Episode 4: Student Perspectives on Open and Inclusive Education with Mitali Kamat, Jaime Hilditch, and Caleb Valorozo-Jones Transcript

[Theme music: "Cool Upbeat Hip Hop Piano" by ItsMochaJones on freesound.org]

Josie Gray: Hello! Welcome to the open knowledge spectrums podcast, which explores questions of epistemic justice, or knowledge equity, in the context of open education and considers different possibilities for making open education and open educational practices more equitable.

My name is Josie Gray, and I am your host. This podcast is my final project for my Master of Design in Inclusive Design at OCAD University.

In this episode, I speak with three students in my Inclusive Design cohort: Jaime, Mitali, and Caleb, who I've had the privilege to work with and learn from over the last two years. They graciously volunteered to record an episode with me to talk about from their perspectives as students and inclusive designers. We talk about their master's major research projects (MRPs), we reflect on positive and challenging learning experiences, and discuss how education could be more inclusive.

Jaime Hilditch is a second-year student in the Master of Inclusive Design program at OCAD University. She has a background in graphic and communication design from Kingston University and OCAD University. Jaime is passionate about social design and inclusive and open education. Her most recent work looks at introducing braille concepts and emphasizes pre-braille learning in kindergarten classrooms.

Mitali Kamat is an inclusive designer and occupational therapist who is passionate about building inclusive environments and products with and for individuals with disabilities. She has been working in public schools in the United States for 7 years. Her key interest areas are assistive technologies, inclusive product design, and built environments. Design for her is multidisciplinary, it is the process of collaborating with individuals from different fields of expertise and lived experiences that make her work life most meaningful.

Caleb Valorozo-Jones is an Inclusive Designer, food allergy "foodie," and accidental rubber duck collector. A lifelong misfit and edge case, Caleb's design ethos focuses on increasing representation of minorities and oppressed groups in policy and design processes, especially his fellow neurodivergent and 2SLGBTQA+ community members. His current passion is researching Dungeons & Dragons for and with neurodivergent adults to help build self-autonomy and self-advocacy skills, as well as creating cathartic experiences. Ultimately, Caleb aims to carve out a space for his fellow misfits through design.

And with that, let's switch over to the conversation.

Josie: Hello**,** to begin, would you each introduce yourself and give listeners a bit of background about who you are, your educational background, and what brought you to inclusive design, and what your MRP is?

Jaime Hilditch: My name is Jaime Hilditch. I'm a designer and author of a children's book called *The Earth Needs a Break from Plastic*. I have a background in graphic design and communication design. And all the design work I did, when possible, served companies, people, organizations wanting to do good. So for example, branding for Fashion Revolution in Calgary, Alberta, graphics for an environmental company working to serve Henvey Inlet First Nations, and exploring dangers of plastic pollution. And I realized through inclusive design, I had an interest in early education as well as design. So my major research project is titled "Pre-braille implementation into early education," more specifically in the kindergarten classroom. And we're working to introduce pre-Braille. And pre-Braille is activities done before learning the formal Braille writing system—so Braille grades one and two. The activities work to build two-handed coordination, finger sensitivity, grasp and release, light touch, finger dexterity and mobility, which are all important to formal learning of Braille. And it's my hope that with this project, introducing these pre-Braille exercises and activities, students will be more engaged in the Braille writing system if they need to later on learn Braille, there will be more inclusive lessons conducted in the classroom, and starting it at a younger age.

Josie: What brought you to the inclusive design program?

Jaime: So, I was in graphic design at OCAD, and I heard about this program through my professor during my undergrad thesis. And I was working on a project, which was the book I ended up writing and illustrating. And she thought I should, you know, attend one of the sessions, and I did. And you know, being really interested in social design, I thought this was another area that could broaden my design perspective. I think, you know, learning design was very helpful—graphic design—but I was more interested in how it could be accessed by what wider audience. You know, web accessibility and more inclusive education. Yeah.

Josie: Mitali, how about for yourself?

