DISABILITIES AND PEDAGOGY

The Spirit of Inclusion: Facilitating Dialogue and Developing Strategies for Inclusion in Catholic Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Inclusion means developing a shared language and cultivating spaces that are adaptable for all learners. In higher education, a campus-wide adoption of inclusion is difficult due to limited time and resources. However, the presence of students with learning differences is increasing on college campuses and challenging traditional images of students and the classroom experience. As the student landscape of higher education continues to shift, developing an inclusive philosophy and increasing accessibility will become imperative. This paper seeks to frame its discussion of inclusion from a theological, relational-ethics lens in order to provide context, strategies, and training for all educators.

Introduction

Imagine hosting a dinner party and some of your guests are avid carnivores while others are vegetarian. Perhaps some are following a keto diet or are ovo-lacto-pescatarians. How do you create a meal that includes everyone? When applied to how we can create spaces of belonging, would it make sense to cook one meal and expect that every guest has the same experience? While this analogy is simplistic, we can begin to consider what it means to have everyone share the table and the gifts they bring.

This paper aims to: (1) Underscore the prevalence of students with learning (dis)abilities on college campuses; (2) Highlight implicit biases regarding cognition; (3) Provide meaningful dialogue for administrators and faculty; (4) Outline strategies for creating inclusive spaces using the person-centered approach for persons with learning (dis) abilities; and, (5) Conclude with next steps for educators. The strategies are intended for both faculty members and administrators. Moreover, the outlined strategies are intended to be adapted for other academic support offices such as campus ministry, academic services, tutoring centers, and other points of contact for students. The

term educator refers to persons who work directly with students and includes faculty, administrators, and peers. Finally, I use various forms of reference to persons with learning disabilities in order to underscore linguistic variance. All forms are person-first inclusive language models, unless otherwise noted.

Stonehill College is a private, Catholic liberal arts school located in Easton, Massachusetts. The mission and philosophy align with Holy Cross' principles including educating the whole person. The Center for Writing and Academic Achievement (CWAA) is a peer tutoring center with approximately fifty student tutors, offering tutoring in over twenty-five subjects and comprehensive writing-support. The CWAA's mission statement was recreated Fall 2019 according to the principles outlined in this paper. Data was provided by the CWAA's TutorTrac system which is an online platform for measuring utilization. Voluntary peer-tutor assessments by Stonehill students measured impact of services.[1] Over the course of one-semester, the CWAA's philosophy, practices, and operations adopted a more inclusive approach that prioritized accessibility. The results indicated a 9 percent increase in services with writing-support as having the most significant increase (43 percent). This article highlights how a prioritized vision of inclusivity increased student-utilization by creating a positive, hospitable learning environment. References to faculty training are based on professional experiences as writing instructors and other department collaborators. The final section on training has been presented to educators at Boston College, Learning Associations of New England (LAANE), Stonehill College and adapted to a College, Reading, and Learning Association (CRLA) Training for learning centers on working with students with learning differences (Agee and Hodges 2012).

Higher Education: Perceiving Difference and Disability

Biases regarding persons with learning (dis)abilities are not limited to higher education or education in general; rather, persons with disabilities have been a central question within communities. Problematically, narratives regarding disability have focused on its elimination; "Disability, then, plays a huge, but seemingly uncontested, role in how contemporary Americans envision the future. Utopian visions are founded on the elimination of disability, while dystopic, negative visions of the future are based on its proliferation. . . both depictions are deeply tied to cultural understandings and anxieties about the proper use of technology" (Kafer 2013, 74). Alison Kafer points out a particular anxiety regarding disability: the threat of becoming a person with a disability is tangible for all persons regardless of socioeconomic status, race, age, culture, or gender. Thus, disability is often portrayed by the community as a state of being that is incapable of contribution to society or as a burden to be eliminated. As a result, persons with disabilities are excluded from the community until they are able to adapt to an able-bodied image that values contribution as proof of acceptance; "Over and over, people with disabilities find themselves thrown into a stereotyped group where they have to deal with an identity not of their own choosing" (Thompson 2009, 214). As persons who are all temporarily-abled, this threat of exclusion from community leads to the widening chasm between persons with/without disabilities.

Ableism is defining a person's worth based on their contribution to society and maintaining the cultural perception that persons with disabilities are somehow less than the nondisabled or incomplete (Thompson 2009, 211). This perception comes to the fore when that difference is conflated with deficiency; "The persistence that some people are 'broken' or 'functionally deficient' is thus one of the core paradoxes of modernity" (Bock 2012, 2). Demonstrated in a 2012 survey by the National Center for Learning Disabilities, Learning disabilities are often misunderstood as connected with intellectual deficiency, laziness, and/or a result of personal, controllable factors such as childhood vaccinations and too much television or they are viewed as requiring minimal support (Cortiella and Horowitz 2014, 7). These misunderstandings implicitly place the blame on either parents of children with learning disabilities or on the person with a learning disability when they advocate for more inclusive practices.

