student. I felt very included in that space, in the university space. But I did feel I felt socially included, but I felt that I had to work very hard to meet the demands, the standards were still, you know, the same. And we as a student, you pay, for, you know, to come to university, now, as an academic, they pay you. And that makes quite a difference as to what you feel entitled to. So then, it feels like I've gone full circle because then I decided to actually explore, again, through phenomenology, the experiences of disabled academics, and I'm at the moment, I'm writing up that research. Me and some fellow researchers, we conducted interviews at four different universities in South Africa. And the overall experience, it's quite mixed, quite mixed. But for many, they feel that they are often not socially included, like felt like that COVID actually, was a positive thing for them, because they didn't have to worry about transport. And, and I also need to say that this is for all kinds of disabilities, it's not just blindness. So this is where I then moved from blindness to, to disability overall. And so yeah, they felt that COVID was actually a positive thing for them, they didn't have to interact with colleagues. They, they didn't have to worry about transport to work. They, the online space was often a bit easier. And yeah, most of them felt in the, in the academic space, felt quite excluded, and that they were excluded from promotion, that transformations, were transformation was often centered around race because of South Africa's history of apartheid. So that often thinking around race, but seldom something is mentioned about disability, in transformation, in discussions around transformation. So that is basically where my research is in terms of inclusive education. I've also done a little bit of research on children in special schools, because in South Africa, that is still, I think the majority of disabled children are still in special schools. I'm also doing a, venturing a bit out of inclusive education, and looking at pharmaceutical experiences of how accessible are pharmaceutical products and services for blind people in South Africa, and also looking at the experiences of COVID for blind persons in South Africa. So that is basically what I am busy with at the moment. If I can summarize my findings, is the fact that it feels like in South Africa, policies are still not very clear on exactly how to accommodate students and blind academics. Also, I've argued in many articles, that it's only in collaborative relationships that we can hope for inclusion through the relational ethics of care, through open responsiveness, engagement and mutual respect. And that it, it sounds like a tension because, on the one hand, I'm arguing for more clear, clear standards. And, on the other hand, I'm also arguing for open responsiveness and that is simply because if we have the standards already, but we are, I mean, all of our needs often change, often differ. So that will allow you that flexibility within the standards that are set out for educational spaces. And that is it for now from my side; thank you.

**Bruno Liesen** 25:12

Thank you very much for this very full contribution, which we will no doubt, come back to, through discussion and questions. Thank you so much. And I'm now hand over to the final speaker for this session. **Dannyelle Valente**, which we've, I’ll just remind you that she's Brazilian in background and currently Lecturer in Developmental Psychology in **Lumière** 2 University at Lyon 2, and also scientific researcher at Geneva University and she also is involved in Panthéon-Sorbonne University with a focus on drawing and blindness and you specialized in the psychology of visual deficiency. And your research is currently looking at the fascinating topic of touch books and multisensorial design, which will have an interest for Bertrand, in particular I believe, and emotional developments. And you've worked in partnership with publishers, museums, schools, and also Les Doigts Qui Rêvent, which is an association, which we've worked with, founded by Philippe Claudet in the 90s. And you have also helped to with the design of multisensory resources, including multisensory books. So without further ado, I'll hand over to you, Dannyelle.