Mitali Kamat: I'm going to give you the short version, because the long version is really long. But um, I've been an occupational therapist for a while now. So I've been practicing about seven years now. And I've tried to sort of... you know how you're in, you're practicing in a field, and you're trying to find what you want to do, or like your niche in that field. So what ended up happening was, I was on that discovery, and I landed in a school, which was heavy on assistive tech—so I'm a school-based occupational therapist, and that's what I do—and because of the caseload I had in the school, I had to learn a lot more about assistive technology; I ended up getting certified. And there was this 3D printer at the school, or in my department, which was not being used. And we also had this incredible tool guy—or

a carpenter—who would sort of customize devices for therapists. So it was like therapists basically engaging in design without actually knowing that they're doing it. And I started doing like adaptive 3D-printed aids for my students because they had unique preferences, like they wanted to use one type of water bottle that would fit on their wheelchair. And there was not a cut, like, you know, something that was off the shelf that was out there. So we ended up designing an adaptive aid for her, for her wheelchair. So things like that.

And I realized that I enjoy that process of actually working with someone to design an adaptive aid or assistive tech device. And that's when I started reading about it. And I started connecting with organizations, and I came across the book *Design Meets Disability*. And I read it. And I was like, "Yes! This is... this is what I'd like to do." Finally, after, like, 10 years of trying, or something. But yeah, then I started basically just googling what inclusive designers is, and I came across this program, since, you know, there's not a whole lot of them out there. Yeah, that's how I ended up in the field.

Josie: Thanks. And do you want to share a little bit about what your MRP is?

Mitali: Yeah. So my major research project, I'm working with blind and partially sighted participants who have an art and design background or who are in the arts, to come up with tools and strategies that could reimagine what drawing looks like for blind, and maybe come up with a drawing toolkit that will help them create, help them access education programs and even industry.

Josie: Cool. Thanks. And Caleb?

Caleb Valorozo-Jones: So I have a bit of a weird background. So I have a certificate and diploma in music production and business. And through doing a lot of like music production and marketing, like on an indie level, I started building websites, and I was designing stuff for people because I knew how to use Photoshop—which was all that you need to know at the time on the local level—and got more and more into it, and learned about interaction design as a field so then I got a degree in interaction design. And now I'm doing a master's of inclusive design at OCAD. So kind of like a weird transition from like doing music and like pop culture-based things to more design and service design.

Josie: And what was it about the inclusive design program that really appealed to you?

Caleb: That's like, complicated because like, I think I've always to a degree been passionate about inclusive design. Although it wasn't like called that when I was younger. And like design education, especially like in high school to when—because like, I went back to school as a mature student—like the degree did not exist when I had graduated high school. And when we took design in high school, it was communications class, and you had to do certain things that— It was primarily graphic-design based, and like—no offense to Jaime—that's just not what... I'm just not into it the same way. Like I like to digital design and like multimedia design.

And you had to take art, and I was terrible at art classes, and I wasn't into it. So we didn't really have the vocabulary to understand that like how things are designed or industrial design, or like all these things that can encapsulate inclusive design. But it was largely because like, my sibling is autistic. And he has other learning disabilities, and they required a lot of assistive technology and accommodations going through schools, and what they have IEPs in Ontario. And it was such a battle to just do the simplest things, like a computer with like assistive technology, so that they could participate in school. And my family was kind of like always embroiled in these battles about it and seeing the same thing, like my mom is also dyslexic and has ADHD. And like, there's whole complexities around the education system that like... like now I identify as neurodivergent, as well, but didn't have those same access needs or barriers to be a "problem" student. And so I was always kind of like, very aware of the lack of access and inclusivity for certain people, because we make exceptions and inclusions and access needs or exceptions for people all the time. But we just don't consider it that if it's not above and beyond what we want to do. So I became very aware of that. So when I was doing my interaction design degree, they always talked about, "You have to make it accessible. And it's easier to make it accessible before, than after, the fact. And it's cheaper," which is like always how things are framed in education, because it's capitalism. But we didn't really like go beyond how to do that beyond like WCAG. And like, I was like, well I want to know more. And because I was kind of passionate, especially about like neurodivergent and autistic accessibility and the getting involved and following people on Twitter in those communities, you eventually find out about the IDRC and learn about those projects. And they were so cool and finding out about how it's linked to the program.

