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Disability: Strong and Able

INTRODUCTION

Simultaneously learning about being a writing associate at the Trinity College Writing Center and being in a disability studies course has allowed me to realize that many students at Trinity College do not have disabilities, or at least are not open about them. Currently, there are two students on campus in wheel chairs and that is the only disability that I am aware of that is visible to the naked eye. In my disability studies class, I am constantly learning about ways that disabilities are being ignored and people with disabilities are being oppressed. This was eye opening to me as I became accustomed to seeing the accommodations section in all of my teacher's syllabi. It caused me to wonder why I was not tutoring students that have a disability, or at least to my knowledge.

This curiosity, and my interest in special education, provided the topic for my paper. Tutoring and nannying young children with disabilities helped me to understand some of the principles of working with people who have a disability. One of the key things I learned from this and my involvement with Best Buddies is that patience is key because confusion and miscommunication and wear on a positive attitude.

In doing my research, I realized that the topics I discuss are not very relevant to Trinity College and the Trinity College writing center as Trinity is not a very disability friendly campus due to the architecture and difficulty with obtaining accommodations. Therefore, I wrote a paper

giving some background on different components of disability studies, and I briefly describe some keywords in disability studies. I also wrote a guide for writing centers, directors, and tutors (referred to as associates in the paper) in general that may have questions about the ways that invisibility, deafness, dyslexia, narcolepsy, and cerebral palsy influence. I wrote this with a hope that disabilities studies will be able to gain its own right's movement, and to have disabilities in work, education, politics, etc. become a much more common and discussed topic.

AMERICAN DISABILITIES ACT, ACCOMODATIONS, AND ACCESS TO EDUCATION

The American Disabilities Act (ADA) was passed in 1990, and it called for no discrimination towards people with disabilities. Essentially, this means that no one can deny rights, a job, educational opportunities, etc. to a person with a disability. There is judgement all around and this had often led to discrimination and unfair treatment and expectations of people with disabilities. The ADA is essentially the closest thing that people with disabilities have gotten for a civil rights act. This is unfortunate as people with disabilities are considered the largest group of minorities. The American Disabilities Act helped insert the movement for disability studies into other civil rights movements. However, a specific period of time has not been dedicated simple to ensuring rights for people with disabilities; it has simply been tacked on to other important strives for equal rights, treatment, and representation: the civil rights movement, the women's movement, the LGBTQ movement. This emphasizes how forgotten and judged people may be about disabilities because they lack an understanding of the encompassing term of disability.

Access to education has been slowly increasing due to the acceptance and slow dilution of the stigma around students with disabilities. Activists have been working on promoting the removal of "super-crips" and society's stigma of the lack of independence and knowledge of

people with disabilities. Furthermore, there has been work done towards accessibility in colleges. Due to the possible outbursts or other actions that a person with a disability cannot easily control, their access, or rather continued admittance has been difficult to maintain. It is not that many people do not try, but there is often a lack of understanding about the disability and only so much patience and time can be allotted to an individual based on the college's resources. According to "Writing Centers and Disability: Enabling Writers Through an Inclusive Philosophy" by Sharifa Daniels, Rebecca Day Babcock, and Doria Daniels, having a fully inclusive campus takes a lot of work and need to be constantly addressed in social hubs such as writing centers. This ranges from physical access, admittance to the school, accommodations access, etc. (Daniels, Babcock, Daniels). It is important to have the main components of the campus constantly working towards being more inclusive through speech and action.

There has been work done towards physical accessibility in colleges. Many buildings are not accessible for wheelchairs or for people with physical ailments. The journal article "Access For All: The Role of Dis/Ability in Multiliteracy Centers" by Allison Hitt discusses how colleges and other institutions have worked to fix this by adding ramps or elevators onto buildings in an attempt to make them more accessible; however, this is also presented as an afterthought and is often in the back of a building, not allowing them the same entrance or consideration (Hitt, 2012). Many buildings are presented with extravagant entrances, but people who have to enter through the back cannot appreciate the design of the desired entrance. However, it is important to acknowledge that the back door ramp is all that buildings can support, and this is the case for Trinity College's English building which houses the writing center. The Trinity College Writing Center was renovated in 2013 and made more disability friendly furniture wise. In order to have the renovation occur, however, the college required that the writing center also function as a

class room. This led to the room having too much furniture to be very accessible; yet, the furniture on wheels let to the room being easily manipulated, and this helps give the workers the ability to arrange the room as need be. Based on that, there have been a couple disabilities commonly seen in colleges and a couple that are not as often see in colleges introduced after some descriptions of keywords that pertain to places like the writing center and both practices and diction that is common yet may occasionally be problematic.