**Dannyelle Valente**

Thank you very much, I trust you can hear me. So just to describe again, myself, I'm a Brazilian woman. So I have a slight Brazilian accent. And I've been in France for 17 years now. Curly hair, white skinned woman with brown eyes. Thank you very much for this presentation. And, in fact, you said everything I need to say pretty much. I will, perhaps say a few words about what I'm doing at the moment. My research is on the co-design and evaluation of multisensory toys for non-sighted children. And I've worked in particular, on blindness appropriate books for children. I researched for the Doigts Qui Rêvent Publishing House and my research in this field of appropriate children's books with illustrations, in particular, as they're to be found in his books, and I was looking at what's interesting, and seeing how they could be made more accessible to non-sighted children and partially sighted children. So I, my background is quite cross functional. I started off in Art and Design, with a PhD in the science of Art, and I now have my research work in Developmental Psychology. And the central issue in this research, which ties it all together is about the relationship between images and blindness. This sounds rather as though they are polar opposites but the question is how we can break down or break images out of a purely visual aspect and explore other relationships. So I've looked firstly at images. So, tactile pictures can be found in museums, for example, so, I already looked at how a blind person might understand such images or pictures, and how we could explore other perception environments with the same type of resource. Because the, the other aspects of this are the same for sighted and non-sighted individuals. So, we think we can create a shared space to discuss this type of thing. And I started looking at drawing, which was my, the subject of my doctoral thesis and this was 20 years ago now. So, I must be getting on. This is at a Brazilian University and I worked with a Brazilian researcher, who described drawings of a young blind girl who had made a drawing of a river which might surprise a sighted person. It was portrayed as a circle, she had felt water around her waist and within this circle, the girl added strings of plasticine, which represented the stones beneath her feet and this drawing opened up all the questions I have about image, which I then tried to apply to tactile illustrations. So, one aspect of my current research is looking at the creation of illustrative content in books, which explores these other sensory experiences. When I worked for the Doigts Qui Rêvent publishers, I started thinking about a model which I call haptic illustration, which sense, seeks to use bodies and movement or handling objects. So, for example, you could take the formal expression of a house as sighted people see, so the square for walls and a triangle for the roof but also by perhaps the action of a door opening which would be more familiar for non- sighted people. So there are other ways of exploring sensory experiences other than visual experiences of an environment. And with my colleagues at the University of Geneva, in haptic, the Haptic Books project, which was started by a Swiss foundation, we worked on the idea of a book that children could explore with two fingers, the index finger and the forefinger, as though they were two legs walking. So, so, for example, jumping on a trampoline, climbing stairs, and we published two papers showing that simulating a physical action created a sensory experience for sighted and non-sighted children. So, this gives a source of inclusion and also decentering from ocularcentric approaches. So, another aspect is a method implemented to design these sensory experiences. I'm a non-blind person and others involved are non-blind. So with the idea of participatory design, we want to engage children and their, the other people around them. So cultural mediators, teachers, in the process of designing these illustrations, and as far as the solutions go as well, I use, I create mediation packs as well as books. So, for instance, we have got a tactile case which has to do with cartoons, so or comic albums. So I present this in a guide online, which is called Designing Sensory Books Accessible to All using a participatory method, you can find that online, it's open source. And the idea is to project, is to try and project into the world of the non-sighted, to have something that makes sense as we try out models, to see what works and what doesn't work and so on. So, examining the project with the assistance of children concerned in workshops and I'm currently doing this with respect to emotion, co-designing a resource to deal with emotions with a foundation in Switzerland. So, that is a brief summary of what I'm doing right now.