Josie: And you want to share a little bit about what your MRP is.

Caleb: Yeah, so my MRP is Dungeons and Dragons for neurodivergent adults. So a lot of neuro-diverse programming—or program for neuro-diverse populations—focus on having them change their behaviors to fit more into society. And there's specific therapies that are very harmful and can cause a lot of psychological damage and PTSD. So this is looking at, instead of asking neurodivergent people to change themselves or come from a deficit-based approach, using hobbies or activities that use a lot of role play and imagination and creative opportunities to imagine and construct neuro-diverse spaces that are a) safe spaces for neurodivergent people, but also to have them work and build on the skills that they identify as needing, so like, self-advocacy, self-determination, etc, which all happens in Dungeons & Dragons, but unless you've played you might not know that. But it's, that as alternative. And also helping neuro-diverse people who may not have access to support systems or funding for accessing programming. So it's like, a more inclusive, hobby-based, less expensive way to do it.

Josie: Yeah. So one of the questions I'm exploring through the podcast is this idea of openness. And how people think about openness, and how people understand openness. And I was wondering how you three have experienced openness in

education? And that could be in kind of, whatever way that word makes sense to you.

Jaime: So for me, before I went to OCAD, I did a diploma in art and design at Kingston University. And so it was a one-year program, and the first six months you're encouraged to explore. So we tested out fashion, 3D animation, fine art. A lot of those I realized I was not good at all. I remember creating a fashion piece with one arm hole.. but actually, sort of inclusive because then I was like, well, you know, this could be for someone who is pregnant, or it could be for someone who has hurt their arm. Anyway. So we did have briefs, as most design projects do, but there was always room to go speak to people in the community—which would inform our designs—guerrilla marketing and campaigns, and collaborating with one another. So we did eventually—after the Christmas break, so halfway through—we focused on one of those areas, and I chose the communication design. But we were still able to work on projects with people in fashion, and people in, you know, 3D modeling and stuff. So I think those, you know, learning from people in different areas was very beneficial and just really interesting.

Josie: Yeah, for sure.

Mitali: I don't remember a whole lot of openness, honestly. I think the only times I can remember are like when we had sort of, project-based activities. So I remember when I was in undergrad, there was this one, one time, that we had to do like... audio-visual presentation. And I ended up, with my friends, making a movie out of interviews from these people who are working in a school with children with disabilities back in India. And I was completely out of the context of what our curriculum was. Yeah, I think I didn't have a whole lot of opportunities for openness in my programs until I got to OCAD, I guess. And getting— the only things I remember being, like flexibility and like, the creativity to go out and explore and do whatever makes sense to you out of this school or this learning goal was probably everything that was project based, I would say.

Josie: Mhmm. The videos you describe, so you were— was that in the States?

Mitali: That was not in the States. I was in India, in Mumbai. And I was at a point where I was getting frustrated with the curriculum, and I really wanted some real world, like, experience. So we ended up going to this school. And they had, you know, a lot of children with multiple disabilities and Down syndrome. And in India, you don't have the education system that's like, sort of funded by the government. So you don't have like IEPs, and all of that. So you have these schools, which are special-education schools, which support students. So we went to that particular school, and it was my first sort of... exposure into real-world application of students in a school environment with regards to OT. So, yeah.

Josie: Yeah, I think that's a great example of just like, how making learning more "real world" can be so much more impactful and motivating and feel like it's worth the time. How about you, Caleb?

Caleb: In terms of, like open education resources, I think, not a lot of exposure to that stuff. With having taken like design fields and stuff—and I don't know if Jaime had a similar experience—but because there is a lot more informal or like, grey literature, about design.. Like there's like oodles of blogs and Medium posts. And most companies now post their, like, design systems, so that you can understand how they develop them. And, and like Microsoft's Inclusive Design package, I forget what they call it—

Josie: Toolkit, I think.