For persons with learning differences, executive function challenges like prioritization, time-management, and focus impede their ability to become academically successful in the current model without adaptations. Examples of ableist language in higher education can sound like the following: "If they cannot handle it, they should not be here;" "I did it so they need to also;" and "They are just faking it, so they do not have to do any work." Educators may even question their

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1 Over 130 voluntary student responses were received (n=130).

legitimacy or presume that having a disability gives a person an advantage in admissions. This perception is the subtext to a common, ableist question: "But how did they even get into college?" The struggle to be considered legitimate with a disability rather than simply lazy rests on the individual to bear the burden of proof, "The disability is often seen as a personal dilemma to be privately endured, and we have placed that responsibility to adapt on the individual with the disability. The person's flaws are to be hidden or fixed" (Thompson 2009, 211). Reflecting on the question, "But how did they get in?" implies the chasm between persons who are abled/(dis)abled on college campuses and destabilizes our preconceived, one-dimensional standards of cognition.

Investing in Disabilities Awareness Training and Inclusive Pedagogy

Institution-wide change is difficult when rapidly shifting student demographics require responsive training and resources. The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLB) found that 7 out of 10 educators do not feel adequately trained or have the time/resources to support diverse learning in the classroom (Thompson 2009, 211). For Catholic schools, the statistics are stark: Abby L.W. Crowley and Shauvan Wall, "Supporting Children with Disabilities in Catholic Schools," found in a 2002 study sponsored by the USCCB that 7 percent of students in Catholic schools have some type of disability; the same study found that only 1 percent of those students receive the appropriate accommodations. Eighty-seven percent of Catholic School responded a lack of capacity to support these students (Crowley and Wall 2007). Indeed disability studies in, specifically, Catholic education remains an underserved field due to lack of consistency across institutions or a central model.

Both the NCLD and USCCB studies underscore common responses when surveying educators' responses to inclusive education models: time, money, and resources. Inclusive education is foremost a philosophy, and the execution of its interpretation may oftentimes feel burdensome and costly. Additionally, assessment of whether inclusive philosophy is working can be difficult to quantify. Indeed, private secondary schools and postsecondary institutions that do not receive federal funding directly are able to circumvent Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act's mandate that all persons are entitled and given "an appropriate education" (DOE OCR 2020). The Act states in response to postsecondary education that, "Recipients [institutions] are not required to make adjustments or provide aids or services that would result in a fundamental alteration of a recipient's program or impose an undue burden" (DOE OCR 2020). Problematically, private secondary and postsecondary institutions have great leeway in determining the economic burden of accessibility and which accommodations would dilute the academic standards. With this wide range of interpretation, it is possible for two students with LD to attend different institutions and receive different accommodations with similar diagnoses and subsequent challenges.

Exploring students with learning (dis)abilities in Catholic Schools is difficult due to the preconceived notion that persons with learning disabilities are the easier disability to accommodate. Melinda Hall, *The Bioethics of Enhancement: Transhumanism, Disability, and Biopolitics*, points out an important polarization within the discussion about disabilities, "That is, models of disability are typically meant to either symbolize or solve problems of exclusion and stigma that comes along with physical and mental differences" (Hall 2017, 35). This also points to a more systemic issue within disability studies on prioritizing which types of disabilities receive attention. Indeed, Kafer underscores an important gap even within disability studies: "Although there have been notable exceptions, disability studies, especially in the humanities, has focused little attention on cognitive disabilities, focusing more often on visible physical impairments and sensory impairments" (2013, 12). Furthermore, authors Meghan M. Burke and Megan M. Griffith, "Students with Developmental Disabilities in Catholic Schools: Examples in Primary and Secondary Settings" state in response to the lack of examples of Catholic education supporting persons with disabilities that, "Other studies have similarly documented that when Catholic schools do admit students with learning disabilities, the students tend to have milder disabilities (e.g. learning disabilities) and do not require extensive support" (2016, 198). By generalizing that students with LD do not require extensive support, and contradicting extensive research by the NCLD, or by pointing out that persons with LD are considered those with "minor" challenges by Catholic schools underscores that the presence of persons with learning disabilities and specific challenges are fundamentally misunderstood.

Students with Learning Disabilities: "But How Did They Get In?"

The phrase *students with learning disabilities* seems antithetical to perceptions of cognition in higher education. According to research conducted by the NCLD (2012), 43 percent of respondents incorrectly associated learning disabilities with low IQ (Cortiella and Horowitz 2014, 7). The same survey reported that up to one-third of respondents believe inaccurate information regarding the cause of learning disabilities including: watching too much television, poor diet, and childhood vaccinations (2014, 7). As the study points out, nearly 79 percent of the general population agrees that people learn differently; however, an alarming seven out of ten educators, parents, and members of the general public believe that learning disabilities are the same as profound intellectual disabilities and approximately half (51 percent) think that a learning disability is simply "laziness" rather than actual impairment (2014, 11). These perceptions of learning disabilities, even amongst educators, highlight how little is understood about the presence of persons with learning disabilities in higher education. The assumption is that these students are simply not present in the classroom; thus, support for students through faculty awareness and collaboration with student resources is essential.