Furthermore, there is an emphasis on the inability to discriminate people based on their disabilities, and to be open and accepting. Many schools and jobs have therefore adopted an accommodations office or some standard accommodation practices. Some of these accommodations may be flexible work hours, different furniture, or typed notes being distributed. There have also been more wheelchair ramps added onto buildings as well as elevators and other devices to allow for easier physical access. Some accessibility options, however, are not possible due the architecture of the building and the absence of funding for the renovation. There is a problem with the process of getting an accommodation approved when working through many accommodation offices in a college. Yet, many of the students benefit from having their notes typed, privately monitored tests for longer period of time, and having a strong relationship with the professor. These benefits make the long process of getting accommodations worthwhile.

Accommodations and the ADA relate to the writing center because writing centers are hubs of interactions and peer communication on campus. Due to there being a high number of first-years using the writing center, “The Necessity of Academic Accommodations for First Year College Students with Learning Disabilities” by Dr. Wanda M. Hadley is important to read in order to realize why there is a need for accommodations across the board. Hadley discusses how

first years are being introduced to a new environment away from home, possibly for the first time, and this may heighten a disability they may have (Hadley, 10). Since the writing center is mostly used by first years, it is necessary to acknowledge increased stress and changes that may influence how they work or interact with others, and then the writing center should attempt to work with the available resource to provide accommodations. A student should feel safe and comfortable to ask for an accommodation from people at the writing center, and the workers and/or institution should be able to respond accordingly or at least offer alternatives within the realm of what they are able to accommodate.

TOPICS

These topics were chosen based on personal experience working with people who have these disabilities as well as having studied some in both a disabilities study course and a child development course. The way our society has adopted certain colloquial phrases has built stigmas around hearing, vision, and intelligence. Some examples of these phrases are “are you deaf?” and “dumb as a doornail.” These common phrases have created a negative relationship with auditory and intelligence skills because these phrases are used in circumstances that are tailored towards exposing weaknesses in people. The normalcy that society has adopted is “disrupted.” Patricia A. Dunn in her journal “Re-Seeing (Dis)Ability: Ten Suggestions states that “Disability Studies activists urge us to radically change the way we think about ‘disability’” (Dunn 14). Dunn also states that, “disability studies challenges us to think about disability as socially constructed...a result of the way they’re treated in society” (Dunn, 14). This is a vital point because many people with disabilities are much stronger and abler than society give them credit for; they just need a place to show their skills.

The reason that the term deafness got chosen over auditory impairment is because the terms are more inclusive of all of the variations of deafness. In fact, all disabilities appear different in every person, and there are many different spectrums within different disabilities as well as abilities. For example, I may sing really well, but I am not considered a gifted singer or child prodigy. These are two different classifications of the same positive ability. The disability narcolepsy was chosen because upon entering my sophomore year at Trinity, I met two friends who have narcolepsy, and they never, unless required, come to the writing center. There is a stigma that people with narcolepsy are lazy because they often appear tired. However, this stigma is exactly what is keeping them from coming: the fear of being judged. "Writing, Identity, and the Other: Dare We Do Disability Studies?" by Linda Ware made me realize that the history of inclusion in colleges still allowed for a lot of judgement towards people with disabilities (Ware, 107-108). This judgement has unfortunately become engrained in both how society acts and in the minds of people facing disabilities, and it has led to the further separation of people.

Before the guide portion of the paper, I am going to give some brief descriptions of the topics I am discussing. The descriptions are based on personal experience as well as research and is in no way all of the information about the topics. Disability studies is a sensitive topic in that there are many ways for a disability to be expressed and this paper is in no way intended to offend or upset any person; rather it is hopefully a resource that will continue to be available to writing centers and possibly people in general. These descriptions will have a focus on writing, language, and communication. The topics will not be discussed at length, but they will introduce the skills related to writing and communication that may be hindered.

