
ACCESSIBLE SCREENWRITING PROGRAM 2022

REPORT

Improving ability-diverse writers' access to Quebec's television industry



ACADÉMIE
CANADIENNE DU CINÉMA ET DE LA TÉLÉVISION
PRÉSENTE

Programme de
scénarisation
accessible

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INTRODUCTION

The Quebec section of the Academy of Canadian Cinema & Television has developed the *Programme de scénarisation accessible* (accessible screenwriting program), an initiative inspired by the **Accessible Writers' Lab** led by Ophira Calof as part of the **Reelabilities Film Festival** in Toronto. The content and work process for the English- and French-language initiatives differed, but they shared similar goals. The approach of the *Programme de scénarisation accessible* was to involve four d/Deaf or disabled francophone writers (scriptwriters working in film, television or online) in workshops held in November and December of 2022. The four sessions brought together the d/Deaf or disabled participants and experienced, non-disabled writers, actors and producers in order to have non-hierarchical discussions on avenues for collaboration and inclusion. The collaborative approach was aimed at helping each person learn from the others on an equal footing, and at encouraging the group to think collaboratively about what an accessible writing process would entail. It was both a research process and an opportunity for d/Deaf and disabled writers to obtain better access to the industry.

The goal of the program and of the present report is to identify the tools absent from Quebec's television industry that are needed to ensure better access to the screenwriting community for d/Deaf and disabled persons, from training to professional practice. The partners who initiated the project wished to offer adequate solutions and exemplary practices that will eliminate existing obstacles, open paths for creators with disabilities and allow them to flourish in the television industry.

The program was developed by **Dédy Bilamba** and **Nora Hassouna** of the Academy, in collaboration with **Charlotte Jacob-Maguire**, creative director for the workshops and a consultant in inclusive practices for accessibility and ability diversity. The workshops were led by **Mouloud Boukala**, a professor at UQAM's media school and holder of the [Canada Research Chair in Media, Disabilities and \(Self\) Representations](#). Several situations were represented in the group, including cerebral palsy, Deafhood (represented by a collective of four d/Deaf persons, "Le Mythe de la main rare," who each participated in one workshop), dysphasia and Type 1 diabetes. Two Quebec Sign Language (QSL) interpreters from the [SIVET](#) organization and an interpreter (Benoît Racette) for the artist with cerebral palsy attended each session. All participants in the project (jury members, moderator, creative director, interpreters, writers, etc.) were remunerated. Deaf and disabled participants each received an honorarium of \$1350 for their contribution to this research work. At the conclusion of the program, participants were sent a survey.

This program is presented by the Telefilm Canada and Accessible Media Inc. and designed by ReelAbilities Film Festival Toronto and Ophira Calof. We thank everyone involved for their invaluable contributions.

SELECTION PROCESS AND CHALLENGES

A call for applications was issued on September 19 and open until November 7. The jury that selected the participants between November 8 and 18 comprised Mouloud Boukala, Charlotte Jacob-Maguire, multidisciplinary author and artist Marie Ayotte, and theatrical director Audrey Talbot. The participants selected were announced on November 21.

The Academy of Canadian Cinema & Television – Quebec Section faced several challenges in its efforts to reach ability-diverse communities. First, the organization had no **previously existing ties** to the communities in question; there remains significant work to be done in building trust-based, long-term relationships with ability-diverse persons. In addition, the call for applicants was not issued in a manner that **adequately reached the communities in question** (including with a video in QSL and a variety of textual formats). Thus, for this first edition, the Academy received only seven applications, all of which were accepted. Some of the applications came from persons active in theatre, and the Academy therefore decided to broaden the eligible areas of activity. The small number of applications limited the diversity of the disabilities represented and the intersectionality of participants'

experiences. Lastly, several non-disabled members of the industry were hesitant to participate in the program despite being enthusiastic about the initiative, because of **ignorance** on the topic. They were offered a concise guide, but it would be preferable, in the future, to provide training on disability, deafness and accessibility.

LANGUAGE AND WORD CHOICE

Gender-neutral, inclusive, accessible language has been used throughout the English version of this report. In the French version, we strove to use **language that is inclusive and accessible** to all disabled persons despite the gendered nature of the French language. That is why, where no appropriate gender-neutral term existed, we opted for syntactical feminization (“les créateurs et les créatrices”) rather than inclusive abbreviations (“les créateur.trice.s”), which make reading less accessible. It should be noted that syntactic feminization is by default situated within a gender-binary norm, but it is intended to be inclusive of all gender identities. A **summary of this report** will also be produced in **QSL**.

The following brief, non-exhaustive glossary clarifies certain neologisms used in this report¹:

Audism

Audism refers to discrimination or unfavourable judgment against d/Deaf and hard-of-hearing persons. It is a “normative system that subordinates deaf and hard of hearing people through a set of practices, actions, beliefs and attitudes that value hearing people and their ways of life (e.g. hearing and speaking) to the detriment of a diversity of (sign) languages and ways of moving.”

Ableism

Ableism is a form of discrimination or negative judgment toward persons with disabilities.

Able-bodied person

Designates persons without disabilities. The term highlights the social processes that value this population and facilitate their ability to act on the basis of a set of codes, norms, practices and standardized structuring environments. The term non-disabled is also used.