Learning disabilities are often categorized as silent disabilities, because these disabilities may not have a visual marker of difference. Other silent disabilities include mental illnesses like depression, personality disorders, and developmental disorders such as persons on the autism spectrum. While ableist attitudes surrounding physical disabilities are often centered on the body as the site of difference, for persons with silent disabilities the site of difference is internal: the brain. Particularly, for persons with silent disabilities in an educational setting, the reflex may be to pass as a person without difference in order to assimilate to the institution's image of what a student should or should not be. This reflex means that students with LD are not advocating for the same services they received in high school; the 2012 report found that only 17 percent of students with LD receive accommodations and support related to their disability during post-secondary education compared to 94 percent of students with LD in high school (Cortiella and Horowitz 2014, 28). While the same survey found that cost was a primary factor in students with LD not completing college, institutional conditions can exacerbate the stress and anxiety of higher education due to a lack of support combined with social pressure to conform. The cost factor response is also most likely linked to students taking longer to finish their degree and/or retaking courses they have not passed.

Kafer posits that disability studies must wrestle with the socially-acceptable figure (2013, 116). This means that educators must question beyond the image or boxes that a person checks-off when determining legitimacy. Indeed, rather than questioning whether a person deserves to be in college, the focus in the classroom needs to be placed on strengthening a person's capability. A community is strengthened when individuals are empowered. Referring to the Octopus, when the student disclosed that no one "sees" their intelligence, we must question what we miss when we choose to see only the surface challenges of working with students with learning disabilities. Urgently, we must also question a system that imposes rigid impressions of who is/who is not intelligent and how that intelligence manifests itself inside and outside the classroom.

The Person-Centered Approach and Creating Inclusive Spaces

For both faculty and administrators, an ethics based on inclusion means that two foundational values are present in the educator-student relationship. The first is that Catholic social ethics dictates respecting and maintaining the integrity of the person through Christ's giving of grace. Second, Jesus' ministry models that all persons are teachable. As an example, throughout the Gospel of John, Jesus' encounters place the humanity of the person at the center rather than their status in the community. In dialogue with Catholic social ethics, the person-centered approach by Carl Rogers (also known as the Rogerian method) and philosophy of inclusion will serve as the pedagogical lens for demonstrating person-first language and its contribution to inclusive education.

Mara Sapon-Shevin, as cited by Spencer J. Salend, defines the inclusive classroom as based on a philosophy "that brings diverse students, families, educators, and community members together to create schools and other social institutions based on acceptance, belonging, and community" (2008, 5). Based on the integration of students with disabilities into the mainstream classroom, inclusion seeks to desegregate and develop strategies that are adaptable for diverse

learning communities.[2] The emphasis on community and belonging is particularly resonant for Catholic education, and we can assess Jesus' practice of inclusion philosophy as a model by focusing on two essential ethics: integrity of the person and the belief that every person is teachable. The person-centered approach has three primary characteristics: (1) genuineness, realness, or congruence; (2) acceptance or "unconditional positive regard"; and, (3) empathic understanding (Rogers 1980, 117). Carl Rogers explains how these characteristics bring about a transformative change in the individuals, "Briefly, as persons are accepted and prized, they tend to develop a more caring attitude towards themselves. . . There is greater freedom to be the true, whole person" (1980, 117). Rogers argues that the educator's goal in the person-centered approach is the "facilitation of change and learning" (1969, 104). Carl Rogers' transformative change is reminiscent of the conversion experience for persons who commune with Jesus. Again, communities are strengthened when individuals feel empowered by their experiences.

Establishing an Inclusive Pedagogy

The person-centered approach is an educational model for spiritual, intellectual, and personal formation. Inclusion in the context of Catholic education is distinct, because it is rooted in a shared purpose of uplifting a person or community of persons. By giving space for persons to orient their academic and personal experiences with faith, Catholic educators create spaces to engage students in a community of interpretation. Jack L. Seymour, *Teaching the Way of Jesus: Educating Christians for Faithful Living*, explains; "Christians are theologians as they are grounded in the traditions of faith, as they are empowered to reflect on the meanings of the faith, as they critique their own present, and as they seek to be faithful in a new time" (2014, 95). As a guide, educators play an active role in the faith and academic formation of others.

Faculty, administrators, and peer educators are considered influential bridges in their communities. These bridges serve by engaging persons with learning differences who are hesitant about participating or struggling to adjust. By assuming the mission of Catholic education, faculty and staff commit to the formation of persons through a practice of inclusion. Practices of inclusion in the classroom mean that educators are actively seeking ways to empower persons by:

1. Creating an adaptable space for all students

2. Encouraging self-reflection and dialogue

3. Modeling constructive listening and communication skills

4. Sharing life experiences

5. Bonding students as one community

All educators, both faculty and administrators, can become inclusive advocates who strive towards student-focused learning, and all students benefit from a sense of community within and outside the classroom. Overall, educators become more effective when students can guide the dialogue in a community in meaningful and compassionate ways.