**Bruno Liesen**

Thank you very much, Dannyelle, very tightly packed and very interesting presentation. I will now attempt to sum up the common points of the three talks, which fortunately are very complementary. Something that struck me in what Susanne said was, of course, [French] we encounter an almost immediate history of transition from teaching dominated by specialist institutions, which sometimes are almost closed systems, to more inclusive systems in which blind children are incorporated in general education with appropriate supports, with accompanying challenges and barriers. And I think that Susanne, you're both, you have both of you got us into current preoccupations in that respect. Another thing that struck me in terms of Quebec is the particular role of the family circle, parents of children, this blind children's parents’ association, which has played a major role in the support of non-sighted children in your country. And as in South Africa, both in South Africa and Canada, of course, the situation, environments may be different in some respects, there are also similarities in terms of the gap between official pronouncements and resolutions, in particular international resolutions by the UN, and these, the gap between these great principles and the implementation of them by various national governments and countries, even those that have signed up, adopted, ratified these provisions. And this gap is quite significant, it shows us that there is still a lot of work to be done, a work in progress, which also as we can see runs up, particularly in South Africa, against some sociological, institutional, economic realities. Thank you to Heidi and Susanne, for having helped us to apprehend this state of affairs. In South Africa, I was particularly struck by the, this transitional experience, from specialist education to academic education for blind young people who really changed worlds in a very short space of time and so thanks for the work done to gather the testimonies of these students talking about this reality, which is, can also help move our thinking forward. And there's also the race issue and education, the role of blind students and also blind teachers. These issues, I believe, are fundamental and very conducive to more research topics, addressing challenges which are facing our society directly in particular, as regards social inclusion. From Dannyelle this contribution, of course, added another facet. This is not at an institutional level, but a very constructive educational resource with these tactile books, which could make interesting links with braille and the whole issue of training and educating young blind people. And I was especially struck by your emphasis on emotion, something we don't often hear about but which is undoubtedly important when it comes to developing skills. Not only the skill of reading, but also the joy of reading braille with tactile, multisensory images is an excellent resource with a lot of potential. I was also struck by this idea of breaking down barriers and moving away from ocularcentric models to multisensory models. In particular, with haptics, which also offers a lot of potential. And finally, another important aspect, in my opinion, is participatory design, engaging non- sighted children and multidisciplinary specialists in design of teaching resources. This also addresses realities such as those that Heidi made us aware of in her paper about the South African experience where there are shortfalls in specialist institutions and in the rollout of appropriate and accessible resources for children. So there's only a few aspects of your first contributions; they've been very interesting, stimulating and I'm sure that we'll have we'll have questions from that. Before we go to questions, I think I probably have time to go through these three questions that we have been asked to think about. So I'll just remind you of those. Firstly, how do you situate your research in studies on French language on handicap on disability studies? Who would like to answer that, and maybe we can go in the order in, so in the order in which you contributed to this discussion, or whoever wants to go first. Dannyelle?

**Dannyelle Valente** 45:19

I thought that Susanne wanted to say something. So this question about disability studies is a question that is found in my work because this question came up on the role of images, that, in the beginning was in a Master's degree that I was doing in cultural studies, where this kind of question came up. And in disability studies, it was the question of how to change standards, how to change the norm. So, to adjust to the person and not ask the person to adjust to the image; it’s not that I refuse learning, but to create this opening, to other universes, through images. And that's so what I've been working on in disability studies and also in terms of participation. There's nothing without us. This is the slogan that I tried to put into place in participatory design by involving people in it.

**Bruno Liesen**

Thank you very much, Dannyelle. Susanne or Heidi, would you like to respond?

**Susanne Commend**

Yes, my work has been inspired on by disability studies when I began my doctoral work. Looking at children with disabilities, and so I was looking at, through the camera lens, rather than writing a social story, that perceives it as being a handicap. On the fringes of history, or just a medical history. The idea of placing the disabled person at the heart of the story that was, was really important in my methodology in the way that I envisage my research work. And also, by trying to allow the people to speak up, as several historians have said, we're going to get the stories of these children themselves. And I was interviewing adults about their childhood. And so it was their voices that were heard, rather than being condemned to silence. And so if I look at this study on disabilities, more and more of over the past years, I've been doing interdisciplinary studies, we've talked about that already, for example, studies that take into account the intersectionality, the intersections between variable differences that can create inequalities. And so the importance of having, is studying the differences within gender, etc., social classes, etc., that's really important and also geographical origins. And as to critical study blindness studies, I think that is part of those studies, disability studies. But there are topics, there are ways of seeing things that can be enriched by the perspective of blindness, or the cultural histories and adjustment and adaptation, adapting, raised writing, raised print writing, and that that's how I see my work at the moment.

**Bruno Liesen**

Thank you, Susanne. I'd now maybe like to ask Heidi to answer the question too about the way her work is situated with respect to disability studies.

**Heidi Lourens** 50:07

Yes, and what Dannyelle, said about you know, getting to the heart of the story that really resonated with me because that is also where my research is at, is to listen to the experiences, you know, phenomenological research, autoethnographic research, getting really to the heart of that experience in order to hear where people are at in terms of inclusion or exclusion, but also, also not disregarding the bodily, bodily truths, you know, the, those things that are almost inevitable in, in having a disability or being blind. So it's looking at that social experience that, that can be remedied through, through the right policies or the right accommodations, but also those things that that cannot be remedied to the environment and really looking at and hearing that embodied experience of, of participants.