Persons who are deaf or hard of hearing

The spelling with initial capital designates both persons with significant and persistent auditory acuity discrimination capacities (deaf persons) and the way in which the Deaf community, which has a very strong culture and identity, prefers to be designated (Deaf persons).

Deafhood

Coined in 2003 by Deaf researcher Paddy Ladd, the concept of Deafhood “highlights the existential position of Deaf people rather than deafness as a pathology or physical condition.”²

Tokenism

The practice whereby a member of a social minority group is engaged solely to ensure that the minority to which they belong is represented in an initiative, without regard to other necessary equity, diversity and inclusion measures.

Capability diversity

Deaf people, people with disabilities, neuroatypical and/or psychoatypical

¹ A more comprehensive glossary is provided by the Canada Council for the Arts: [GLOSSARY - Deaf and Disability Arts Practices in Canada](#)

² Leduc, Véro and Line Grenier. 2017. “[Signer/connecter : enjeux croisés du vieillissement, des technologies et de la sourditte.](#)” *Revue canadienne de communication*, 42, 2, p. 214.



EXPERTISE AND BIOGRAPHIES

OPHIRA CALOF – Founder of the Accessible Writers’ Lab

Ophira Calof (she/they) is a multi-award-winning screenwriter, actor and disability consultant who makes a point of integrating disability questions into the scriptwriting field. To that end, she centres the knowledge and experiences of disabled persons in the work, production and presentation processes. Ophira was also in charge of the accessibility process at AccessCBC, chaired the programming committee for ReelAbilities in 2022, and has led international workshops on narrative, writing, music, accessibility and stories related to disability.

CHARLOTTE JACOB-MAGUIRE – Creative director of the program and member of the selection jury

Charlotte Jacob-Maguire is a disability and accessibility advisor at the Musée d’art contemporain de Montréal and a consultant in inclusive practices. In her work, she addresses ableism and universal accessibility in the cultural world, particularly in the visual arts. She holds a master’s degree in museum anthropology from the University of Oxford.

MOULOUD BOUKALA – Workshop moderator and member of the selection jury

A full professor in UQAM’s media studies school, holder of a Canada Research Chair on Media, Disabilities and (Self) Representations, and co-director of the Laboratoire Handicap, Sourditude et Innovations (HIS – disability, Deafhood and innovation laboratory), Mouloud Boukala is a researcher in media anthropology who focuses on studies of disability and (self) representations of disability in film, television and comic books. A regular member of the Centre de recherche Cultures Arts Sociétés (CELAT) and co-editor of the periodical *Frontières*, the courses he teaches include film theory; anthropological approaches to media; and rights, citizenship and disability: emancipation strategies. In 2022, Mouloud became the chair of the Association internationale de recherche scientifique en faveur des personnes handicapées mentales (AIRHM – international association for scientific research to benefit persons with mental disabilities).

MARIE AYOTTE – Member of the selection jury

The executive and artistic director of Théâtre Déchaînés, Marie Ayotte, is a writer and multidisciplinary artist whose work explores notions of vulnerability, accessibility and intimacy through participatory and documentary theatrical experiences. She specializes in ways of involving theatre spectators ethically when audience participation has the potential to make a tangible impact on the work, while respecting each person’s boundaries. She is fascinated by new theatrical stages and the many possibilities of universally accessible theatre.

AUDREY TALBOT – Member of the selection jury

In 2001 Audrey Talbot completed a diploma in professional theatre (acting) at Collège Lionel-Groulx. Since then she has spent most of her career onstage. She has worked extensively in youth theatre with the companies Le Carrousel, Tout à Trac and Le Clou. She wrote her first play in 2021, *Corps titan (titre de survie)*, in which she also played the lead role. The work recounts and explores her atypical path as a miraculous survivor who rebuilt her life. She also appears in the series *Léo* by Fabien Cloutier.

PHILIPPE DAVID – Participant (disability: non-verbal dysphasia)

Philippe David is a versatile and creative artist. A student at Les Muses : centre des arts de la scène, a performing arts school, he already has several credits to his name. Among the highest profile is the show *L’Enfirwapé*, which he

co-wrote with H  l  ne-  lise Blais and Kim Perreault and in which he played the lead. He has also played the part of Martini in *Vol au-dessus d'un nid de coucou (One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest)*, directed by Michel Monty and staged at Th   tre du Rideau Vert in 2017. In 2021-22, he attended a scriptwriting training program offered by the UDA, where he developed a television series project that he hopes to have financed and produced.

PATRICK DESJARDINS – Participant (disability: cerebral palsy)

A writer, scriptwriter and director with several years of experience, Patrick Desjardins is also a doctoral student in film studies at the Universit   de Montr  al, where he is researching the “abject” body and the underlying attraction to disability in contemporary Gothic films. His documentary *La Riposte* (2009), on the difficulties he faced securing financing for his first feature film, was shown during Montreal’s Nuit Blanche in 2011. He is now a professional filmmaker but has yet to secure funding for his projects. In 2016-17, he wrote, directed and edited the fantasy webseries *Rolling Dead*, in which he played the lead role. He formed the punk rock band Les Voix interdites in 2020.