Principle 1: Jesus as Mentor and Model for Inclusion

By becoming an active presence in the community, Jesus represents faith, wisdom, and understanding. Through Jesus' actions, He is both healer and teacher. Similarly, this model for Catholic inclusion encompasses both the healing and teaching potential within education through action and expression; "To imagine that we are educating in faith toward

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2 Universal Design for Learning (UDL) developed and updated by David Rose and Anne Meyer (2002) is the most well-known framework of inclusive classroom building. It is helpful to distinguish inclusion as the philosophy and UDL as the philosophy in practice. For a complete guide to UDL, Cast.org is an excellent resource for educators.

liberating salvation for people's lives and for society is truly an inspiring purpose. It can shape our whole curriculum—what, why, and how we teach Christian faith—in very positive and life-giving ways" (Groome 2011, 131). Indeed, Catholic teaching exemplifies faith when educators begin to view their vocation as a salvific activity for empowering communities.[3]

Throughout Jesus' ministry, He was tested on Jewish content and tradition. Consistently, Jesus states that his intention is not to dismantle tradition; rather Jesus' mission is to fulfil its reality (Seymour 2014, 91). In the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is admired by witnesses at the Temple; "After three days, they found him [Jesus] in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and answers" (Luke 2:46-47). Jesus flips the classroom by listening and asking questions rather than imposing a traditional model. This is distinct from educational models that overemphasize memorization. In the example of the Temple, Jesus exemplifies inclusive education by creating the space to listen, question, and dialogue to engage students with the material.

Principle 2: Solidarity with the Marginalized

In addition to asking questions, Jesus is attentive to people's life stories. On the road to Emmaus, the Risen Christ approaches the two disciples who have endured a traumatic event. In their trauma, the two disciples do not recognize their Lord "But their eyes were kept from recognizing him" (Luke 24:16). Instead of Jesus simply announcing, "Here I am!" He listens to their stories and, in turn, provides the space to narrate their suffering. After hearing about the loss of their Savior, Jesus then asks, "Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Luke 24:26). Still, the disciples do not recognize the Risen Christ. It is after Christ has walked alongside His disciples and broken bread when the Disciples eyes are finally open (Luke 24:28-31). In, *Will There Be Faith? A New Vision for Educating and Growing Disciples*, Thomas Groome underscores the road to Emmaus as paradigmatic for educators in faith; "The Emmaus road story leaves no doubt that Jesus' approach was to enable learners to bring their lives and pressing issues to the spiritual wisdom of their faith tradition, and then to bring that Faith back to new and renewed commitment to lived, living, and life-giving faith" (2011, 44). As Catholic educators, the image of walking alongside marginalized students in their faith-journey is emblematic of Jesus' solidarity with those who are suffering.

Jesus in the Temple and on the road to Emmaus highlights an important principle for Catholic educators who want to commit to inclusion: mutual accompaniment. Mutual accompaniment within Christian faith means that Catholic educators share these principles of Jesus' teaching in a collaborative, dynamic way. In practice, this means consistent reflection and candor on how we can best provide the tools for students to actively explore their learning journey. Moreover, Jesus' presence in the community and prioritization of those who are excluded underscores the impact Catholic educators can have on empowering marginalized students to become agents of their experiences.

Principle 3: Seeking, Understanding, and Expressing through Metaphor

Jesus' teachings through action, questions, and life experiences are exemplified in the parables on the Reign of God. The treasure and pearl parables provide a rich metaphor for a mentorship process that is based on seeking, questioning, and expressing. In seeking a great treasure, a person discovers this in a field and sells all their earthly possessions to purchase the field (Matthew 13:44). This precedes a similar construction when the merchant sells all their belongings for one pearl (Matthew 13:45). In each of these parables, the person is the agent who is seeking a great treasure, understands or discerns its value, and in turn takes necessary steps in order to acquire that treasure by parting with materials that are not comparable in value. In both instances the person and merchant undergo a spiritual, intellectual, and personal change.

Similar to the academic journey in Catholic education, the student leaves behind one community and joins another in order to discern their vocation. A cornerstone of Catholic education is for the student to become agents in their learning process today, so that they can become thoughtful, impactful leaders tomorrow. Through the use of metaphor and guided

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3 All biblical references are from the New American Bible (NAB), unless otherwise cited.

questions for reflection, Catholic educators can focus on establishing the students' sense of agency. Inclusion respects a person's learning process by remaining attentive to openings where further reflection may reveal insight into how the person learns and the quality of their educational experience.