Invisibility and deafness can both relate back to some ways that tutors interact with people during disabilities during writing center appointments. Susannah B. Mintz, in her article

called *Invisibility*, defines invisibility as “the absence of disability from the conversations and activities that establish the way a society functions, encompassing social relationships, intellectual and artistic work, and politics” (Mintz, 113). This is my exact point in writing about disability in the writing center: it is not commonly discussed or seen. In the article *Deafness*, Douglass C. Baynton defines deafness as many things. Some of these definitions include “those who cannot understand speech through hearing alone without any amplification” or “any hearing impairment” (Baynton, 48). He goes further to discuss that some people may also identify with the capital “d” Deaf culture (Baynton, 48). Also, Baynton discusses the oralism that has been adopted by some institutions; they do not acknowledge sign language or deaf culture as being their own entity (Baynton, 50). These terms have been coined in order to show that disabilities are more common than people may first realize, and disabilities are also often forgotten from the conversation. It is important to take what writing center principles may conflict with some of these keywords in disability studies and see how a new way of thinking may be a positive solution.

Dyslexia is often associated in relation to writing and reading; whereas narcolepsy is not often thought of as in the context of writing and communication. Mayo Clinic describes dyslexia as “a learning disorder that involves difficulty reading due to problems identifying speech sounds and learning how they relate to letters and words (decoding). Also called reading disability, dyslexia affects areas of the brain that process language” (n.d., n.d.). This definition shows how dyslexia can directly affect the writing process as well as the tutoring process because there may be a lack of productive communication and with the writing/coding of the paper. The National Institute of Neurological Disorders discusses narcolepsy’s terms in relation to the affect that the chronic neurological disorder can have on every day activities:

Narcolepsy can greatly affect daily activities. People may unwillingly fall asleep even if they are in the middle of an activity like driving, eating, or talking. Other symptoms may include sudden muscle weakness while awake that makes a person go limp or unable to move (cataplexy), vivid dream-like images or hallucinations, and total paralysis just before falling asleep or just after waking up (sleep paralysis).

The possible difficulties with daily activities imply that a student/person may have trouble staying alert and engages in the writing process/in a tutoring appointment. I have a couple of friends who do not go to the writing center because they are nervous of coming across as lazy or 'out-of-it'. These two disabilities are commonly seen on college campuses and rarely addressed outside of the accommodations' office. The writing center is a place where these disabilities should be addressed, and the tutors should be equipped with some strategies to make the writing process more enjoyable for these students as well.

Cerebral Palsy is another disability found on college campus that can impact how a writing center appointment is run. Cerebral Palsy is defined by Mayo Clinic:

Cerebral palsy is a disorder of movement, muscle tone or posture that is caused by damage that occurs to the immature, developing brain, most often before birth. Signs and symptoms appear during infancy or preschool years. In general, cerebral palsy causes impaired movement associated with abnormal reflexes, floppiness or rigidity of the limbs and trunk, abnormal posture, involuntary movements, unsteady walking, or some combination of these.

The reason I chose to look at cerebral palsy in relation to the writing center was to really focus on the physical set-up of writing centers. Maysoon Zayid, in a TED Talk, discusses how her college experience is what made her feel excluded in many ways, including not being cast in a play as a character who has cerebral palsy because she would not be able to complete the stunts written for the play. This is something I want writing centers to work against: making a further divide of people.

CONCLUSION

Writing Centers should be aware of ways that both the rooms and tutoring skills should be more accessible for people who have disabilities. This information also goes beyond the writing center as it highlights a normalcy that colleges, people, and society have adopted. Judgement and isolation are way to prominent in the world today, and some of this research and suggestions are just a small step to acknowledging change. The reason the title is disability: strong and able is because the goal of the tutor is to empower the writer and to collaborate. There should not be judgment or discrimination if someone comes in and does not want to disclose a disability. Every person who walks through the doors of a writing center should be viewed as strong and able.

To take this project further, I would have researched more categories of disabilities and included them in the guide. I would do more research into how people interact and the impact of the physical space upon collaboration. With the research, I had difficulty in finding any statistics about disabilities on Trinity's campus, and I believe it would be interesting to expand this project in a few years and see if the campus has become more inclusive towards disabilities. Then, it would be beneficial to expand the guide to focus on disabilities pertaining to the Trinity College Writing Center in particular.

My hope is that this research and guide does more than provide tutoring techniques and accommodations for writing centers; my hope is that this project helps to open up a new discussion around disability studies and how it affects us. The reason it is not often discussed now is because of stigmas around disability and intelligence. There will hopefully be a need to continue this project and discussion in the future because of a rising number of people with disabilities having access to higher education and accommodations within the schools.