BENO  T RACETTE – Interpreter for Patrick Desjardins

Beno  t Racette is a rights champion on the Comit   r  gional pour l’autisme et la d  ficience intellectuelle (CRADI – regional autism and intellectual disability committee); head of community relations at Finautonome, the only community organization in Quebec specializing in helping one million people with functional limitations to improve their financial health in order to achieve greater independence and security; and a trainer for the Conseil pour la protection des malades (CPM – council for the protection of the ill). Beno  t is also a research partner and member of advisory committees and boards of directors for several institutions: the Programme international d’  ducation    la citoyennet   d  mocratique (PIECD - international democratic citizenship program), Observatoire qu  b  cois sur la d  mocratie (Quebec democracy observatory), Forum sur la participation et l’organisation des services de Sant   et des Services sociaux (forum on health and social services participation and organization) and the Canada Research Chair in Media, Handicaps and (Self) Representation at UQAM.

LAURA MARROQUIN-ETHIER – Participant (disability: Type 1 diabetes)

An emerging filmmaker who identifies as a disabled person, Laura Marroquin-Ethier has written and directed several short and medium-length documentaries as personal projects, alongside her work in various television production roles. Her films often focus on subjects such as intergenerational relations, knowledge transfer, traditions, the beauty of everyday actions, magical realism and remote places. She has also started to explore her own history, her diagnosis and her Salvadoran roots.

LE MYTHE DE LA MAIN RARE collective: four Deaf persons working in theatre, who took turns attending the workshops

JENNIFER MANNING – Participant (session 1)

Jennifer Manning developed a passion for acting as a child, and has always been active in the Deaf community. She participated in a QSL adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* in Montreal in 2002. After ten years in Western Canada, in 2018 she performed with the Voyageurs Immobiles company in a QSL rendition of the play *Travers  e*. In 2019, she was the QSL interpreter for the show *Gu  rilla Girls* presented at Th   tre d’Aujourd’hui. Since the summer of 2019, she has done sign singing in QSL and ASL and worked as a sign language coach for L-Expression, of which she became vice-president in 2021.

HODAN YOUSOUF – Participant (session 2)

Born in Somalia and deaf since childhood, performing artist and actor Hodan Youssouf lived in France before immigrating to Canada in 1989. She has participated in numerous projects over the years, including an ASL adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet* staged in Toronto, the bilingual QSL/French play *Traversée* by the Voyageurs Immobiliers company and *The Tempest* at the Citadel Theatre in Edmonton. She has worked with Cinéall, an organization that works on innovative and creative communication solutions linking the Deaf and hearing worlds, and directed the feature films *Un homme fou s'aspire* and *Souviens-toi... un dortoir*. Hodan also does research on Deaf music.

MARIE-PIERRE PETIT – Participant (session 3)

Deaf from birth, Marie-Pierre Petit grew up in a Deaf family. Thanks to her father, Pafou the clown, she was introduced to the performing arts at the age of 8. She created her own character, Clown Pafolie, and boldly succeeded in putting together entertaining and magical shows. Marie-Pierre trained in theatrical clowning at the Clown Comédie school and with Maxim Fomitchev, Cirque du Soleil's Deaf clown. Since 2016, Pafolie and her colleague Jaclo have appeared at several events linked to high-profile Deaf organizations, as well as in elementary schools and libraries. She will soon take a training course aimed at developing a therapeutic clowning practice for public nursing homes.

STÉPHANIE VEILLEUX – Participant (session 4)

A graduate of the professional theatre program at Collège Lionel-Groulx, specializing in production, in 2021 Stéphanie Veilleux focused on theatrical management and stage techniques. During her academic career, she worked on managing a prop department. She has participated in several projects as project manager, assistant technical director, assistant lighting designer and assistant crew manager. She is a writer and director with the Deaf collective Le mythe de la main rare.

LELOUIS COURCHESNE (session 2)

A member of the 2001 graduating class from the École nationale de l'humour, LeLouis Courchesne is an actor, writer and opinion columnist, mainly on television, and an experienced improv performer.

JEAN-PHILIPPE DURAND (session 2)

Actor and writer Jean-Philippe Durand is a graduate of the Conservatoire d'art dramatique de Québec. He has appeared in television programs, films and webseries. Currently he works primarily as a writer for television.

MÉLANIE VIAU (session 2)

Mélanie Viau is a producer and senior vice president for development and production at KOTV, a Quebec company that develops and produces innovative and entertaining programs in various genres.

JUDITH BRÈS (sessions 3 and 4)

A screenwriter, producer and script editor born to a French father and a Haitian mother, and the mother of atypical children, Judith Brès is particularly sensitive to racial, social and gender issues and their on-screen representation.

ALEXANDRE GAUTHIER (session 3)

Trained at Inis, UCLA and the École nationale de l'humour, Alexandre Gauthier works as a development producer for the television division of the URBANIA media group.

PROGRAM STRUCTURE

The workshops ran for two hours each with a 10-15 minute break. They were held online and built around four themes:

- November 24, 10 a.m. to noon: **validation and representation**
- November 29, 2 to 4 p.m.: **access to information, opportunities and the cultural industry**
- December 6, 2 to 4 p.m.: **training and breaking into the market**
- December 13, 2 to 4 p.m.: **adjustments to make and practices to adopt**

Each participant was encouraged to express their point of view, grounded in their experience and the way the industry is currently structured. Members of the group could express themselves orally or by typing. The questions and themes were prepared and written by Mouloud Boukala and Dédy Bilamba, and revised by Charlotte Jacob-Maguire. They were then sent to the group members before each session.

SESSION 1: VALIDATION AND REPRESENTATION

The first working session was focused on the issues of due recognition for works by d/Deaf or disabled writers in the industry, the presence of these writers in the industry, and the ways in which disabled persons are represented on-screen (film, television, media in general).