In John 3, an ethics of inclusion is exemplified in the love between Father-Son-humanity; "For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life" (John 3:16) and "The Father loves the Son and has given everything to him. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever disobeys the Son will not see life, but the wrath of God remains upon him" (John 3:36). This relationship expresses a new immediacy; Jesus is the direct link to God. Importantly, Jesus is sent to humanity with humanity so that the Son of God may be approachable, real, tangible, even touched by all. This sense of immediacy embodies the inclusive experience of God's grace and love. 1 John further develops Jesus' inclusion by commanding the community to love another, "For this is the message you have heard from the beginning; we should love one another" (1 John 3:11), continuing, "The way we came to know love was that he laid down his life for us; so we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him? Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth" (1 John 3:16-17). The author begins the Gospel of John with the present knowledge and assumption that readers already know the story, as evidenced by the call to love one another and reference to the Resurrection. While we do see the emphasis on group identity and the expectation of serving one another in the community, as God sent and sacrificed his only Son for the good of humanity. Repeatedly, the emphasis is the distinction between those who believe/do not believe, but considering that Jesus' ministry is defined by His engagement with persons who are marginalized, the capacity to believe becomes the defining feature of group identity and not a person's place in society as defined by a lack. While we have seen that this has devastating effects for the characterization of the Jews throughout the Johannine Gospel, the call to love one another simply based on capacity for belief is embodied by Jesus' interactions with those who have been socially excluded.

Importantly, utilizing the person-centered approach does not imply that God or Jesus should be instrumentalized for personal growth nor should it detract from a theocentric orientation of persons to the Divine; rather, Jesus' ministry for persons who are considered outcasts in the community is parallel to the philosophy of inclusion and Rogers' primary characteristics, "In John's Gospel in general as well as in 3.16-21 in particular, Jesus brings the 'truth' from God, even if people do not want to hear it, but he also comes as an expression of divine love to help us love one another" continuing, "So while the language may be very different, perhaps it might be the case that John, in his own way and style, nonetheless agrees with the same combination of words and deeds, rigorous teaching, and inclusive acceptance" (Burridge 2007, 286). Throughout the Gospel of John and in Jesus' interactions, a radical transformation occurs whereby Jesus facilitates a conversation that leads the receiver to learn that Jesus is the Son of God culminating in a change or conversion similar to the transformative potential of an inclusive education.

What Can I Do Tomorrow?

Strategy 1: Develop a Shared Inclusive Vocabulary

Person-centered pedagogy must begin with person-first or inclusive language. Emphasizing that language is an evolving code begins when students enter their first class on their first day of college. The primary challenge is that inclusive language changes as more communities begin to name their experiences. A second difficulty is that instruction on communicating inclusively is not part of every members' lexicon, thus the practice of teaching inclusive language is siloed to specific disciplines or optional workshops on-campus. Thirdly, many may feel intimidated or overwhelmed by an evolving code and perceive that they are censored or their good intentions are suddenly offensive. Finally, what constitutes person-first language and how do we keep-up with changes and then transmit those to our community?

Person-first language means that the person is the agent of their experience, as Carl Rogers' models in the person-centered approach. This is the linguistic distinction between persons with disabilities and disabled persons. But, there are no hard, fixed rules—rather, person-first language is less a rigid code and more so a perception that communities and persons are

agents of their vocabulary. For example, you may see persons with disabilities or the term persons with (dis)abilities. In contrast, Disabled Vets prefers disabled as the adjective. If your brain feels like it is spinning, then this is a good sign. Inclusive language means that listeners pay attention to how communities and individuals refer to themselves and mirror that language affirmatively. It also means paying attention to words and phrases that are exclusionary or antiquated. A prime example for theologians is the move from using man to denote the human experience or the term Creator in contrast to Father. These terms are now seamlessly woven into an academic vocabulary and, in turn, the field has evolved to include marginalized voices. As a philosophy in practice, when working with students, it is important to listen to how they describe their identities and experiences. In the classroom, asking students to probe, question, and take risks with using language that they see/hear every day creates the space for everyone to re-evaluate their own linguistic code. Most importantly, modeling inclusive language is key for all educators and incorporating person-first perspectives in interactions with students will create a space to develop a person-first perspective.[4]

Strategy 2: Set Guidelines for Discussion

An ongoing, inclusive dialogue aims to create a community of accountability where communities are self-dialogical about their own negative narratives. As a result, faculty, staff, and students must actively deconstruct harmful narratives by first cultivating a hospitable space where students feel free to discuss challenges, struggles, failures, and successes in order to take ownership of their experiences. On the first day of class or during a training session for staff, a facilitator can ask participants to create a set of guiding principles for discussion and, together, they can reference this foundation to hold one another accountable. Common examples from past trainings include: (1) Assume best intentions, (2) Listen before speaking, (3) Give everyone a chance to respond, and (4) Speak respectfully of one another outside of this discussion. This practice revolves around affirming a student's agency and role in the community while also modeling inclusion of others' experiences. Moreover, educators can be especially attentive to the destructive narratives students experience regarding education and its influence on how they perceive their role in the academic community. This, in turn, can be used to further adapt policies and practices that are causing barriers to access.