**Bruno Liesen** 51:35

Thank you very much, Heidi. If you don't have anything else to answer, I suggest that we move on to the second question. How, we've already answered this in part, I think, but how do you think we can describe blindness studies? And what do you think about Vanessa's expression, that I think is interesting, what theme seems essential to you to be included in these studies? Susanne, or Danielle, or Heidi? Would you like to answer? Who would like to start? Yes, Susanne?

**Susanne Commend**

There were maybe topics that are essential, such as, as I said, story from my point of view, the story of the change, or progressing, having suitable equipment. And in what I’ve studied a little bit, what I find interesting is, and this is fundamental, is intergenerational stories: how we can compare the stories of the first generations that were included in schools, that were, went to ordinary schools, compared, mainstream schools compared to other generations, before them, that were in specialist schools in Quebec, such as the Nazareth school or the Braille Institute. I think it'd be interesting to see. That was a point in history where there was a gap between the generations and the understanding of that experience, and maybe find a dialogue between the generations to find what their different experiences were. There were good things or less good things in their experiences. There are, there's a recognition of what these institutions provided for rehabilitation of blind teachers, but maybe there was also a time when it was a little more difficult. And this, I think, is part of the, this is one of the topics that can be interesting to explore. And but there are others too.

**Bruno Liesen**

Maybe I'd like to ask Heidi if she has anything to add to what Susanne has just said, with respect maybe to South Africa.

**Heidi Lourens** 54:33

Absolutely. I think I was also thinking as Susanne was speaking, you know, listening to the experiences, also listening to what is working and what has been working in the past and what has not been working, so as to avoid those pitfalls. Especially, as I said before, in South Africa, we have our apartheid legacy and, and so on. So it was in schools, in particular, it was and still remains quite grim, the divide between so to speak, previously advantaged and previously disadvantaged schools for people with visual impairment. In many instances, you know, that legacy from the past still filters through. Sorry, I don't know if you can hear my cat has decided to meow-- so, has filtered through to the reality at the moment. My cat has a contribution to make as well. So, yeah, so that has filtered through in that sense that some children still don’t have textbooks, we're not speaking, we're not talking about Braille textbooks but no no textbooks at all. In school, so I think, you know, that intergenerational aspect that Susanne referred to can be quite, can be quite useful. Yes, for me also, blindness studies, if I can say further ... also, also speaks to, to not only looking at the individual experiences, but also at the broader, the governmental policies. How Blindness studies is intersecting with, with things like race. [Recording stopped]. What we heard before today, gender [recording in progress], are those intersections and those experiences are not only the experiences of people who are experiencing the disability, but as Dannyelle’s research also showed, you know, people who, like parents and families and teachers, and those people who are inevitable, inevitably also implicated in, in, in the blindness experienced [Recording stopped]. That is my contribution and my cat’s.

**Bruno Liesen** 57:27

So I'll repeat myself; thank you Heidi for your very interesting answer. As time is going by, I'm going to hand over to Dannyelle, who no doubt has a point of view to express on this subject.

**Dannyelle Valente**

So very quickly, on the topics that I'm working on at the moment, my challenge, it's that the of the topic of emotion, because in education, we know that there are questions of emotional skills are very important for school. And it's a real challenge, because I try through my work on participatory design with professionals for these children who don't have tools, there aren’t any suitable systems to work on emotions at school with the children. And so the idea is to, have a look at how we can deal with emotions from the point, a multisensorial point of view, because in our society, this question of facial expressions to convey emotions, yeah, in with this idea that non-blind people can find that important. So how can we find other ways, or the alternative? So this resonates with the work that I'm doing on illustrations to express and identify emotions using the body, using sound. So that's some work that I'm interested in at the moment, which I think it's important to develop, because there are very, very few studies have been done on this.

**Bruno Liesen**

Absolutely. Thank you very much, Dannyelle, for your point of view; it's absolutely wonderful to see how your three presentations are interlocked together. I think now we have about eight or nine minutes left before we move on to the questions to the floor. So we have time to move on to the third question, and to answer it sufficiently, fully. So the third question, I'll remind you, is what definition of blindness do you find in your experience? So what is your definition of blindness? Susanne, maybe you can start?