Caleb: Yeah, their toolkit. So there's a lot of resources in that sense, that we have access to in learning, and that they were free and were referenced. Because they are like industry examples and case studies and resources, so they're useful in that regard. But like Mitali said, I— my instinct is to say there was not a lot of openness in education, but like, the more I think about it… And in my interaction design projects and the briefs, like yes, we had to do specific things to learn specific hard and soft skills, but we could do whatever we wanted with the project, usually within approval of the professor.. Like I still— *[laughs].* No, I shouldn't tell that story, *[laughter]* but like, if they didn't think it was a good idea, you wouldn't do it because you, you'd get a bad grade. And ultimately, even if it was the most fulfilling project for you, your scholarships and funding and bursaries are ultimately based on your grades. So you're not going to do that in pursuit of it, unless maybe you have better like, ethics than I do to like not compromise your principles… [*Laughter*] But to me, I was like, yeah, well, I'm not going to lose my funding.

Josie: Mhmm. Yeah, that the topic of grades in that context is so tricky, and I feel like it's one we've had in practice with this cohort in the last year, right? Like how grades are so limiting, but also how they still have a lot of power over the type of work that we do. And like, as long as there are grades, we can't not consider grades. I follow a lot of people on Twitter that talk about "un-grading" and changing— Like they still have to submit grades, but they change their grading practices. So it's more about… Like, they're not grading the work, they're more grading how students reflect on their own learning over the semester. And like, that's the grade. There's a lot more collaboration between instructor and student, and a lot more self-reflection and self-grading. So yeah, those conversations are very interesting. And, when you want to... when you *want* to give students the ability to like, explore and do things maybe outside of what's expected, stepping back from grading is pretty important, just because they're so limiting, and they're so oppressive.

Caleb: And I love those systems, but also like, the thought of that sends me into like a panic spiral because it's like, we've learned nothing else other than to achieve the grade.

Mitali: It does make you happy also. It's like—

Josie: Yeah!

Mitali: It doesn't mean anything! *[Laughter]* Like it really doesn't

Caleb: Yeah. Because I also hate it when professors are like, why are you so obsessed with grades? And it's like, because...

Jaime: We're made this way?

Josie: Grades got me scholarships.

[Laughter]

Caleb: Yeah, like, how do you think I am here? If my grade drops, so does the money...

Josie: In past educational experiences, what are sometimes you have felt included, or excluded, or otherwise? Like, what kind of challenges have you faced in the education system.

Mitali: I feel like my largest barrier or challenge, has been being on a Visa... *[Laughs]* I didn't realize how much that limits your options, like even in my master's program for occupational therapy. You know, all of these students had the chance to go and explore an externship. You know, they went to Ghana, and they went to, I think multiple other places where they got to explore. And, because of money and because of Visa and because of all of these things, that was just not an option for me. I mean, the process was so different from back at home that the time it took to sort of navigate and understand what kind of environment I was in, I was pretty much out of school by then. So you know, you just kind of follow this traditional path that, you know, most people have taken before you. And it's safe, and you know, you're going to graduate and get a job at the end of it. Yeah… Not a whole lot of room for exploration, even at OCAD. OCAD, though, I did try to like— I had the chance to sort of edit my program to my needs. But it took a lot of, sort of, reaching out myself and trying to see what I can get replaced with, you know, what I needed to do.

Josie: Yeah, you did a lot of self-advocacy work.

Mitali: Yeah, like, this is my second master's. So I was like, I don't want to get through another program and be like, I'm not happy with what I learned, you know. So I did replace a lot of things with more experiential learning, like an internship, an independent study project. Anything that's a project for me, I found was like, a good place to learn. [Caleb: Yeah] Something that was not an assignment or like, like a graded assignment or something like that. Yeah, I think that has been my biggest challenge or barrier, I would say, is navigating the international aspect and trying to find scholarships, and trying to find classes I can take, and stuff like that.

Josie: Mhmm. Yeah, I think that challenge of being an international student, for sure. I think you faced a lot of barriers with that. And it's interesting that OCAD—or at least the inclusive design program—isn't better equipped to deal with those

barriers, considering it's a program that aims to be welcoming of international students and to build more global communities.