“Like vampires, persons with disabilities have no reflection in the mirror that is the television or movie screen. This is true on both sides of the camera.”
– Patrick Desjardins

PRESENCE IN THE INDUSTRY

The participants started by discussing d/Deaf or disabled persons they know who are working in the audio-visual industry or the media.

- Regarding **d/Deaf persons**, it was mentioned that progress is moving faster in the United States than Quebec, where there are nevertheless several d/Deaf actors working in film and television. Recently, the Quebec series *Le temps des framboises* by director Philippe Falardeau starred young Deaf actor **Xavier Chalifoux**, giving hope to the Deaf community for a more representative future. **Sylvain Gélinas**, a Deaf filmmaker from Quebec, has been working in the arts for more than 20 years, but he still runs up against obstacles to accessibility that prevent him from fully participating in the industry. The podcast [House of Stone](#) by hard of hearing actor **Abby Stonehouse** (an anglophone Montrealer) features hour-long interviews with d/Deaf people accompanied by interpreters.
- Some **artists with disabilities** were also mentioned. Several students from the [Les Muses](#) school, which offers professional training in theatre, dance and singing for disabled artists, have appeared in television series such as *Unité 9*, *Leo*, *Faits divers* and *Annie et ses hommes*, and in films such as *Gabrielle* and *Tu dors Nicole*. Quebec artist **Maxime D.-Pomerleau** became well known by co-writing and starring in *Batwheel*, a short film about a superheroine in a wheelchair. She has since joined a professional dance company, appeared in the film *Prends-moi* by Anaïs Barbeau-Lavalette and André Turpin (with **Alexandre Vallerand**, an actor with cerebral palsy) and appeared in plays at Théâtre d'Aujourd'hui. Noah Parker plays a visually

impaired teen in the series *Six degrés* by Simon Boulerice; the actor is not visually impaired, but visually impaired consultant Méridick Forest consulted on the script and coached Parker on the set. In the media, **Keven Breton** is a disabled journalist for Radio-Canada and a host on AMI-Télé. In music, we learned after his passing that **Karim Ouellet** had Type 1 diabetes.

REPRESENTATION, PAST AND PRESENT

Next, the group discussed the ways in which d/Deaf and disabled persons are represented in audio-visual works.

- The group was unanimous in noting that works often focus on the **dark side** of disability, without giving any depth or proper narrative arc to the character. The focus is on what the person cannot do, rather than on what they can do. Even if this “dark side” approach is no longer universal, there remains much work to be done.
- Roles are not only **underdeveloped**, they are also **limited**, with **little dialogue** and often a **single character** from the ability-diversity community. Generally, an isolated individual is shown, not a community.
- Many **clichés** and **false representations** persist (dependency on others, assistance with sex, crisis situations, bad-taste jokes about deafness or disability...), all of which contribute to stigmatization and ignorance. Such stereotypes can also return after having disappeared.
- Certain films attempt to show disability or deafness as an **exceptional quality**, a **superpower** or a means of surviving a danger (*A Quiet Place*, *Bird Box*, *The Eternals*, etc.). This can be seen as progress, but it is also a one-dimensional form of representation.
- When the roles of d/Deaf or disabled characters are played by hearing or able-bodied actors, the performance is generally bad, drawn in broad strokes and lacking subtlety. Hearing persons who play d/Deaf people often sign badly (e.g.: *La Famille Bélier*, 2014), while d/Deaf actors would do a better job (e.g.: *Coda*, 2021, the American remake of *La Famille Bélier*). *Gabrielle* (2013) very nicely represented the dreams of freedom of a person with an intellectual handicap (played by Gabrielle Marion-Rivard, a final-year student at Les Muses), but her partner was played by an able-bodied actor who gave a very stereotyped performance.
- There are **exceptions**: for example, the Pixar animated film *Turning Red* (2022), which depicts a diabetic child with her glucometer and insulin pump without focusing on the disability; the film *My Left Foot* (1989), which gave an honest and positive portrayal of a person with spastic palsy; the reality TV program *Deaf U* (2020), one of whose executive producers is the Deaf actor and model Nyle DiMarco; or the fictional series *Switched at Birth* (2011-2017), which like *Deaf U* presented a nuanced portrayal of the lives of d/Deaf and hard of hearing persons.
- The Deaf community hopes that recent progress will not be a passing **fad**.

POTENTIAL FOR MORE POSITIVE REPRESENTATION

Lastly, the group discussed avenues for driving the evolution of positive representations and promoting more respectful and interesting portrayals:

- Rather than their disability or deafness, it is the **social role of the character** that should be centred, along with **solid narrative arcs** that do not revolve around difficulties but rather the character’s aspirations. It is essential to have characters that are not only **multidimensional** but **varied**. Disability and deafness must be **normalized** in audio-visual works in order to help the persons represented on-screen build self-esteem and avoid the microaggressions that lead to false representations.
- Participants stressed the importance of having **more d/Deaf and disabled creators** in the industry. In general, artists should talk about things that they know well.

