THE AHEAD JOURNAL

No. 2

A Review of Inclusive Education & Employment Practices

ahead
Association for Higher Education Access & Disability

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Welcome to Journal number 2

from Ann Heelan, Executive Director AHEAD

Changing thinking about disability: Why is it such a big deal?

On the one hand AHEAD is actively promoting the idea of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) which is an **idea elastic enough to fit every kid** (Rose, Harvard Education Magazine 2014). We are talking to colleagues in HEI about it, organising training sessions and summer schools and the idea is growing. In higher education, staff working in disability support services feel the pinch. They understand that given the rising numbers of students and a shrinking pot of funding to provide supports, the way forward has to include the mainstream, and responsibility for including these students has to be shared with faculty staff, placement staff, careers and libraries. After all, every student learns differently and we know that one size cannot fit all, so the greater flexibility that is built into mainstream provision, then the less need there will be for add on supports for students with a disability. This is not to say that many students will not require individual supports - they will - but it is to locate responsibility for inclusion across the whole institution. UDL is an excellent framework for support staff to become more inclusive of a diversity of students in higher education and to create inclusive learning spaces.

This approach is visionary and forward-looking, but on the ground some policies are extremely difficult to shift. After all, we are still having the same conversation about examinations and what is a reasonable accommodation that we were having 20 years ago.

There is still considerable resistance to giving a student extra time to complete an examination. Why is this? Why is giving a student with an information processing difficulty 10 minutes extra in a critical exam such as the Leaving Cert such a big deal? Why do students need to prove beyond any shadow of a doubt that their condition is below specific percentiles in writing or reading in order to be granted extra time? After all, what is the examination actually assessing? Is it assessing their speed writing or their knowledge and ability to answer a question? According to Dr. Nicole Offesh

> **All the time in the world is no good if the student does not know the answer. Extended time in an examination for students who need it does make a difference and is related to their disability.**
> (NADP conference Manchester July 2015)

This particular conversation about extra time in exams to accommodate students with disabilities has been going on for years and it is tiring.

It is time to change this view of disability and move on from the medical model which locates the problem in the student rather than in the design of the learning environment. It is time to challenge this thinking and design assessments that are fair to all students and aim to assess the ability and knowledge of the student, not their speed of execution. Everyone wants to ensure the tests are fair to all students and everyone wants to maintain the robust integrity of the examinations, but there are many ways for students to demonstrate what they know including using computers and having additional time.

Within a UDL way of thinking there are multiple ways for a student to show what they know and we would like UDL to be considered as an appropriate framework within which to explore the concept of reasonable accommodations in examinations in the upcoming review by the State Examinations Commission.

September, 2015

From the Editor

Barbara Waters

Here we are with the second edition of the AHEAD Journal. Thank you for your positive comments on the first edition (still available on the AHEAD website if you missed it **www.ahead.ie**). I am overwhelmed with the range of work that is going on, and for your willingness to share it with colleagues.

Once again we have a really interesting mix of articles, photos and art work. Thanks for Dr Tim Cordes for his reflections on our perceptions, and do have a look at Ray Watson's amazing illustrations! Colleagues Michael Seery and Alan Hurst continue our theme of looking at the impact of universal design/ inclusive teaching and learning and Terry Maguire gives an up to date on the work of the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. There is a good range of work with students with varied disabilities and experiences. AHEAD keeps up the all important employer input with an entertaining exchange with Leslee O'Loughlin from Enterprise Rent-A-Car. AHEAD is also to be congratulated on its work tracking the data on inclusion of students with disabilities, a sample of which is included in this edition. The whole report can be found at **http://www.ahead.ie/datacentre**

This edition includes a book review, and we would be glad to hear about books you have enjoyed, or from volunteers willing to write reviews. Contact our sub-editor **lorraine.gallagher@ahead.ie** for details on how to submit an article, or with suggestions of topics you would like to hear more about. We would love to hear what you think of the Journal, and would greatly appreciate you taking a short online **survey**. I do hope you enjoy this edition of the Journal and have had a relaxing summer break.

Barbara Waters, Editor

September, 2015

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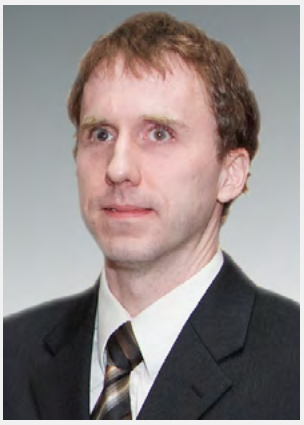
There to see the sights?