Caleb: I wonder how much... well a) that will change. And I just find it interesting too like, with Mitali doing all this self-advocacy to get all these experiential and like more custom and well suited to your learning goals. And why like, we kind of talked about this prior, like, in class when you're discussing about like electives and like, wanting to learn and trying to take electives at other schools, and the whole system kind of seems like you *can* do this, but they don't really want you to.

[Laughter]

Mitali: It's true.

Jaime: Yeah.

Caleb: It's not exclusive to OCAD. That's just, I've noticed that other schools. Like even when I was trying to take electives in my undergrad and wanting to take them at a different school, because it was something I was interested in learning, and it was just like, such a headache.

Josie: Mhmm. Yeah. Jutta has talked about doing co-design sessions to see how we can improve the inclusive design program. And it would be interesting to see—it sounds like it used to be—but interesting to see how the inclusive design program could be more flexible and easier to personalize it to specific learning goals. Like I think those barriers are things that could be made... less

Jaime: For sure.

Mitali: It was interesting when she said that like, because it does make sense. Like, you know, it's kind of like an individualized education program, or like plan. Which would be like, a perfect fit for an inclusive design program, right? You are basically using something that has been used for students who need that, to see if it works better for everyone else? And that makes sense. Yeah, I think it would be really nice if they can do that.

Josie: Yeah, Caleb or Jaime, do you have experiences or challenges you'd like to share?

Caleb: I have, like, two thoughts about it. And like, my first thought is always—not always—but like my first thought is kind of experiencing the education system as a queer person, as a queer man. And that's always been a concern, like— It's less so in post-secondary a concern because like, it's impolite, especially in Canadian society to be like, outwardly homophobic. But that doesn't mean like you don't experience microaggressions. I know everyone experiences microaggressions for various things. But like, I have definitely had those moments in education. And I think like with any person who's experiencing microaggressions, or oppression, or being marginalized in the classroom, that is going to take away from your experience. And you're not focusing on learning, you're more focused on your

safety. And I'm sure that has been experienced by lots of people, having sexist or racist or xenophobic professors. Like, I've not met anyone who has not had that experience. And I know schools have policies to deal with these situations. But I think the reality for students is much different. And as much as— I feel like students are told a lot like, "Oh, well, you're buying this education, like you're the customer. It's catered to you." But there's not that— There's such a huge power imbalance that even making complaints or advocating for yourself, it very much does feel like you're putting yourself at risk. And you're risking your grades, which depend— Like it all, it all ties into, like the system where you feel excluded and also like, could hurt your academic or your professional career if once you graduate that you're a "problem" person.

And then I think a lot about, in my undergrad, when I was sick, and I had to have surgery, and I was on, like, accessibility, the Student Accessibility office. But it was a nightmare to deal with, and like to deal with teachers, and systems that like we're not doing what they were meant to do. And just being a person with temporary accessibility needs. The hurdle for people who are not able bodied, or disabled, or sick, or experience chronic illness, I like, I can't imagine having to go through schooling or post-secondary schooling with that. That's, to me, like one of the biggest problems with exclusion—in society in general—but specifically education where they... they say they have these policies, but it's still so difficult for the students themselves to enact them.

Josie: Yeah. Post-secondary is very ableist and not designed to support disabled people at all. And I think with COVID, we've seen a lot of like disabled people who've been asking for accommodations to be able to take their classes remotely and being told for a long time that that wasn't possible. And now all of a sudden, oh, all of a sudden, it's possible. And will those accommodations still be... Will those be provided now as accommodations? Especially for people who are immune compromised and chronically ill, where it's still a huge risk for them to go back in person, even once people start to get vaccinated. Yeah, I've been reading a lot about the different kind of accommodation requirements that have come up with COVID, and around like, people not having quiet places to work or take tests because they're at home and not having their own space, and with this online proctoring and how ableist those systems are and how racist those systems are. Yeah, academia is not a safe place for a lot of people.

Caleb: Did you see the thing about the York student in Myanmar?

