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Book Review / Compte rendu

Book review written by **Catie Sahadath**, M.Ed. student, Trent University

Troubles Online: Ableism and Access in Higher Education. Edited by Chelsea Temple Jones, Fady Shanouda, and Lise Binhammer. Athabasca University Press, 2025, 229 pages paperback. ISBN: 97181771994163.

In *Troubles Online*, editors Chelsea Temple Jones, Fady Shanouda, and Lisanne Binhammer lay a foundation for scholarship on the critical examination of accessibility in online learning environments. The co-editors of this volume present nuanced lenses on the topic of accessible digital pedagogy, which triangulate at the point of critical scholarship. Temple Jones, a professor in the Department of Child and Youth Studies at Brock University, brings a record of research examining the interplay between disability and the media. Shanouda, a professor of Critical Disability Studies at Carleton University, adds his expertise in critical disability and mad studies. Binhammer provides lived experience as a graduate student impacted by remote learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. Through their critical reflections of practice, the chapters' authors provide a variety of perspectives that relay a common message: online learning environments are not inherently more accessible than other forms of pedagogy.

Critical digital pedagogy challenges traditional methods of teaching, and promotes participatory, learner-centred approaches to online learning. The book argues that technological advances and additions to education are largely uncritical, and that the extant literature in critical digital pedagogy addressing these gaps tends to treat mad, disabled, d/Deaf, and neurodivergent learners as afterthoughts. The editors coin the term *accessible critical digital pedagogy,* as an approach to digital pedagogy that embeds accessibility into critical praxis. As noted by Temple Jones and Shanouda, "this book is a response to the fallacy that online learning is accessible" (p. 2). Binhammer brings forth a call to action for educators to consider radical solutions to the barriers faced by online learners, and to incorporate critical digital access into online education.

The publication of *Troubles Online* represents a shift to commitment-motivated action, following two decades of compliant-centric practice in Canada's postsecondary institutions. Between 2005 and 2024, eight of Canada's ten provinces had enacted accessibility legislation, which defined and mandated compliance for their respective postsecondary institutions. This coincided with the proliferation of online learning in higher education, which was also subject to accessibility compliance legislation. A common response to accessibility in online learning in postsecondary institutions has been the implementation and promotion of Universal Design for Learning (UDL), which encourages the use of multiple means of engagement

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to make content as usable as possible for online learners. While UDL has been useful in providing guidance for accessible content, it has not required educators to think critically, nor to act radically when thinking about digital pedagogy. *Troubles Online* moves beyond the compliance-centred motivations that have prevailed over the last twenty years and moves toward a commitment-centred approach to providing justice for online learners.

A key element of this volume is its treatment of emergency remote online learning, where course work was forced online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. The editors and authors began work on *Troubles Online* in 2018, and the onset of the pandemic in 2020 introduced a disruption to learners that magnified issues that were already prevalent in online learning environments. For example, digital learning exposes a lack of enthusiasm on the part of learners and educators to shift to online learning, and the loss of opportunities for mutual authenticity and excitement (Temple Jones & Maloley, 2025). The editors successfully incorporated chapters that draw on both educator and student experiences to effectively amplify the book's calls to action. In the final chapter, Vostermans and Mohler encourage the reader to invoke the principles of disability justice, such as using co-creation of curriculum to creation to create meaning and trust between students and educators, to move forward into a more inclusive post-pandemic pedagogical future.

Through ten chapters written by educators across Canada and the United States, the contributing authors provide a primer on justice-oriented online education (Chapter 1), before launching into an array of insights from a diverse practical landscape. This spans from the framing of online education using paradigms that materialize online learning (Chapters 2, 7); case studies that provide unique perspectives on access issues for student populations including those in social work education (Chapter 4), and from a religious community (Chapter 5); practical examples of implementations of accessible online learning design (Chapters 8, 9); and considerations for critical digital pedagogy in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic (Chapters 3, 6, 10). Explicit thematic links between the chapters strengthen the central argument of the collection without appearing forced or disingenuous.

The editors' presentation of the novel concept of *accessible critical digital pedagogy* is successful for three reasons. First, the hopeful tone of *Troubles Online* provides a soft entry point for readers who may not have experience or confidence with topics relating to digital accessibility and presents understandable examples that are genuinely interesting to learn about. For example, Chapter 5 presents the accessibility issues faced by students whose membership in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints limited their ability to access their online courses due to their Church's restrictions on internet usage. Second, the book presents real examples of research that are grounded in the paradigm of accessible critical digital pedagogy. For example, Chapter 6 presents a poetic narrative of two disabled students navigating the transition online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. This example uses co-creation to give voice to students whose perspectives would otherwise remain omitted from the body of work in critical digital pedagogy. Accessible critical digital pedagogy seeks justice by providing explicit, meaningful testimonies that make the issue impossible to ignore. This is effective because it advances scholarship beyond works that examine the role of ableist normativity of education systems (E.g. Felder, 2025), by asserting that the practice of critical pedagogy itself still needs to make advances for the aforementioned learners.

Other recent works addressing accessibility in online learning situate digital accessibility in online learning within legislative contexts, which provide guidance to educators on how to remain compliant (E.g. Mancilla et al., 2023), or how to create accessible content (E.g. Miller, 2021). Uniquely, *Troubles Online* addresses disability by centring student voices, and by advocating for a justice-driven approach to online learning. A criticism of this approach may be the practicality of its implementation. The examples in the book address accessible online education in action, but do not address the systemic-level contexts that perpetuate these injustices. Nevertheless, *Troubles Online* effectively

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presents a new paradigm for the examination and praxis in critical digital pedagogy. It will be especially useful to educators who are seeking to develop their own critical digital praxis, as well as researchers looking for a launch point in this area.

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