- There should be no **segregation** between professional artists and d/Deaf or disabled persons. It is possible to be both at once!
- It is necessary to reach out to the persons concerned and spend time with them to **understand their inner reality**. It is not only the actor who will portray an ability-diverse person who should do this work, but the main crew of the entire film, because all crew members contribute to the representation of d/Deaf or disabled persons.
- An exemplary practice is to have a **team meeting at the start of the process** in which all **accessibility and adaptation needs of crew members** are discussed. This ensures that everyone is on the same page and working on an equal footing. In the case of deafness, for example, if the writers have a discussion with d/Deaf people and consult accessibility experts at the start, it becomes much easier later on to integrate d/Deaf artists; often, it is even possible to work without interpreters, saving significant costs. The integration of d/Deaf and disabled persons must be part of the creative process from the beginning, and not be done afterwards or in parallel.

SESSION 2: ACCESS TO INFORMATION, OPPORTUNITIES AND THE CULTURAL INDUSTRY

The second session focused on access to information, calls for applicants and the cultural industry in general, particularly professional networking opportunities.

“We all have an interest in taking inspiration from what is done elsewhere.”

– Hodan Youssouf

WHERE TO GET INFORMATION

First, participants discussed the ways in which they find information about professional development and employment opportunities.

- The newsletters, Facebook pages and websites of the **Conseil des arts de Montréal**, the **Conseil des arts et des lettres du Québec** and the **Canada Council for the Arts** were mentioned, as were the newsletters of **SARTEC** and the **UDA**. **Facebook groups focusing on diversity** and minority groups and **personal contacts** were also mentioned as potential resources, as well as the **Scénaristes** Facebook group, where advice, calls for proposals and mentorship opportunities for screenwriters are discussed.
- Hearing and able-bodied persons spoke about the **informal network** and the fact that much information travels by word of mouth, with initial contact usually made during training or auditions. They also stressed the importance of showing active interest by proposing ideas or submitting scripts to decision makers.

OBSTACLES TO ACCESS

The group then discussed the obstacles to accessing the cultural industry and relevant information.

- Regarding accessibility for d/Deaf persons, **Quebec appears to be out of step with the rest of Canada and with the United States**, where events have included ASL interpretation for many years. Events (oral communication) like calls for proposals (written communication) are rarely interpreted in QSL (whether in person or on video). Because interpretation is very expensive, persons and organizations typically do not have the resources to provide it, which creates significant barriers for d/Deaf persons. It is important that attitudes change and that organizations form a common front to seek funding for accessibility to training and professional opportunities, so that everyone is on an equal footing.

- Things **are changing gradually**: in particular, COVID led to more programming in QSL. However, not only is Quebec still lagging compared with other places, the Deaf community fears that recent progress will not be permanent.
- In addition, **grant applications are complicated for d/Deaf persons**. Written proposals are requested to be 1000 words or more, and even if the ideas exist in signs in the person's mind, it is a challenge to translate them from QSL to French. Fortunately, there is now free access to translators (for example via the Conseil des arts de Montréal and the Canada Council), who write the application for the artist once the artist has explained the project in QSL.
- Deaf interpreters also often face obstacles in **playing certain roles** if the **language register** of dialogue is too formal and not translatable in QSL.
- **Networking** was also described as **difficult to access** for d/Deaf and disabled persons. Cocktail parties are often less than ideal settings for ability-diverse persons, whether because of fatigue at the end of a workday, or lack of support or interpretation (or information on the presence of interpreters), the absence of access ramps at the venue, or the impossibility of controlling one's food and medication in this type of setting. To properly organize an event using universal accessibility principles, it is necessary to allow at least two or three months for planning.
- In terms of **television production, there is rarely a budget for accessibility** (aside from closed captions and described video). Budgets may exist when the production is specifically related to disability or Deafhood, but even in such cases productions are not always well prepared, due to insufficient understanding of the disability.
- **On-set constraints** are currently **very strict** for economic reasons (particularly as to working hours), making sets low-accessibility environments for disabled persons. However, there is more flexibility on the creative and post-production sides.

FACILITATING ACCESS

To conclude, the group focused on different ways of improving access to information and to the cultural industry as a whole.

- It is necessary to fight to create **accessible shoots**. Currently, schedules are adapted to accommodate children – so why not do the same for ability-diverse persons? The on-set environment should not only be open to young, childless and able-bodied persons.
- **Consulting** the people directly affected is certainly a good practice (for example, by hiring script consultants), because they can provide an appropriate vocabulary and a relevant vision, and thus avoid clichés. However, it would be preferable to establish **true, permanent collaborations** in which the ability-diverse person participates in the creative project as an equal.
- Several hearing and non-disabled persons indicated that they would like to have access to a **directory of ability-diverse artists** because they generally do not know where to look.
- Productions that announce they are seeking a d/Deaf or disabled person may attract interest and create possibilities, but it would be even better if, even if the script does not call for it, **offers were open to Deaf and disabled persons** who do not necessarily want to talk about their disability or make it the focus of the narrative.
- The possibility of **online participation** in events or working sessions is a major asset. The COVID-19 pandemic greatly improved accessibility for disabled persons. In addition, it is often useful to provide a **transcript** after the activity.
- It is important for persons with **invisible illnesses** to admit their **belonging to "diversity"** and give themselves permission to apply for equity-related funding. Funders, meanwhile, should clearly indicate the inclusion of d/Deaf and disabled persons among the groups intended to benefit from equity measures.

SESSION 3: TRAINING AND ENTERING THE MARKET

For the third workshop, the group focused on the accessibility of screenwriting training and the challenges of entering the television writing market.