Timothy Cordes M.D., Ph.D.

Timothy Cordes is a Clinical Assistant Professor in the Department of Psychiatry, University of Wisconsin - Madison, USA. Dr. Cordes is also a Ph.D in biomolecular chemistry and graduate of the Medical Scientists Training Program at the University of Wisconsin - Madison, earning both a Ph.D. in Biomolecular Chemistry and an M.D. He is believed to be the only blind person ever to obtain these dual degrees. He has written computer software that uses sound to help sighted and blind individuals understand the structure of proteins.

I'm a physician and psychiatrist who happens to be blind. I had the wonderful opportunity to attend the AHEAD conference in Dublin this past March. When that finished, my wife and I visited the cliffs of Moher. We set out north with the Atlantic Ocean roaring to our left, and then we stopped to take it all in.

To a more distant observer, perhaps peering through a telescope, this may have looked a bit crazy—something a psychiatrist can say with some certainty. A blind man, perched three feet from a disastrous fall. **There to see the sights?** As a person with a disability, I encounter that tension, between the observer and their expectations, and my experience of the reality of the situation. We all see the world through our own lenses. As educators and the educated, we need to be keenly aware of this fact and have strategies to address it.

The viewer at the other end of the telescope, who is already relying on vision to assess the situation, might try to put themselves in my place, with no visual input, and conclude this is folly. But what this observer neglects to realise is that I've had years to accommodate to my disability. Move closer and one will see my white cane trailing over the edge. The cane, like the dog guide, is a common, familiar tool of the blind. It's something I've trained with, and it's as comfortable for me as your favorite pair of trainers. I may not see the edge, but believe me, I know it's there too.

Beyond the fact that I've learned skills to accommodate for my disability, it turns out that my brain may actually be different from the observer's. Neuroplasticity is a process by which the brain can make certain changes to itself in response to new demands or injury.

Imaging studies, for example, show that, in a person who is blind, the part of the brain usually devoted to interpreting visual information can be activated by reading Braille, or that auditory cortex can be active while a person who is deaf is lip reading. Our brains are different, and thus, we can do different things with them.

The observer might also conclude that appreciating the cliffs must be a visual process. Yet, without vision, I took in the sounds of the birds and the surf far, far below. I smelt the salt and felt the breeze in my face. I could hear the space, the absence of buildings and modern mechanical noises other than an accordion playing far off. Visiting the cliffs didn't need to be a visual experience. When we assume that how we think about something is actually how it is, we are falling into the 'model trap.'

The model trap

In my career, I've needed to evade the model trap repeatedly. When studying biochemistry, the standard paradigm is that we understand protein structure by looking at pictures. However, proteins are so tiny that no one could actually see one because they are smaller than the wavelength of light that we'd try to see them with. Instead, people have seen pictures derived from more fundamental data, which is usually just a list of atoms and their coordinates in three-dimensional space, but they assume that this is what a protein 'looks like.' When it came time for me to study protein structure, I needed to acknowledge this assumption if I would have any chance of challenging it.

I took stock of the resources that I had to tackle the structure challenge. I had experience with computer programming and music, and there were freely available programming modules to help with sound and graphics. I was blessed with the support of my thesis advisor, Katrina Forest, and I had a crystal structure of a protein that I needed to understand.

I set to work. I developed a way to describe a small piece of the protein using text and speech output, and used musical cues to indicate its spatial location. However, my program still didn't say anything about the overall shape of the protein, which is critical to its function.

I mentioned my problem to a lab mate, who was a former punk rocker, and he said, 'Why don't you play the protein?' **Why don't I play the protein?** It was a great question, and this was one of those 'why not?' moments that was a turning point in my life. When you're avoiding traps, it's best to think broadly. So, I tweaked the software to step along the protein's backbone, playing musical tones as it went. Hearing the protein's music told me, and a sample group of people when we tested it, about its shape. Finally, I added graphics routines so that a colleague and I could work together, each of us understanding the structure in our own way.