Josie: Yeah, the email.

Caleb: Yeah.

Jaime: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

Caleb: It was—I don't know if you saw it, Mitali—but it was a student who's in Myanmar, who's going through a military coup. He asked to reschedule his midterm

because they were shutting down all the internet, the cell. And the teacher was like, incredibly rude and dismissive and questioned his sense of reality...

Mitali: Oh my god.

Caleb: And said, like, “Well, you better pass the exam, it's going to be difficult.”

Mitali: *[Laughs]* Sorry. This is not like, laughter…

Caleb: No, it's… incredulity. And that people were so shocked. I'm like, no, like, this is so exemplary of a lot of the mindsets. A school may have a policy, but that professor is a barrier to enacting that policy.

Josie: Mhmm.

Mitali: Yeah.

Jaime: Kinda reminds me of a classmate of ours talking about being like a half a semester behind because their accessibility was delayed, and like he couldn't get the transcripts.

Josie: Yeah, accommodations not being the default, and having to go through all these hoops to get those required accommodations.

Jaime: And then having to catch up while you're doing a giant project. And I think similar to Caleb, less so in post-secondary, but in high school and younger. I am a person of quiet nature, and I also have anxiety. So many times, but depending on the class or the project structure, I wasn’t able or didn't feel comfortable contributing. So I think it's really important to acknowledge the different learning styles, and mental health, and language barriers, and you know, to create a safe and inclusive space to learn. I did have some teachers in high school that would try and make these accommodations. But I was definitely extra work on my part to go and speak to them, even if I wasn't comfortable doing that on my own and advocating for what I needed. But in terms of inclusion, I think this year in class with Jutta, definitely co-designing a class outline was something I'd never experienced before. I think that was really exciting.

Caleb: That just made me think, Jaime, basically, like what we're kind of discussing is that at all— It puts the onus and the effort on the student. But I had a great professor. I only had her for like two classes, she was one of my favorite professors. But at the start of her class, she would do a survey so that we didn't have to, like, speak up in class. Because a lot of times teachers say, “Who has accessibility accommodations?” and you have to put your hand up, and you'd be singling yourself out, and people who wouldn't want to do that. And she said, "Regardless of whether you're registered with the accessibility office, do you have any accessibility needs? Do you have any concerns?" And it would be in the survey, and like it also said, like, "What's your preferred name? What are your pronouns? What accessibility needs? Are there any concerns that you have about this class?" And like, yeah, the onus is on the student, but you don't have to, like, go initiate

that conversation or out yourself in any capacity. She was initiating, and she was laying the groundwork for setting up that dialogue.

Jaime: That's great. I wish I had that.

Josie: How do you think inclusive design practices can make education better?

Jaime: So many things. I think, you know, we all talked about this a little bit, but tailoring studies to unique interests. Kind of creating your own your own degree, your own study path. As well as something that includes cross disciplines and collaboration, combining different faculties. So like, even science and fine art. You know, having these conversations that would not typically happen. I think that's one thing.

Josie: For sure.

Mitali: Yeah, definitely. I think it would help to have the intersections, right. I mean, the more that we get to... sort of interact with students or professors from different fields and different backgrounds. And I think it depends on what level of education we're talking about, as well. Like, I feel like once you're at a graduation and post-graduation level, you would assume that you a little bit know where you're going. Whereas it would be harder to identify goals for someone who is very, very young. You have to, you know, come up with a lot of creative methods to do that. Yeah, I think tailoring a program according to your goal—like overarching goal—would be ideal, according to me. Like, so my goal at the end of this is I want to work on this one project, or I want to be able to learn how to do this. And whatever skills I need to get there, hopefully, the university or the program can equip me with those tools or those resources to get to my end point.

Josie: Mhmm.

Jaime: I also think it'd be interesting to look at post-secondary education models in Europe, ones that are free to attend. You know, cost is a big barrier for education post high school. I don't know the school specifically or how they operated, you know, I have to look into that more. And I also think we've touched a bit on this in class, these schools in Europe are maybe more tailored studies, and they're free to attend.