Strategy 3: Make Accommodation Statements Visible and Adaptable

Every institution is distinct in coordinating accommodations for students, but at some point a faculty member is presented with an accommodation letter for an individual student. While this process is responding to a specific need, how can we become proactive even before students approach us with this letter? As the NCLD highlights, many students will not self-advocate for their full accommodations and may feel a sense of trepidation when approaching a professor for the first time. In order to mitigate this, reflect on where the accommodations statement is located on the syllabus. Oftentimes, accommodations statements are buried after course information, objectives, classroom policies, and grading breakdowns. Sometimes, accommodations statements are grouped-in with other on-campus resources. Moving the statement closer to the beginning or even as the first statement after the course description creates visibility and prioritizes accommodations for all students. Faculty may even suggest that any student may request lecture notes or that copies will be available online. By denoting that inclusion is beneficial for all students, faculty can model how accommodations are adaptations for all students.

For administrators, an accommodations statement is essential. Consider how your space is a classroom and include contact information for students to approach with accommodations requests, as many students may not even consider an office meeting as an opportunity to request a required accommodation such as recording the meeting in order to recall information later. Unlike faculty, administrators may not necessarily have access to letters or notes regarding students and must depend on self-reference. Assess what the office manages logistically (ex: private spaces, recording sessions, and alternative formats) and include trainings that focus on learning differences for staff and how to adapt accordingly.

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4 Online Resources on inclusive language include Human Rights Campaign (HRC.org), GLAAD Media Reference Guide (GLAAD.org), and United Nations Fact sheet about Persons with Disabilities (UN.org). To research how particular communities refer to themselves, organizations like the National Association of the Deaf (NAD.org) and Disabled Veterans of America (DAV.org) websites have guidelines for reference.

For example, an ongoing issue for learning centers is physical space and providing a distraction-reduced environment for all students. An effective strategy is to identify quieter times when there is not as much traffic or have extended hours as an offering for all students.

FERPA maintains that all students are agents of the information they choose to share with educators, and FERPA has served both to protect ostracization of persons with LD and to maintain their integrity as an agent of their information. This is also is an opportunity to develop a privacy policy. In reference to students disclosing learning differences, always ask how they would like that information to be used. Sharing practices and strategies with staff on how to work with a student may not necessitate revealing the specific learning difference and offering all students adaptations will make students feel less outed by the process.

For both faculty and staff, when a student presents a letter or self-refers, the following question can be: "How do you learn best?" Having an honest, transparent conversation about what the student needs and what you can provide is important for keeping dialogue open to adaptation. For example, in an effort to seem accommodating by setting no deadlines, ask the student if deadlines would be helpful and how you can hold each other accountable. For students with learning differences, self-managing can be a difficult task and having open-ended times can cause undue stress on the student, faculty member, and administrator.

Strategy 4: Engage with Technology and Remove Barriers to Access

Adopting bias-free inclusive language and prioritizing accommodations statements are steps prior to an evaluation of policies and practices to determine which create barriers for students. This evaluation is the praxis of inclusion and educators must assess impact above intention. One example is the accessibility of content online for e-readers. Microsoft Word and Adobe, two common programs, now have accessibility checkers and LMS, like Blackboard, rate content with an accessibility score while providing suggestions. While it may seem onerous to convert an entire semester's worth of colorful PowerPoints to easily readable documents, consider that persons with LD are not the only students who can benefit from text-to-speech readers. Students who prefer an audio format may also utilize a text-to-speech reader and students whose primary language is not English will also benefit from converted files. For faculty who do not wish to have their lessons recorded, making documents accessible for e-readers, uploading supplemental lecture notes, and posing pre-classroom discussion questions can be adapted. We are all agents of our experiences and adaptations are an invitation to dialogue.

Increasing technology in the classroom will lead to a reevaluation of how we interact with students. Replacing the physical classroom with an online format means that faculty will have less opportunities in the physical classroom to build community among students. This may place more responsibility on faculty members to have policies regarding in-person communication as a means of assisting students or offering online, virtual meetings as an alternate office-hour format. With Blackboard and Skype, it is possible for students to record these office hours and use closed-captioning programs. Strategies which help guide office-hour conversations and working with students individually will become imperative, particularly if classrooms are increasingly more virtual. For students with learning differences, the increase in virtual classrooms may provide flexibility; however, it may also exacerbate social isolation and adjustment difficulties. The increase in virtual classrooms will mean that faculty and students will need to be more proactive in establishing dialogue either online or in a physical space.

Technology can also become burdensome for administrators because they lack the physical classroom and set time to send a cohesive message to all students. Students become inundated with emails and no amount of high priority subject-lines ensures that students even read them. For administrators, consider how students access resources with the following questions: Are sessions appointment-based, online, or drop-in? Do you have a front-desk staff? What's on your website? Do you have or want a social media presence? Do you use an online booking system? How many hours in advance can students book? Is this system ADA accessible with mobile-view? Understanding the organizational structure is important for recognizing barriers students may face. Foremost, all students must be able to easily access information on a public website. Schedules must be clear and the ability to book appointments intuitively (if necessary) is essential. One of the first steps in evaluating the intuitiveness of the system is to hold student-focus groups or survey the student staff on the

ease of accessing the services. If the office uses an online system, how many steps does it take for a student to book an appointment? Can staff in other departments easily assist students? When possible, streamline these steps, so that a student can search for and book an appointment for the first time in under ten seconds, the average attention span of Generation Z.