As educators and those seeking education, we must avoid these conceptual traps. First, we must acknowledge our biases, by asking what are we bringing with us? What have been our prior experiences with disability and confronting challenges, and what does our culture say about it? Then, we define the fundamental goal as precisely as we can. For example, for me, being a psychiatrist is about accurately assessing a patient, building a treatment alliance, and making sound medical decisions. My goal has nothing to do with a visual inspection of the patient. We need to draw deeply and broadly from our experiences and those around us. One of the best ways to do so is direct dialogue. Perhaps, as I'm feeling the breeze in my face and listening to the sea birds, the observer realises the distance between us, puts down his telescope and walks over to engage with me.

The sound of the surf echoed in my memory as the bus rumbled away. Like the waves straining against the shore feet below, the cycle of straining against limits goes on. As eventually, the gentlest of waves wears away the hardest of rock, so too, over time, with awareness and dialogue, we can break down barriers between people with disabilities and the education they seek.

The Flipped Classroom: Rationale and Approaches for Higher Education

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Flipped learning has emerged as a popular teaching strategy in higher education in the last five years. Like many educational innovations centred around technology (e.g. MOOCs and 'clickers'), hype and enthusiasm can help spread the idea widely to the education community, often overselling the potential of the innovation without firm evidence from the literature to back it up.

Flipped learning has developed out of the classroom and education researchers are catching up to evaluate its impact on learning and explore its use as a teaching method. In this paper, I intend to explore the concept of flipped learning so that educators who may wish to implement the approach in their own practice can make some informed decisions about how they might use it in their own curriculum. In doing so, the paper will:

1. Draw on the literature beginning to come out on flipped learning to provide a rationale for the approach.
2. Use literature reports and experience from my own use of flipped learning to highlight typical approaches educators take.

With a surge in interest in flipped learning, definitions of what 'flipping' actually is abound. The Flipped Learning Network sought to formalise the definition of flipped learning so that the key components of the model would be maintained when the approach was adopted by educators (**http://www.flippedlearning.org/definition**). Central to their definition is that as well as moving the 'direct instruction' component of a lecture to before the lecture (by way of students watching videos or doing some reading in advance of the lecture), the lecture environment itself becomes much more flexible, consisting of group activities, presentations, problem solving, or other student work. In other words, the presentation of material in advance of class allows the teacher to move away from the traditional lecture setting and facilitate a more active learning environment.

Rationale for flipped learning

Flipped learning has emerged as a classroom innovation by teachers 'at the chalk-face'. In general, those who advocate flipped learning argue that it allows students to approach new material in their own time at their own pace in advance of class, allowing the class time today with difficulties in understanding, address misconceptions, and generally push towards a deeper understanding of the material (O'Flaherty and Phillips, 2015). Students have a more active role and assume responsibility for mastery of the material.

But with any change to educational practice, we have a moral responsibility to address the question: is there evidence that the learning is at least the same as the method which has been replaced? Furthermore, is it possible to align the new teaching method within an educational theory?

Much of the literature on implementing the flipped learning approach in classrooms focussed on student evaluations of the approach. These are overwhelmingly positive. For example, Smith published results for his implementation of flipping introductory college chemistry and reported that students found the pre-recorded lectures useful, and agreed that the class time was more engaging. A majority of students found that the in-class work helped them with their subsequent study and homework (Smith, 2013). More recently, Fautch has reported her use of flipping in a mid-level chemistry classroom and considers it that it may help students take more ownership of their learning (Fautch, 2015).