A Short Guide to Writing Center Practices Associated with Invisibility

- ❖ Invisibility in writing centers is mainly geared towards the acknowledgement of a disability.
 - This can be addressed by possibly adding in a section to the writing center's online scheduling program that allows the student to input a disability and any other accommodations that they are hoping to receive.
 - By giving the option for a student to ask for an accommodation before an appointment and share their disability if they so desire, then there is a good change that the appointment will be smoother.
 - By having the knowledge of a disability before an appointment, the writing associate can prepare themselves for any accommodations needed allowing the appointment to begin quicker.
 - This way, everyone involved gets the most use of their time.
- ❖ Invisibility can also be addressed by having a class or guide available that discusses different forms of disabilities and why they are important to familiarize oneself with.
 - The act of having this discussion and information builds upon the notion that the writing center is a social hub on many college campuses, and it shows that they acknowledge the different cultures and disabilities present on the campus, or that could potentially be present.
 - Introducing disability studies to the conversation among writing associates acknowledges disabilities and makes them more visible.
- ❖ A third way invisibility can be acknowledged in the writing center is by having artwork of famous disabled writers, musicians, mathematicians, displayed throughout the centers. Having books about certain disabilities or by authors with a disability would be beneficial to

help expand the conversation around disability studies. This also acknowledges that the writing center realizes that people with disabilities are just as strong and capable as any other peer that enters the writing center.

- Some example of these could be a list of TED Talks by people with disabilities, a poster of Forest Gump, *I am intelligent* by Peyton Goddard and Dianne Goddard, *The Miracle Worker* by William Gibson, etc.
 - Having true stories of people with disabilities getting an education available in the writing center can foster conversations around disability studies, access to education, and writing practices in general.

A Short Guide to Writing Center Practices Associated with Deafness

- ❖ Deafness in the writing center is a fairly common scenario in one way because of an increase of the use of cochlear implants and hearing aids in younger people.
 - A way to work with a student who was hearing impaired would be to move to a quieter room and sit next to the ear that the person hears best out of.
 - This will allow for the writer to hear what the writing associate is trying to communicate and will foster better communication between the tutor and their peer.
- ❖ With the acknowledgement of American Sign Language (ASL) as a world language, there has been an increase of colleges admitting students who speak ASL.
 - This is a great step towards more inclusive campuses, but it brings up the necessity of ASL interpreters.
 - If there is a presence, or even one person on a campus with ASL, then there should be an option to request an interpreter during an appointment. The writing center should work on supplying the option for an interpreter, or possibly having a class session tutors that give some basics of ASL.
- ❖ The language around deafness, as discussed earlier, can be problematic in the writing center. I often ask my peers if it is okay if I read their paper aloud during the appointment, so we can listen to the mistakes being made. This is a tutoring skill that I do often, and it tends to be beneficial to most appointments.
 - Yet, think about if a student is deaf or hard of hearing, then you could not use this technique.
 - Sitting in silence can be almost uncomfortable during a tutoring session, and it can feel like there is a lack of collaboration.

- A way to accommodate your tutoring session would to possibly have a computer open or a pen and paper and type/write out the conversation instead.
 - ◆ This is also a useful approach of a student uses signs to communicate, and there is not an interpreter present.
- ❖ In order to be fully inclusive, then it is also important to know about deaf culture in the writing center.
 - As with other languages and cultures, it is important to know the background information and the beliefs of a group. This is the same for ASL and deaf culture.
 - Having some background information for the writing associates about ways that not being able to hear well or express yourself in a way that person can understand is important to be able to relate to your peers that may struggle with these challenges.

A Short Guide to Writing Difficulties Associated with Dyslexia

- ❖ Dyslexia is a common learning disability seen in relation to writing centers.
 - From the Mayo Clinic website, “some common dyslexia signs and symptoms in teens and adults include:
 - Difficulty reading, including reading aloud
 - Slow and labor-intensive reading and writing
 - Problems spelling
 - Avoiding activities that involve reading
 - Mispronouncing names or words, or problems retrieving words
 - Trouble understanding jokes or expressions that have a meaning not easily understood from the specific words (idioms), such as "piece of cake" meaning "easy"
 - Spending an unusually long-time completing tasks that involve reading or writing
 - Difficulty summarizing a story”
 - From these symptoms, it is inferred that the majority of people with dyslexia have difficulty with reading and/or writing.
 - A way to possibly guide an appointment is by reading the paper out loud to the student. That way, the communication between the writing associate and peer is clear and there is not time devoted towards clarification of a sentence if the peer happens to pronounce a word wrong.
 - ◆ Many students who have dyslexia will come into an appointment and tell the tutor, which is useful knowledge for the appointment. However, it cannot be assumed that every person will feel comfortable sharing that information, so you will have to be patient with the process, especially if you notice some of the symptoms of dyslexia listed above.
- ❖ A font specifically designed for people with dyslexia, to help them from switching letters, has been adopted by many teachers as well as therapists and other careers.
 - Dyslexie was designed to have a thicker curves and an almost wavy shape in order to show the ways in which a letter moves. These changes to the font are helping people with

dyslexia from switching around letters or words because they can more distinctly see each letter.