“The mental and economic load, as well as the very real physical impacts of illness, prevent me from fully committing to my passion and a career in screenwriting.”

– Laura Marroquin-Ethier

ACCESSIBILITY OF TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Participants started the session by discussing training locations and their accessibility.

- **Most training sites are not accessible**, whether for disabled or d/Deaf persons. In addition, training programs are often very intensive (at Inis, for example).
- The **teaching staff** should receive training or **have lived experience of disability or Deafhood**.
- There are **screenwriting courses**, for example at [Cégep Saint-Laurent](#), [Inis](#) and UQAM, as well as short training programs provided by SARTEC, [Main Film](#) and [Vidéographe](#). The Canadian Academy – national offers [professional development programs](#) for screenwriters from underrepresented communities, while the Academy’s Quebec section offers [pitch training](#) for writers who self-identify as racialized persons. [Black on Black Films](#) offers training for African descendant creators, and while these programs are financially accessible, they are not necessarily accessible for ability-diverse persons. [Réalisatrices équitables](#) recently formed a screenwriting club, but it is currently held at the ARRQ, a space that is not accessible to persons with reduced mobility, and there is no room in the budget for QSL interpreters. All of these courses and initiatives are opportunities to network, and financial terms vary greatly from one program to the next. It is generally necessary to inform oneself about accessibility conditions, and even in cases where the site is physically accessible, QSL interpreters are rarely available – a major financial obstacle for d/Deaf persons.
- [Studio 303](#) is one of the few places offering **accessible workshops** for ability-diverse artists. **Les Muses**, an artists’ centre mentioned above, provides professional training in theatre, dance and singing to artists living with a disability (intellectual disability, autism spectrum disorder, or physical or sensory limitations)³.
- Illness and disability can often lead to **significant medical expenses**, forcing those affected to hold a **full-time job**, preventing them from pursuing more intensive screenwriting training.
- The group discussed **informal approaches to training**: watching tutorials or master classes on YouTube (for example via the [No Film School](#) Facebook page), by reading books about screenwriting, or simply by listening to colleagues talk about their approach. Here again, there are very few accessible opportunities in QSL.

WRITING: CHALLENGES AND TOOLS

Next, the group was asked to talk about ways of creating texts and scripts, as well as the challenges they have faced.

- For disabled artists working with a **different sense of time**, it can be particularly difficult to write on work days when it is necessary to hold a full-time job for economic reasons. It is also usually necessary to adjust one’s ambitions to one’s body and handicap, and to respect one’s own creative pace (this different sense of time is known as “crip time”⁴).
- One participant mentioned that he was making an effort to **render this particular sense of time in his work**, by reappropriating certain editing techniques and sequence shots.

³ See also the accessible groups and artists’ centres listed in the [Banque de ressources](#) of the Conseil des arts de Montréal, p. 5-7.

⁴ See the definition of this term, and its positive connotations, on page 4 of the Canada Council’s [GLOSSARY - Deaf and Disability Arts Practices in Canada](#).

- Once a grant has been awarded, a d/Deaf person faces new challenges: conceptualizing the work in QSL and, once again, a translator must get involved to **render the ideas in written French**, which comes at a significant cost. Certain things are difficult to translate, such as the nonverbal concepts that are pervasive in sign language. Generally speaking, French and QSL have very different structures. Deaf persons must often make producers and writers aware of such **challenges, which are both communication-related and financial**.
- For some people with reduced mobility, it is **not possible to draw** and therefore take the step of **producing a shooting script**. It is therefore necessary to write two versions of the script: a classic version and one that incorporates technical directions.

ENTERING THE SCREENWRITING INDUSTRY

To conclude the session, participants discussed the ways in which they secured their first opportunity to have one of their works produced.

- For some, **self-production** was the path to getting a start, and it has remained their production model. Arts councils can sometimes provide assistance for getting started (especially since the implementation of programs to support access and application writing), but if a grant is not secured, productions have to be completed on a shoestring budget. Self-production can make it possible to build a network and have a “calling card” to present to production companies, which can then lead to professionalization. It should, however, be noted that self-production typically involves having prior access to a network of some kind.
- The concept of **crip time** was discussed again. Finding a producer can be a long and difficult process, especially when you are slowed by a disability and the mental and financial challenges it carries. Film studies also tend to take longer for a person with a disability. During their entire training, the person will generally not be able to work on the side nor obtain grants, since students are not eligible, making self-production very difficult. In addition, in the case of invisible illnesses, production companies can be completely insensitive to the reality of crip time.
- Non-disabled persons mentioned the importance of finding **a good match** both with a production company and the individuals working there, if they want to work with adequate funding from exhibitors and stop relying on self-production.
- They also discussed the **possibility of desegregating approaches and blowing up existing models**. Production companies cannot ask ability-diverse artists (or those who are diverse in other ways), who may not have had access to screenwriting schools, to deliver a turnkey project: it is rather **their unique point of view that matters**. The singular experiences of d/Deaf and disabled persons can be truly interesting to production companies even if they are not necessarily looking to make the disability or Deafhood central to the story. The reality of ability diversity can simply be baked into the script. Thus, d/Deaf and disabled persons can propose **other forms of representation than those found in traditional scripts** (a video in LSQ with simultaneous interpretation, for example). Next, there is a collaboration between the artist and the production company for working on the structure and placement of ideas – with the artist always having the final say – in order to arrive at a traditional written format to be shopped to broadcasters and funders.
- Among the **opportunities for entering the industry**, the group mentioned: the first-pitch activity at the RIDM, support from SODEC, and production companies seeking new angles (Picbois Productions, Pimiento, Black on Black Films, etc.). The **Web** was also described as a **more accessible exhibition platform than television**: it is an interesting avenue for reaching an underserved audience, and Web platforms are generally less conservative than broadcasters. In other words, the more a production or an audience are considered “niche” (and the shorter the artist’s résumé), the less likely broadcasters will want to be involved, because they want to reach millions of viewers. None of this applies to Web platforms. There are funding options for the Web (Bell Fund) that accept applications. When successful, the Web can then become a springboard for accessing television. The situation is sometimes similar with short films.