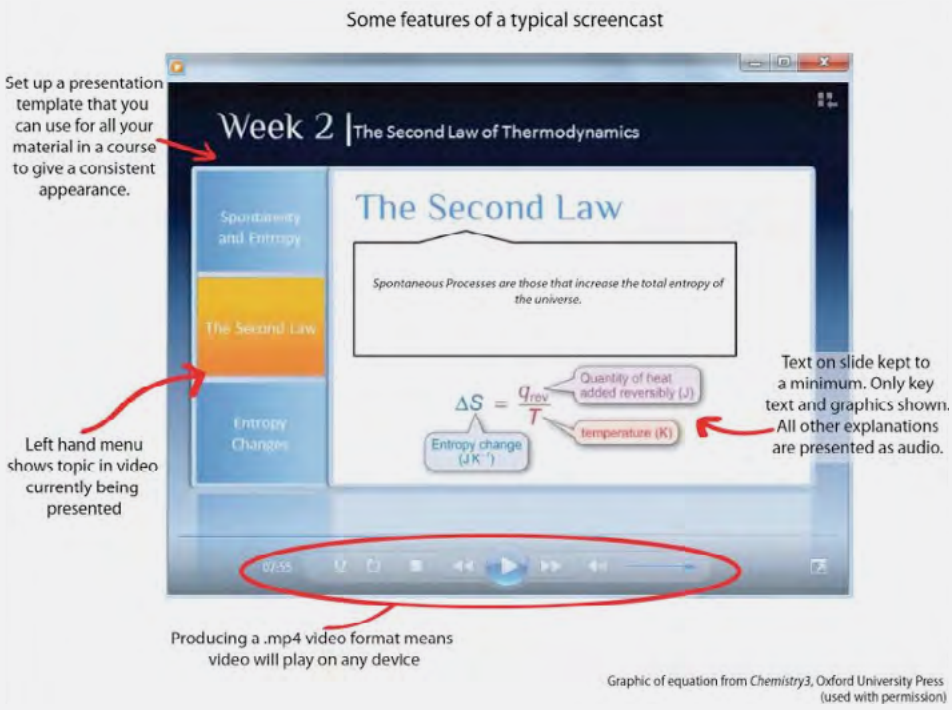
With an increasing number of reports on the implementation of flipped classrooms in recent years, attention turns to grounding the approach in an underlying theoretical framework. An obvious one to consider is cognitive load theory. A criticism of the traditional lecture is that a lot of new information is presented to learners in a short time, and it is difficult for the working memory to process this information and relate to what they know. Even in active learning classes, information for consideration is often presented for the first time. With flipped learning, providing

students with material in advance of class means that students have some time to process the new information at their own pace, and in an environment and format that suits them. Grounding flipped learning in cognitive load theory has recently been considered by Abeysekeraa and Dawson (2015) who argue that flipped approaches may improve student motivation and help manage cognitive load.

Approaches to flipped learning

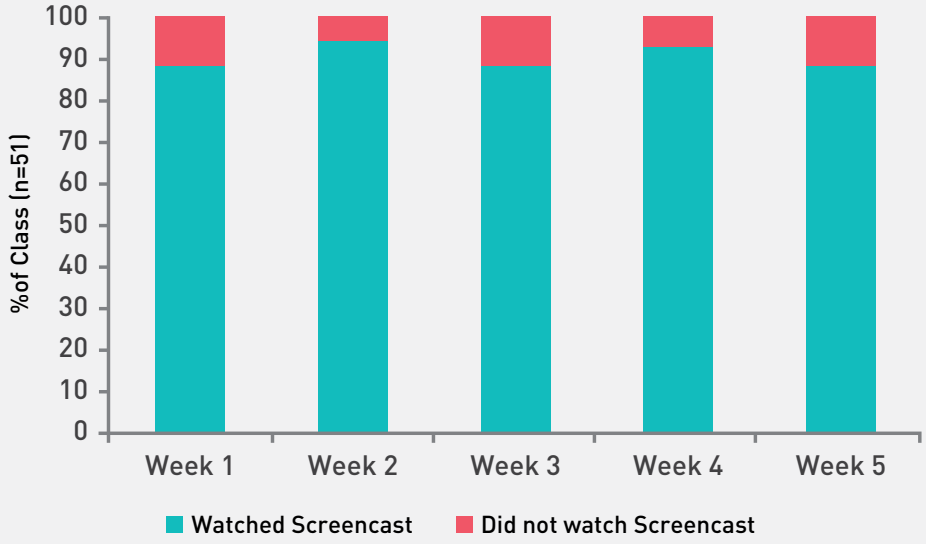
How do educators interested in using the flipped learning method approach it in their own classrooms? In general, there are three components to be considered: the format of the material provided to students prior to the face-to-face time; the activities that will be conducted during the face-to-face time; and the assessment or monitoring of student progress.

Advance materials for students to view before the class time are central to the flipped approach. While this material can be assigned reading, the most common medium is some form of video presentation. These can be a recording of the previous year's lecture, although most implementations reported in the literature use bespoke 'screencasts' – where a purpose-made slide presentation with narration is made available to students to watch. This was the case in my own work (Seery 2015). Some general principles are available for considering the design of screencasts (Seery, 2014). In addition, to allow students explore topics in more detail, they are pointed to the reference text book, so that they can read further or try out some textbook examples. A particular part of my own implementation was to structure students' approach to both studying and using the textbook, so the screencasts were designed to build in this outside lecture activity time in a formalised manner. This was done using a gapped handout that students use while watching the screencast. This includes spaces for students to add diagrams, try suggested problems, and annotate notes in a structured way.