- A possible thing to add to writing centers computers is the Dyslexie font. This way, it is available to anyone that enters the writing center, and it can be a beneficial resource if a student is struggling with their dyslexia a lot during an appointment.
- It may not work for everyone, but it is important to show that the writing center has considered different disabilities and has made some step towards addressing accommodations.

Sources Used for Dyslexia: <file:///C:/Users/Sara%20Barrett/Zotero/storage/GTMG9WBG/syc-20353552.html>

<file:///C:/Users/Sara%20Barrett/Zotero/storage/ZWNY5IP6/does-dyslexie-font-help-dyslexic-readers%20.html>

A Short Guide to Writing Difficulties Associated with Narcolepsy

- ❖ People with narcolepsy tend to stay more alert in a room where the temperature is cooler.
 - This is a common concept as many people are more alert in a cooler room. Now, the room should not be freezing and uncomfortable, but it should not always be warm either.
 - Monitoring the temperature in the room can be a task added to the coordinator's role in the writing center.
 - Moreover, unless it is a drastic change in temperature, then writing associates and coordinators should consider adjusting the temperature in the room if there is the ability to do so.
- ❖ As discussed earlier, there is a large judgment scare around the writing center. This may be because writing centers are a social hub on campuses.
 - Disabilities tend to be heightened in social situations because of how society defines “normal” and often highlights anything that may not be normal.
 - As with many other topics, it is not the tutor's or writing center's place to judge a person coming into the writing center based on how they interact with us.
 - There is a lack of background information and their personal lives, unless relevant or disclosed, are not the focus of the conversation; the writer is the focus.
 - ◆ A way to address this may be to put a sign up on the door or somewhere in the writing center that states that the area is a safe space and that we are welcoming to blank, blank, and blank (whatever the center agrees is most important to them).
- ❖ Another challenge that may be faced during an appointment with a person with narcolepsy is keeping the attention of the peer alert and on the assignment.

- A few ways to do this are:
 - moving to another room with less distractions
 - having the student read their paper aloud
 - helps keep them engaged and focused on the relevant information.
 - alternative times as to when the appointment can occur
 - ◆ possibly 15-minute blocks over a set period of time
 - it is recommended to have writing associates volunteer themselves to work with the altered schedule
 - Their comfort is also important during appointments

Sources Used for Narcolepsy:

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<file:///C:/Users/Sara%20Barrett/Zotero/storage/TT8KIRGQ/Narcolepsy-Fact-Sheet.html>

A Short Guide to Writing Difficulties Associated with Cerebral Palsy

- ❖ With cerebral palsy (CP), I am going to focus on physical set-up of writing centers
 - People with CP tend to have limited control over their motor skills and are constantly living with a shaking body.
 - Having lots of furniture in the writing center would not be a beneficial design to allow for easy access to people with impaired physical abilities.
 - Having furniture that can be manipulated in a space is important to allow for accommodations to be made.
 - There could also be an option of a more accessible space in the building for the tutoring session to occur. This should be made know to the student, and then the writing associate and their peer can decide on what they would like to do.
- ❖ While it is important to have easily manipulated furniture, chair with wheels pose a potential difficulty for people with CP.
 - Since they have limited function of motor skills and shake often, then sitting in a rolling chair would out them focus on making sure they were not nearly falling or moving about the room.
 - It is important to give the option of a chair without wheels for the appointment.
 - This decision should be collective between the tutor and peer as both of them need to be comfortable during an appointment.
 - ◆ As seen here, many solutions for certain disabilities also pose new challenges that need to be addressed. Therefore, it is important to remain patient and work towards a solution that works for everyone involved.

Sources Used for CP:

file:///C:/Users/Sara%20Barrett/Zotero/storage/5UUVWL2R/maysoon_zayid_i_got_99_problem_s_palsy_is_just_one.html

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