**Susanne Commend**

Sorry. Maybe not from my own experience, but from my research from the point of view of stories, I've, I’m looking at the concept of historicity, of the concept of blindness, such as other concepts, such as disabilities. This is the idea that deficiencies change over time, depending how people are seen by others, the person giving a diagnosis, whether they be medical workers, or from a legal point of view, from a social point of view, that can fluctuate over time. And so I think it's important to have a definition, a self-identification by individuals. I think it's interesting to take that into account in a definition that I can't really give. I can just give certain elements of that, things that should be taken into account.

**Bruno Liesen**

Thank you, Susanne. Now I'm going to hand it over to Heidi to continue with the third question.

**Heidi Lourens** 1:01:34

Yes, so for me, and I think I've alluded to this before, the definition of blindness is really around, and this is what I said in an article of mine, that is my body. I am blind because of my body. And my body is disabled because of stigma, social exclusion, and physical inaccessibility. So for me, it's, it's a blend between the medical and the social and, and psycho-emotional, which might differ from person to person, each person's experiences in that will obviously be different. So, each of us are blind because of a different biological, each of us have different experiences, like I say, that can't be remedied by the environment, each of us has depending on our context, who we are, what our situations are, so socio- economic situation, gender, etcetera, race. We are faced with different environmental factors. And that, obviously, then results in certain psycho-emotional experiences, so that is my definition.

**Bruno Liesen** 1:03:08

Thank you, Heidi, for this answer, which, which affects very basic questions. We still have time to listen to what Danielle has to say, if she can give us an answer to her question. So Dannyelle over to you.

**Dannyelle Valente**

So, thank you. I don't really have a precise definition to give you a precise answer. But what is sure is that in my work, I would like to turn upside down this idea of something being missing in the image, having something missing in a visual culture and try to give this visual culture to people who haven't got that. For me, that isn't my starting point with a question of image. What I do is to try and find it in these singularities, for example, in the drawing of the river that I presented to you, in this perceptive singularity, how can we put forward something that will be enough for everybody, because it's something that speaks to all of us. So I would like to turn the thing upside down, I want to get away from the idea of something being missing, to explore the same realities for everybody.

**Bruno Liesen**

Thank you, Dannyelle. That was practically our conclusion for this wonderful roundtable that I am very delighted to have been able to take part in and to chair, so your comments will no doubt have touched the people listening and given rise to a lot of questions, I hope, and we have enough time now to move on to questions from the floor unless you would like to say one last thing, before we move on to that. But you'll still have time to come back to that later, no doubt. Thank you, again, very warmly, all three of you. And now I'm going to hand it over to No**ë**lle to moderate the discussion with the audience.

**Noëlle Roy**

Can you hear me? I'm very embarrassed because I've lost one of the, my, the gallery of participants, I know somebody wants to ask a question but I can't see. And I'm really sorry about that at this crucial moment. Can you tell me how I can get back my gallery of participants at the top of my screen?

**Marion Chottin**

Yes, this is Marion. If you click at the bottom of the screen on the participants, the window on the top right should open. And you should see the little hands otherwise, I can tell you, that there’s Hannah, who would like to say something, David Johnson, and Michelle Botha.

**Noëlle Roy**

And so I invite them to note I heard that, but I can't see them again. They've disappeared. I can't see who is raising the hand. No, I don't have a window there. But there's Hannah and David and Michelle Botha. For the time being. Maybe Hannah would like to speak.

**Hannah Thompson** 1:06:59

Hello, everybody. Hannah speaking. This whole session was really interesting. And there are lots of intersections with session, roundtable 12, tomorrow, which is about blind, which has sessions, which has papers, about blind parents, and, and autoethnographic studies, which is the link with Heidi's work. And Heidi, I wanted to ask you, how do you when, when you were talking about accommodations, and the students and teachers being grateful for things that were being given to them, rather than understanding that it's, that its their right, not, not a gift. I could sense some activism in your, in your voice, in your, in your, in the content. And I wanted to ask you as a blind researcher, how do you navigate the relationship between research, and the kind of implied objectivity of research, and then activism, and the kind of subjectivity of activism?