Some general features of a screencast (Seery, 2014)

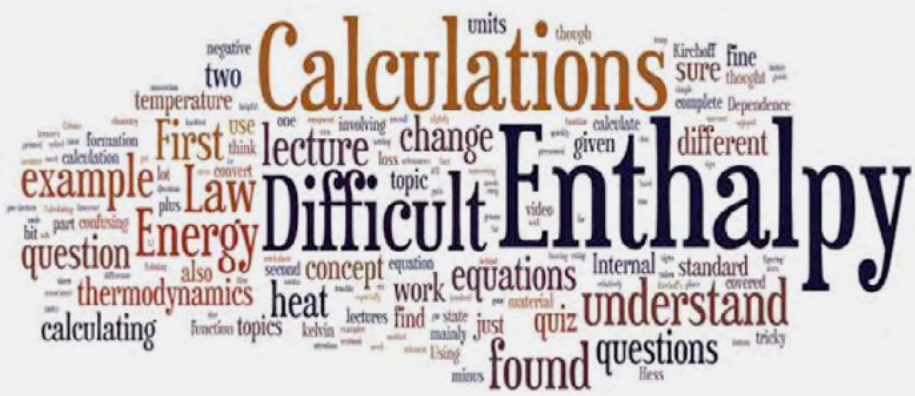
Two concerns arise here for the teacher. The first is whether students would engage with this material at all. As the screencasts were hosted on the virtual learning environment, usage figures can be tracked. In my own implementation, 92% of students watched the screencast each week, 4% (a different 4% each week!) missed the viewing, and 4% were not active on the module. Usually a reminder to students who missed a video worked as a prompt for them to engage the following week. The second concern is the amount of time required of students to complete the pre-lecture work. Smith noted in his study that half the students agreed that the approach was more burdensome with additional workload outside of class, although they found it useful. Therefore care should be taken to require an amount of work that students can feasibly complete in their own time.



Proportion of students watching screencast video prior to lectures (Seery, 2015)

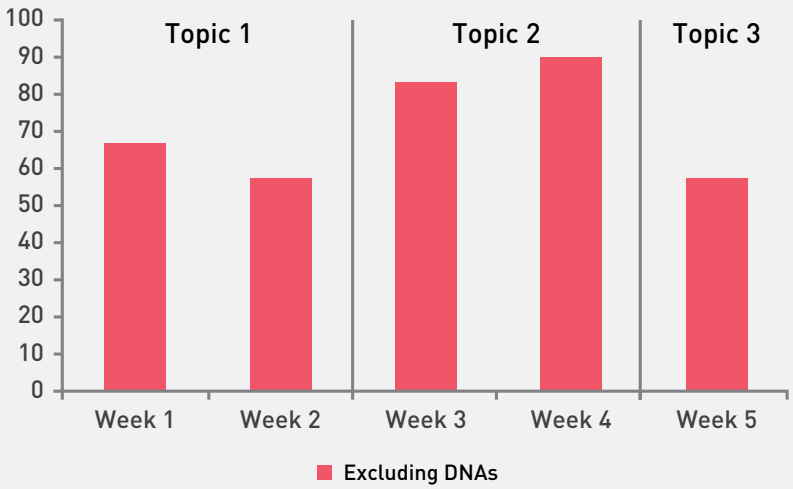
Activities to be conducted in class are varied, and include problem solving, group project work, presentation, etc. Depending on the discipline and the desired outcomes, the face-to-face time can be used to allow for students to be actively involved in using the content presented to them prior to the lecture for some task. In my own case, after a brief re-cap of some of the main points of the pre-lecture material (to help students focus on the topic), students were presented with problem sets in two phases. The first were algorithmic type problems, which mimicked the examples students were asked to try in the pre-lecture work. This meant that any difficulties could be dealt with, and some principles re-explained. The second phase was to use more general problems, so that students could take their recently acquired knowledge and apply it to more involved problems. Students completed these in groups of three, which is a convenient arrangement in a tiered lecture theatre, with large classes. Regular feedback on progress during the class time allowed for students to get a sense of their own progress, and questions to try after class were available for students who wished to continue this work.