Strategy 5: Redefine Success: Process vs. Product

Self-advocacy remains a significant challenge, as students move from a high-school environment where there was more structure and well-developed connections. Particularly for students with learning differences, guardians may have acted as the primary advocate. Now, students are the primary advocate and conversations regarding accommodations and communicating with faculty and staff becomes a necessary step in order to become successful in college. However, this process for students can feel like they must come-out continually as a person with differences while also trying to navigate new norms and expectations.

Creating an inclusive environment centers on reframing narratives about what a successful college student looks and acts like. In an age of constant comparison, we tend to look sideways at others and believe they have it together while we are struggling. In higher education, cultural identity and group membership is a current that connects students but it can also polarize students with differences, because the tendency to compare is higher when students live, work, and study in close quarters. Particularly, with such dynamic changes to an evolving student body's needs, it is possible to surmise that college is simply not the same as it was—and that, fundamentally, this is okay. Students with learning differences do not dilute the academic standards, rather, they bring capabilities that shine a light on outdated practices and perceptions about success.

When entering college, students will bring fixed perceptions of education and ideas about who they are as a student. Perhaps they were the top of their class and expectations are high. For some, the damage inflicted by the one person who told them they are bad writers or terrible in math is everlasting. An example in higher education is the constant refrain that students cannot write. This is untrue and damaging, because college students have demonstrated a standard of literacy but still need to adapt to changing practices and attitudes about college-writing. While we cannot magically erase the damage, we can guide students towards a reframing technique. We can also educate each other about our own learning processes, and the importance of practice. Particularly for students with learning differences, their experience with these challenges is an opportunity to explore the diverse ways people learn and grow through adaptation.

The first step in this strategy is emphasizing process rather than product. Product is the grade whereas the process is how the grade was attained. Indeed, there are students who may receive As, but their practices are unsustainable. Developing sustainable strategies for success (DSSS) is and should be the educator's primary focus for initiating college students to new academic standards.[5] DSSS includes balancing school, work, community, and well-being through practices that serve long-lasting goals rather than short-term end-results. Students tend to tie their self-worth in a grade as a concrete form of external validation. In turn, educators engage in an authentic dialogue by having students narrate their version of success in order to guide students through realistic and idealistic expectations.

Process does not mean a formula for receiving an A, and it does not mean dismissing a student who feels grades are important. Process, in this context, means that a person plans each step intentionally, pays attention to how they are moving through the steps, adjusts if necessary, reflects on the product with compassionate non-judgment, and narrates the experience. Eventually, the goal is for students to see the grade as part of the learning process and not the defining feature. This provides a guide for faculty working with students during office hours or peer tutors/administrators who want to engage students in this process. From these conversations, students can begin to see each assignment or task as

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5 Saundra Yancy McGuire and Stephanie McQuire's work, *Teach Students How to Learn* (2015), is an excellent guide for educators on what these skills are and how to teach students. There is also a student-version.

an opportunity to refine this process and, overwhelmingly, large assignments with heavily weighted grade percentages seem more manageable. Developing agency is the primary objective and having students reframe their experiences from one that feels anxious, isolating, and unfair to an open dialogue about how learning is an adaptable process promotes this. For persons with verbal challenges or who prefer not to share this experience, the narrating process will be different and underscoring that there is no assessment in the process portion of learning is important. This is not process by force; rather, it is intended to give students a new perspective on learning.

Trainings for educators that focus on incorporating academic skills like time-management, focus, prioritization, study, and test-taking strategies are indispensable. More so, when peers can serve as mentors in academic skills, they can provide other students with actual, real experience. Hiring peers who have experienced their own challenges and can effectively narrate their journey with candor will create a staff that is more inclusive of everyone's experiences. Prioritizing the process rather than focusing solely on students with a 4.0 will also give students without higher than average GPAs an opportunity to become leaders on campuses. Hiring questions that focus on what diversity and inclusion means and giving space for staff to discuss their own perceptions of cognition or what grades mean to them invites an authentic, real conversation about success in all forms.

Peer and Faculty Training: Bringing it All Together

What Does Your Brain Look Like?