**Heidi Lourens** 1:08:23

That's a difficult question, but it's interesting that you raised that because my doctoral supervisor said to me, It sounds very political when you write, which is sort of in that activism. But, but absolutely, I think, look, objectivity for me, I don't want to say I've given up completely on it, but I am rather embracing the, the subjectivity as, as, hopefully, as a benefit to my research. And absolutely, I mean, I think what you probably could hear if you say it was activism is also a bit of frustration, and probably a bit of anger around the fact that, you know, you have to fight for yourself all the time. And you know, I have to take up that responsibility and children in my research that start off with a fraction of an equal footing, I want to say, almost, so for me, definitely that, that activates a feeling of activism, that with, what then, I think, entered into my autoethnographic work. And also, I think, I don't know if I'm making sense, but to me, it helps to sort of, also fight for myself, I guess, but yeah, I can just summarize, I think that the subjectivity for me is, I've come to understand and experience it as an asset. And in my work, yes, it does raise some strong emotion, but I think it can lead into sort of wanting to tell my own story, which is sort of, I think, in the realm of activism, because personally, for myself, I'm also going to feel very grateful, and very appreciative. So, but but I am, I guess, through my research, and that's what they say about autoethnography also is that it is, it is really therapeutic. And I wrote about that. So, in that, it's quite, you know, emancipating myself to say no, but hang on, you know, this is, this is, this is a right. It's not a privilege, or something to be grateful for. So I've not moved towards active activism, if I can put it like that. But I feel like from moving from experiences to autoethnography, to feeling that my own voice is becoming stronger, I might be moving more towards that.

**Hannah Thompson** 1:11:25

Brilliant, thank you.

**Noëlle Roy** 1:11:28

Thank you. Maybe, I could hand over to David Johnson?

**Audience Member** 1:11:36

Okay. Yeah. So, first of all, I'd like to say how, how rich, I found the presentations, thank you very much indeed. My question is, really, I think, mainly for Dannyelle. I'm really interested in what you're doing, Dannyelle, because I'm, my own work is about what I call blind aesthetics. And I love the reference to the drawing of the river, which I think did you say just there was a circle with marks that represented pebbles, which I think is absolutely brilliant. But I'm wondering if you could just expand on the idea of the image because I'm interested in how the blind experience gives you the opportunity to think about the multisensory, as you said, and you use multisensory what you called multisensory images. But, for me, and in my work, I'm trying to show how multisensory ways of thinking bring you back to sort of conventional images in a way, visual images that are there for blind people and sighted people. Do you agree with me? And if not, can you expand on a little bit on, on images in general. Was that too big a question.

**Dannyelle Valente** 1:13:18

Thank you. Well, my question was to do with drawings, to start, this drawing of the river- you can hear me I hope- and this drawing, I was looking for other looking for other drawings in a similar register, and looked at a game that I designed which is called Touch Memory, which is a tactile version of Pictionary where I asked players and had blind players to try and see how they represented objects in Pictionary. And so, this idea of wanting to find out more and to see whether we could find some form of representation of objects, to explore what other people have seen. But I did not find other types of, similar types of drawing, for example, stairs, represented by rising steps and perhaps a banister with hands on the banister or a drawing of a bus where it's displayed, represented by a young blind person with two lines which illustrate getting onto the bus and a vertical line which is that where they're holding the rail inside the bus. So these are fascinating drawings, but I had the difficulty of the medium, which is that blind children don't draw. So I tried to find something which is perceptible via a visual tool, which means that, that's why I went to explore more multisensory approaches; one example of how you can explore visual concepts in a multisensory manner is a book which has just been brought out which we've co built with children, with Toulouse Museum, called Tactile Explorers in the Museum, where we have represented artifacts in the book, which you can touch in the Natural History Museum, with tactile properties, which were brought by the children themselves when they touch these objects, and we explore that in the illustrations, in an illustration, sorry. And other research is just coming to an end, a multisensory book that we are publishing with Les Doigts Qui Rêvent, you have where, we're going to be touching, you get a picture or touch things, and sounds will be generated. So, for example, you’ll be able to jump into a river. And as you do that, a sound will be generated. So this is using smart fabrics as they are known. I don't know if that's answered your question. But it's true that that's quite a broad field that you've opened up there.