Students were regularly asked after watching the pre-lecture what they found most difficult about the material just covered. The culmination of these responses (see Wordle example) allowed for some direction in the first phase of the in-class problem work.



Word cloud of responses to the question: 'what did you find most difficult in the topic just covered?' allowed for in-class work to address difficulties (Seery, 2015).

Assessment is a crucial component in considering the flipped learning model, probably more so at higher education. Students are busy people, and with a number of academic demands on their time; it is at best pragmatic to recognise that students should receive some reward for their pre-lecture work. Awarding it some assessment marks also indicates the value that is placed on it by the lecturer. In my module, 10% of the module previously awarded to a mid-semester test was instead given to 5 weekly quizzes (2% each) that students would complete prior to the lecture. This was an incentive to watch the pre-lecture screencast, and complete the worked examples indicated. The pre-lecture quiz tended to follow on directly from this material, so that students who engaged with the material were rewarded with the quiz marks. This ensured the high engagement with the screencasts mentioned above, which was rewarded with generally good average assessment marks.
In terms of an assessment method, it was likely a fairer measure of student knowledge in a particular moment than the old in-class test, and also allowed students instant feedback on their performance.



Quiz marks for weekly pre-lecture quizzes (excluding the did-not-attempt students mentioned above).

Conclusions

Flipped learning is still relatively new in higher education, although instances of it are growing rapidly. While we should always monitor closely any new approach for its effectiveness, a growing body of evidence around interest and engagement suggests that it is a viable approach. Integrating the approach in a solid educational framework is nascent, but early reports bode well. The method on the whole allows for a diversity in teaching methods and materials, provides new opportunities for assessment and feedback, and empowers students to take some ownership and control of their learning. I for one will be continuing the experiment for another while yet.

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Coming Ready or Not – Supporting Disabled Students in Changing Times in England

Alan Hurst was formerly Professor, School of Education, University of Central Lancashire, Preston, UK

Alan Hurst, has published books and articles, lectured, and led workshops in many countries, been a member of several significant and influential policy groups, and been the recipient of a number of awards for his work on the creation of inclusive education for disabled students in universities; his best-known publication being a staff training handbook. Currently he chairs the Disabled Students Stakeholder Group for the Student Loans Company and is guest editor for the AHEAD (USA) Journal of Post-Secondary Education and Development. He is the independent chair of the Accreditation Panel of the National Association of Disability Practitioners (NADP).

As I began to prepare this article, my two granddaughters were playing a game of hide-and-seek. True to the rules, one went to hide whilst the other counted to one hundred before shouting, 'Coming ready or not!'. It struck me then that this phrase would be an appropriate title for my paper given what I want to say – so thank you, Eva and Bo! Let me explain.

It is clear that in many countries, different approaches to supporting disabled students in third level/higher education are beginning to gather momentum. The strategy underpinning most of them involves a shift from being reactive to being proactive, the latter focusing on strategy and on anticipation and moving away from post-hoc actions for individual students. For instance, some years ago, in one university a lecture to a year group of about 300 students involved making adjustments for some 30 individual students. After persuading the tutor to create notes in advance and make them available electronically so that students could change font, type size, colour contrast etc. the number of students requiring changes fell to just 10. The first major concern with universal curriculum design can be demonstrated by the number of conferences, keynote speakers and workshop sessions on the topic - for example, the AHEAD conference in Dublin in March. (The proceedings can be accessed via AHEAD's website at **www.ahead.ie**) The second major concern is with inclusive pedagogy where the approaches to learning, teaching and assessment are intended to embrace the needs of a variety of students including those with a range of impairments. I shall return to this second concern when discussing professional development for disability services and teaching staff later.

Implications for the role and responsibilities of specialist disability services staff

The spread of these two features has significant implications for the role and responsibilities of specialist disability services staff (although being strictly accurate, at the time of writing, there remains a lack of clear research evidence that universal curriculum design and inclusive pedagogy have a positive impact on the experiences of disabled students and their levels of attainment). I think too that there are implications for others, especially teaching staff. There will be a need for universal curriculum design and inclusive pedagogy to be included in both basic and in on-going staff training and professional development – in which disability specialists ought to have a role. This is just the first of a number of implications which will be explored in what follows.