Metaphors are powerful. By encouraging metaphorical language, the educator provides the space for students to express their feelings with creative intention. It also creates distance by distinguishing between the personal and the symbolic. For students with learning disabilities, the brain can be a fraught point. Whether the disability is something known or newly discovered, students with learning differences understand that they are unique both in challenges and capabilities. "What does your brain look like? Use a metaphor" (see Figure 1) in an inclusive class will help students and faculty to recognize that everyone learns differently. Figure 1 exemplifies the conversation from asking this question. A student shared that their brain is like an octopus. For someone with ADHD, the arms of the octopus pick objects up and sometimes they become so distracted by these objects, they forget which arm is holding what object. The student shared that their intelligence is underneath the octopus, because "no one seems to see that it's there." Whether a shamrock, concert, improv dance, tipped filing cabinet, a cavernous recess, or a Ferris wheel, our brains are the same but different. As educators, our purpose is to facilitate the act of learning in an environment that is receptive to people's experiences, challenges, and differences. Below is a training that all educators can do tomorrow for any audience whether they are faculty, staff, or peer educators. It can be adapted to any institution's values and mission, private, public, or secular. The learning objective is to start seeing what we may have missed by not looking underneath the Octopus. Perhaps, we will find that the way to a person's spirit is through their brain.

Training Outline

- Time
  – 1.5 hours but may be adjusted

- Materials
  – Drawing markers
  – Paper
  – Computer
  – Projector

First Activity: Seeking, Expressing, Understanding through Metaphor

- Ask audience members to use a metaphor: What does your brain look like? The audience has five minutes to think of a metaphor. They can draw, narrate, or utilize any mode of choice to describe their brain.

- At the conclusion of five minutes, they can turn to others and describe their brain. Finally, the group will come together and share their metaphors.

- The facilitator will write the metaphors on the board or computer.

Guiding Questions about the Metaphors:

1. What similarities/differences are there?

2. What do we notice as a group?

Guiding Questions about Individuals' Metaphors:

3. Why did you choose this metaphor?

4. What does this metaphor tell us about you?

5. How does this metaphor connect to how you learn?

Second Activity: Developing an Inclusive Vocabulary

- Display the Octopus and describe what it means to learn differently.

- Discuss what are the common perceptions about college students and learning differences

- Content: Inclusion and the Person-Centered Approach
  – Developing principles for discussion
  – Creating a common inclusive vocabulary around persons with disabilities
  – Identifying fixed perceptions and helping other reframe narratives

- You may also include information about on-campus services such as Accessibility, Technology, and other support.

*Third Activity: Redefining Process and Product*

- Directions: Depending on the size of the group, place participants in groups of two and hand each group a set of student experiences to role-play.

- The groups will also receive Respondent cards with language that reflects fixed perceptions of success like:

– "Just try harder"
– "I have no idea how to help you."
– "Maybe you just can't keep up."
– "Everyone does it this way."
– "Well, what were your grades in high school?"

• In groups, participants will read aloud a situation. One participant will play the role as Student Experience and the other will play the role as Respondent.

• Participants will then rewrite a dialogue that uses inclusive techniques, reframing, and make suggestions for sustainable strategies for success.

• Volunteers will be asked to act out the new scripts.

Final Closing: Guiding Questions

1. What have we learned today about each other?

2. How do you think these metaphors may change? Will they remain the same tomorrow or twenty-years from now?

3. Why was it important to set principles first?

4. How did we feel after rewriting the script?

5. What can we do tomorrow?

Figure 1
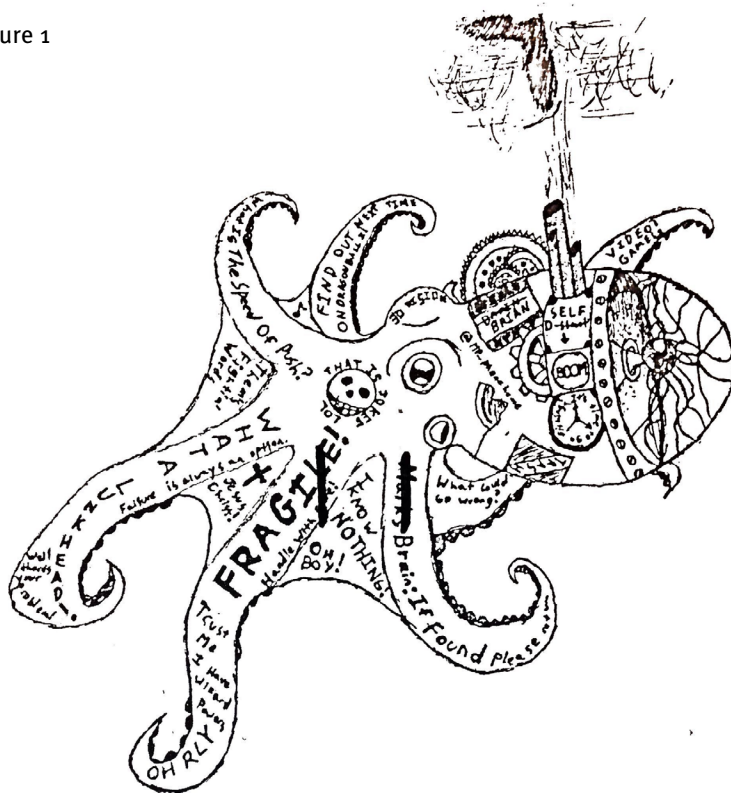
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