SESSION 4: PRACTICAL ADJUSTMENTS TO BE MADE

For the final workshop, the group brainstormed adequate solutions and exemplary practices that should be established in the television community.

“I am a creator before being a disabled person. [...] My aspirations are simple: to be able to lead my career the way I want and make a living from it.”

– Patrick Desjardins

“Seeing my project on screen would be a great source of pride for me, and for the neurodiverse community as a whole.”

– Philippe David

ASSISTANTS

To start, the moderator invited participants to talk about the kind of assistants that the industry should systematically hire in order to ensure a collaborative creative process.

- In any type of creative work involving d/Deaf persons, **interpreters** should be available starting with the writing and planning stages and continuing through preproduction and filming. It is important that the link be created with d/Deaf persons, both for understanding of their world and for language, right from the start of the creative process. Interpreters also help adapt French expressions in the text and find turns of phrase that work in both QSL and French, despite the very different structures of the languages. In this area, [SLCB](#) provides excellent services.
- Hiring **accessibility and inclusiveness coordinators** is also a good practice. These assistants can learn about the entire creative team’s accessibility needs and ensure that they are met. Coordinators also seek out appropriate locations during preproduction and ensure that all communication tools are accessible. It is important that such persons understand both the industry and its demands, and the reality of ability-diverse creators.
- To work with **neurodiverse screenwriters**, it would be useful to have **mediators** who help decode, formulate and refine ideas. Without writing for the screenwriter, mediators ensure that their message is written in an industry-standard manner.

AVOIDING TOKENISM

Next, the group discussed the risks of tokenism and ways of avoiding ableist prejudices and audism in the industry.

- It was stressed that the starting point for avoiding tokenism is to talk about ability diversity for the **right reasons**. For example, if the intent is to make a joke or to use a d/Deaf or disabled character as a sidekick to an able-bodied character, these are bad motivations. The intent should be to **highlight a reality**, and in this case we always need to ask if we are the right person to do it if we are not directly concerned; in any case, **collaboration** with ability-diverse writers is essential.
- Ability-diverse screenwriters should have **approval rights at each step of the creative process** (for example casting and direction). There needs to be an ongoing discussion among the writing, production and direction departments, both as part of an effort to achieve realistic portrayals and out of respect for those working on-set.
- It was also noted that we often expect that ability-diverse creators (or members of any minority) tend to restrict themselves to the documentary genre rather than working in fiction, as if their creative world could not transcend the reality of their disability. There is a difference between representing a situation honestly and **always doing documentary work**.

- Deaf and disabled persons are not immune to **internalized audism and ableism**, and may therefore perpetuate certain stereotypes. For one of the participants, the challenge is to be both **creative** and **respectful**. On the one hand, creativity makes it possible to talk about what we know with subtlety, balance and elegance. On the other, respect leads to having paid consultants review the aspects of a script dealing with subjects we do not know very well.
- Lastly, if we are not **tolerant of errors** made by ability-diverse creators, that means we are still using a tokenistic approach. The possibility of being wrong must be an integral part of new avenues of collaboration.

UNIVERSAL ACCESSIBILITY

Next, the discussion shifted to adjustments that the various industry players need to make to meet the needs of d/Deaf and disabled persons, and to facilitate their entry and success in the industry.

- The importance of **time spent on creative work** was highlighted, despite the economic constraints affecting productions. The extra time needed by ability-diverse screenwriters must be institutionalized, for example in the form of **premiums or grants covering the cost of the additional time**. We can take inspiration from the accommodations made for disabled students in schools and universities. In terms of mindset, the **concepts of performance and productivity** need to be **deconstructed**, so that the constant pressure and mental load no longer burden ability-diverse artists.
- The **costs of access** are costs that must be covered by d/Deaf and disabled persons in order to benefit, on an equal footing with others, from the services and programs offered by institutions for the creation, production or dissemination of their art. Having an **accessibility budget, separate from the creative budget**, is a key factor in opening more doors. The reimbursement of a portion of these expenses by the Conseil des arts de Montréal or the Canada Council (or the [Fondation des Sourds du Québec](#)) can mitigate some of the existing disadvantages, but proving eligibility also represents an added mental load and time requirement. However, according to a Deaf participant, productions are increasingly open to accounting for these adjustments.
- **Accessibility premiums** are an excellent starting point, since instead of fearing revealing their disability to industry players (when the disability is invisible, for example), artists would know that their requests for accommodations are likely to be well received. The goal is for **disabilities and Deafhood to no longer be seen by the industry as burdens**.
- **Universal accessibility** means that all teaching establishments, creative spaces and exhibition venues, the artistic community and the entire industry have earmarked funds for accommodations meeting the needs of ability-diverse artists. Otherwise, d/Deaf and disabled persons will continue to have very limited options throughout their careers, and will have to restrict themselves to the few accessible spaces for learning, discussion and work.
- Lastly, certain changes should be made in the **evaluation of grant proposals**. It has been suggested that representation of ability diversity should be promoted on juries, or that a fund should be created specifically for diverse projects. Some artists do not necessarily wish to have to always confine themselves to programs reserved for ability diversity, but would prefer to apply simply as a creator, nothing more. There should also be more room for their unique vision and interesting projects that deviate from standard formulas.

