

Blog 5 – PDF Version:
"The Power of Connectivity"

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For the Institute's presentation on "Network Career Panel Q&A "How we got here," I had the pleasure of moderating an expert panel on inclusive disability research for the 2020 PIRL Institute. The experience was new to me as a first-time moderator of a panel discussion. The idea for this student session was to create a dialogue around conducting Disability Inclusive Development (DID) research, especially for students.

Before the presentation, I asked myself: How will all the panelists provide us with new insights? As we began the panel discussion, it became very clear to me that everyone's unique career story, despite differences due to their varying positionalities, heavily touched on with the theme of connectivity. Their past decisions connected with a number of important milestones, and despite all the challenges they embarked on, they all experienced certain hurdles. The discussion's ending brought us to reflect on critical disability studies, particularly drawing on work in Cameroon.

For [Goli Hashemi's](#) work, she mentioned how she went from different academic trajectories, and landed on the nuanced intersection of migration and disability studies. Drawing on her experiences with DID in Colombia, this often-overlooked intersection became a focal point for her study on the Hispanic community in Los Angeles, which led her to recognize the DID needs of diasporic communities. This new and unique connection was only made possible because of her time spent in Latin America and her previous work on

disability legislation in Cameroon, along with her family's earlier aspiration of her working in the medical field. Goli's past experiences informed and complimented her research. This is thematically similar to Dr. Pedro Almeida's discussion around cultivating community involvement in the diaspora, and how he was able to integrate his work in DID as an [occupational therapist](#) through his Latin roots as a Brazilian immigrant to Canada. Dr. Almeida used lived experience with his ethno-cultural community to establish a connection to his host country and to the diaspora. And through this conduit, he was able to navigate a new country, a new discipline, and create a new space in DID.

The need to branch out in one's research is also shown through Daniel Boyco's discussion around starting off with an interest in [DID](#), and exploring different countries to further this research, and ending up with a thematic focus in climate action. Yet, he infuses his work on DID in this new research area as a means of informing others that disability inclusivity is important for social and economic wellbeing, as is a healthy climate.

[Dr. Ruheena Sangrar](#) mentions that intersecting areas of interest to advance future opportunities is only possible if we acknowledge failure as a positive companion and teacher. In Dr. Sangrar's touchpoint, she discusses how her work in institutional care homes/ long-term care facilities, disability and COVID-19 also created an opportunity to explore a new field of interest. This interest found her through a time where she had to acknowledge that opportunities did not have to be exactly what she studied or knew, but rather represented a chance to pivot into a direction that could incorporate other elements of her academic experience. She chose to take up something completely new because it was an opportunity that emerged from a place of

difficulty, and managed to endure honest conversations with herself about conquering unexplored terrains. This is similar to [Dr. Louis Mbibeh's](#) story, who also mentions how his initial journey had him on the path to become a medical doctor. However, he soon realized that being a professor and a disability expert had inherent value, allowing him to instruct medical professionals on incorporating disability theory into medical practice.

People with different lived experiences partook in our panel discussion, and yet they all witnessed a long path of self-discovery, reimagining their goals and abilities, and new unnoticed potentials for research. These connections are not capsuled inside their past; rather, they are constantly informing their ongoing research. The power of seeing oneself as connected with their lived experiences and present conditions is important for informing one's decisions, be it academic research or professional ambitions.

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