Josie: Yeah, cost is a huge barrier, right.

Caleb: Cost definitely. And I also think, like, the thing that I love most about open education and open education resources—and obviously I'm not the resident expert here, that's Josie *[laughter]*—but just kind of the sharing of knowledge, in a sense that knowledge does not have to exist or be captured in one way. Like I was reading a survey and report of graduate students and professors, and the majority of them have at least one parent who has a PhD. And there's like insights into the education system and participating in post-secondary education that you're not going to have in terms of its culture, and also the understanding of its materials

and the way it works, that if you don't have that knowledge, like I don't have that knowledge, my parents don't have post-grad degrees. We always talk about the accessibility of journal articles and learning materials in terms of their accessibility for disability and needs, but also, the concept of plain language and understanding knowledge. I think that's like the biggest opportunity for open education resources is just giving more people access to knowledge that is not paywalled and is also at different levels of knowledge scaffolding. Because journal articles can be like so, so painful when you want to learn about topic or get into it. And a lot of the time, it's easier to read and start at these, like, simplified blog posts. But like, there's somewhere in the middle that you can meet with open education and making it more inclusive in the sense that getting more people into different topics.

Josie: I think you've made great points, both talking about like for first generation students, post-secondary is like such a *system* in that it's like, you have to learn how to navigate it and how it's structured, and who to talk to, and like what kind of supports are available that, like if you don't have those support networks that can help guide you through that, that's a huge barrier for students who are first generation. And talking about paywalled articles and more access to information, but also more like public facing scholarship, where the goal is to make knowledge more accessible in all of those different ways. Like not behind a paywall, written in plain language, actually relevant to people outside of academia, digitally accessible, like can be worked with assistive technologies, those are all part of it.

Jaime: But a lot of times during the early part of the project and literature review, finding these journal articles, and be really excited about them, and then just... just not comprehending because it's such scientific— Yeah, I guess… I don't know the type of language. But it's quite difficult to understand, and you have to, you know, review multiple times. And so, I'm trying with my MRP to make it very plain language, also something I'm comfortable with writing as well.

Josie: Yeah, it's such a skill, right? Like you get people who do academic writing all the time. And they have such a hard time writing in plain language. Like it's... both of those things are skills.

Caleb: Because I think it's shown itself to be a very large problem. Like, with dissemination of information and knowledge surrounding COVID. And people's understanding of how it works and the dangers it poses, because so much of it is written in academic language and scientific language and then disseminated through journalists who are trying to—and like, I know there's science journalists and whatnot—but I think that's perhaps one of the problems with it. And like trying to explain to my family about like, "Well, they're saying a different thing every day. It's changing. They keep saying different things." I'm like, "You're watching like, science and academia happened in real time, like, probably for the first time in your life." We're not used to that, like as a society, like we don't have... it's a completely different world.

Josie: Yeah. It's so interesting to see the new ways people are sharing information. Like I've seen so many great TikTok videos explaining how vaccines work that are hilarious but also make so much sense.

[Laughter]

[Theme music]

Josie: If you want to connect with any of the guests today, you can connect with each of them on LinkedIn by searching their names. So you can search for Mitali Kamat, Jaime Hilditch, and Caleb Valorozo-Jones. You can also find Caleb on Twitter @qrnrd and check out his website at https://calebvalorozojones.ca/. You can also checkout Jaime's website at https://jaimehilditch.com/, where you can learn more about her children's book.

You can learn more about this podcast at knowledgespectrums.opened.ca. On the website, you can find all episodes and transcripts, along with many other resources and information related to this project.

You can connect with me on Twitter @josiea_g and you can tweet about the podcast using the hashtag #OKSPodcast

I record this podcast on the traditional and unceded territories of the lək̓ʷəŋən Peoples, known today as the Songhees and Esquimalt Nations, and the territories of the W̱SÁNEĆ Peoples.

The theme song is "Cool Upbeat Hip Hop Piano" by ItsMochaJones on freesound.org and shared under a Creative Commons Attribution License.

This has been Open Knowledge Spectrums. Thank you for listening.

—End of Episode—