EDUCATIONAL EFFORTS

To conclude the final session, the group considered ways of educating the industry in order to open up new avenues for collaboration with ability-diverse creators.

- The **visibility of ability-diverse persons** contributes significantly to educating the general public. Regarding Deafhood, the presence of interpreters on certain major television networks during the pandemic went a long way toward helping normalize sign language.

- To go beyond simple visibility and promote integration and interaction, organizations **specializing** in ability diversity (for example Les Muses, SLCB, etc.) could provide **training** to members of the industry and answer their questions.
- The [database on media representations of deafness and disability in Quebec \(1980-2020\)](#) was recently launched by the Canada Research Chair on Media, Disability and (Self) Representation. It is an excellent educational tool on the representation of disability onscreen over the last 40 years.
- **Critical studies on disability** help change attitudes (the short program [Disability and deafhood: rights and citizenship](#) at UQAM and the course [Disability, societies and organizations](#) at Université Laval).
- Non-disabled writers should **observe the creative process** and **discover the works** of ability-diverse artists.
- **The education of the industry should not be the responsibility of ability-diverse persons**, except when they are specifically hired for that purpose. We should not put that **added mental load** on them as part of their employment or contract in the industry.

CONCLUSION

By running the accessible screenwriting program, the Quebec section of the Academy benefited from several lessons relevant to the improvement of its own practices. It now wishes to:

- **Build lasting, trust-based relationships** with ability-diverse communities
- **Improve its communications** for greater clarity and accessibility
- **Reflect on its work processes, before getting started**, with members of ability-diverse communities.

In general, Quebec's television industry, as well as the broader cultural sector, needs to question and change its dominant practices and worldview:

- **Audism** and **ableism** are still very common, and Deafhood and disability are seen as burdens
- These environments are **not very accessible** to d/Deaf and disabled persons, in terms of training, networking, creation, production and exhibition
- **Representativeness problems** have seen some progress but still persist (lack of representation and role models; stereotypes).

Avenues toward solutions can be summed up in five main points:

- **The hiring of ability-diverse persons** (by educational institutions, funding bodies and their juries, the staff and boards of organizations, creative teams, decision makers, etc.) to open the way to more creative and respectful representations, normalization of disability and Deafhood in our lives and onscreen, and true collaboration. In the specific case of television production, ability-diverse writers should be able to oversee each step in the creative process
- **Separate funding of accessibility costs**, distinct from creative budgets, and **consideration of crip time**
- **Accessible communications** for all (program descriptions, calls for proposals, training, etc.)
- **Education of industry members**, without creating an added mental load for ability-diverse artists
- The goal of **universal accessibility** at every stage of a screenwriting career and creative process (training, networking, creation, production, exhibition), particularly through the hiring of interpreters and accessibility coordinators, and the option to participate in online activities.

“The solution is universal accessibility [...], in order to include and work with Deaf persons and those with functional limitations, so that we become a single artistic world.” – Jennifer Manning

RESOURCES

A more complete list of resources is available in the document [Accessibilité et lutte contre le capacitisme dans les arts – Banque de ressources](#) published by the Conseil des arts de Montréal (2021).

[AlterGo](#)

[Association de Montréal pour la déficience intellectuelle](#)

[Autisme Québec](#)

[Chaire de recherche du Canada sur la citoyenneté culturelle des personnes sourdes et les pratiques d'équité culturelle](#)

Chaire de recherche du Canada sur les médias, les handicaps et les (auto)représentations (2022). [Base de données sur les représentations médiatiques du handicap et de la sourditude au Québec \(1980-2020\)](#)

[Cinéall](#)

Conseil des arts de Montréal (2021). [Accessibilité et lutte contre le capacitisme dans les arts – Guide d'accessibilité aux événements](#)

Conseil des arts de Montréal (2021). [Accessibilité et lutte contre le capacitisme dans les arts – Recommandations et outils pour le Conseil des arts de Montréal](#)

Canada Council for the Arts (2020). [Deaf and Disability Arts Practices in Canada. Executive Summary](#)

Canada Council for the Arts (2020). [Deaf and Disability Arts Practices in Canada. Glossary](#)

Canada Council for the Arts (2020). [Deaf and Disability Arts Practices in Canada. Report](#)

[Diabetes Canada](#)

[Dysphasie Québec](#)

[Fédération québécoise de l'autisme](#)

[Fondation des aveugles du Québec](#)

[Fondation des Sourds du Québec](#)

Leduc, Véro (2004-2020). [Publications diverses sur la sourditude et l'audisme](#)

[Les Impatients](#)

[Les Muses](#)

[Productions Spectrum](#)

[Regroupement des aveugles et amblyopes du Québec](#)

[Services linguistiques CB \(SLCB\)](#)

[SIVET](#)

[Société inclusive](#)

[Société logique](#)