**Audience Member** 1:16:43

Yeah. Fascinating. I'd love to get hold of that book. Thank you very much indeed.

**Noëlle Roy** 1:16:52

So Michelle Botha, I'm afraid I can't see your name. But I believe that is it. I can't read your name. Marion, if you can help? Michelle, you have the floor.

**Audience Member** 1:17:12

Thanks so much. Thanks again, for another brilliant session. There's just been so much to think about today. Yes, it's Michelle, here, again from Cape Town, which is, by the way, the most beautiful part of South Africa. Sorry, Heidi, but you know, it's true. My question is about, and I'm very interested in the building of, I guess, positive sense of self in, in young people with visual impairments through their educational experiences. And I mean, coming back to Heidi, what you were saying about gratitude and this kind of imperative that these students feel to be grateful or to show gratitude. I guess my question to you is, you know, is what groundwork is laid at school around, around that imperative? Is that something that's being carried forward from what young people are being exposed to, in your experience and from your participants? And then I guess a similar question to Susanne, about in your research, what you've seen in terms of the building of positive identities, positive sense of self in, in young people, whether that's happening in schooling, or through peer groups, or in families or, or other spaces? So I guess it's, it's a question to each of you. Thanks.

**Heidi Lourens** 1:18:51

So I wish I could deny the fact that Cape Town is the most beautiful part, but at least I grew up there, that's a consolation. So you ask about, and please correct me if I'm wrong about the building of positive sense of self in school. For me and from what I’ve seen you know, there's generally like very low expectations on the children. There's not a lot of any career counseling, or, you know, a sense of, you know, you can go you can do it, you can go to university. It's more a fact of, oh, you should be so scared and so worried because the world out there is very cruel and no one will want to help you and that's really the messages that that came through for the students that I interviewed and also my personal life but in terms of positive sense of self, because at the end of the day, there are children out there and they do go to university, I would say they believe sufficiently, sufficiently in themselves to actually go out and do it. And that is often a case of that, one teacher told me, and also the parents, and also the inner resilience. So it's often unfortunately, from what I've heard, it's often not the, I want to say the majority voice that said, you can do it, you can socialize, you can, you know, you will be welcomed outside, which I mean, it's also not entirely true to say, exactly. That's also a false expectation. But, but it's often that that one single voice of someone or that parents took the initiative to take the child for career counseling, because it's often not offered in special schools. And by not offering career counseling, it feels to me that there is an implicit implication that almost, you know, there are just certain jobs for you. So why, why actually explore the whole, the whole full banquet of possibilities that are out there? So yes, I hope that answers your question. It’s often from what I've heard, it's that one teacher or the parents or peers, yes.

**Noëlle Roy**

Which is why meeting others is so important. Marion, are there others?

**Susanne Commend**

Yes, sorry, I would just like to jump in to say much the same; I've... in interviews of young people who have done well, they have had positive experiences enabling them to have positive feelingsthrough associative activities, sports competition, events which helped them and there are a number of testimonies which say pretty much the same thing. But there is a pressure to succeed for young people today in general.

**Noëlle Roy** 1:23:27

Thank you. If there are no other questions, I'd like to hand back to Bruno to wrap up this session. Bruno you are muted.

**Bruno Liesen**

Okay, sorry. Yes, I'd lost the button. So just to close, at the risk of repeating myself, I think this was a highly interesting panel discussion and my thanks go to all of our panelists for having been both concise and fascinating in their contributions and in their answers. Very, very judicious use of time to address huge and current concerns in education, the training of eager young minds, forming personalities, giving them the resources to find their role in society, in the world at large, is especially challenging, by something of a tyranny of the visual, so thank you to all of you for your work. And I trust that you'll be able to continue this experimentation and research and continue to produce resources, whether they are intellectual material, through your talent and enthusiasm. Thank you, we will conclude this session. We are bang on time. And I think I am probably supposed to hand over to Hannah, to formally introduce our 30-minute break.

**Hannah Thompson** 1:26:16

Yes. Thank you, Bruno. Exactly. We now have -- thank you, everybody, for this extraordinary session and now we have a half hour break before our next session.