To begin with, disability services staff will need to work more strategically to ensure that they can influence important decisions on policies and practices. For example, they could be useful participants in groups and committees responsible for validation of new courses, periodic reviews of existing courses, and quality assurance. As a simple example, questions should be asked about the impact of the proposed learning approaches used in the course on students with a range of impairments. It might be that the programme includes a work placement as a core non-negotiable element, so this should be explored in relation to disabled students. **Next,** disability services staff will need to adapt many of their current practices to act in a more advisory and consultative capacity since in a genuinely inclusive institution disability is everybody's responsibility. Taking academic assessment as an example, disability specialists should be there to offer advice on a range of possible adjustments (based on knowledge and experience) and not to make the actual practical arrangements such as invigilation or venue. Even if universal course design and inclusive pedagogy have been introduced, there will still be a small number of disabled students who will continue to need changes to the assessment programme. However, to return to the point, whoever is responsible for exam arrangements must take on responsibility for actually making any modifications which are needed by disabled students.

A crucial aspect of the changed role is involvement in training and professional development. However, depending on their own backgrounds and experiences, some disability services staff might have to acquire more knowledge about curriculum design and pedagogy in order to establish their credibility in this field. Once they have this and are recognised as such, they can participate fully in training and development for other staff. They will need to consider ways of delivering these. Using my own sessions as an example, in more recent times I have moved the focus away from using case studies of individuals with physical, sensory, and non-visible impairments towards exploring issues relevant to inclusive course design, learning, teaching, and academic assessment.

Often, I use the strategy advocated in the Teachability programme which involves asking teaching staff to first identify the core, non-negotiable elements of a course they are familiar with, then to consider the barriers these might present for students with a range of impairments, and finally to suggest ways in which these barriers might be overcome (SHEFC 2000). Looking back, I think that it is fair to claim that what the Teachability programme was attempting to do from the year 2000 onwards was well ahead of its time. It is necessary to recognise that all staff are under great pressure in terms of having time to attend sessions; also, there could be limits to the funding available to support attendance at events. One way is to make greater use of IT-based training, although this does not address some important issues such as whether participation is compulsory or by free choice. (See Hurst 2006 for a more detailed discussion of issues linked to training and development.)

So what might the future look like?

One valuable example comes from the Open University in the UK which has an excellent record of making high quality provision for its disabled students and has been a leader in the field. I can do no better than use the descriptive summary which opens a recent article which outlines the new development:

> The Open University has an established infrastructure for supporting disabled students. Historically the thrust of this support has focused on accessibility of materials once they have been produced. In 2012 the OU implemented Securing Greater Accessibility (SeGA) to raise awareness and bring about an institutional change to curriculum design so that the needs of all students, including disabled students, are taken into account from the outset of module design and production. A core component of SeGA was the introduction of faculty accessibility specialists (AS). (Slater et al 2015 opening abstract).

This development put the OU in a good position vis-a-vis the changes that are being made between 2015 and 2017 to the funding of disabled students in England. (Control of education in Scotland and Wales has been devolved to their respective national governments.) The process began in April 2015 when the then Secretary of State announced that the system of providing Disabled Students Allowances (DSAs) was to be modified. This was met with considerable criticism from the sector, much of which was about the timescale for the implementation of the changes. Since that first announcement, agreement has been reached with a new Secretary of State about a revised longer schedule for their implementation to allow everyone in the sector to get prepared for the new context. What has not altered, however, is the government's intention to monitor the spending on DSA to ensure that funds are directed towards the most needy, such as those who need considerable levels of support, and also to ensure that the institutions take on their proper responsibilities in an inclusive setting. For example, many of the services currently financed by the individual student's DSA are to be provided at no cost to the disabled students by the institutions themselves (SLC 2015).This will free up funds for the more targeted approach. Incidentally, there has been no mention by the government that the total amount spent on the DSA will be cut, but many have chosen to interpret it in that way.

Are we ready?

So, in England at least, change is underway. The question now is whether disability services staff are ready to respond. My personal view is somewhat negative; I feel that many still have work to do. I base my position on my experiences of working with the National Association of Disability Practitioners (NADP) on its accreditation scheme. (For a full account of the scheme and how it developed and is organised see Hurst 2015.) Since the scheme was implemented in 2013, many members of the NADP have had their applications returned to them for further work and thus could not be accredited. Advice about how to amend their submissions so that they reach the standard required for accreditation has been provided both by mentors and by members of the accreditation panel. It appears that those applications returned for revision demonstrate the need for staff to engage in more critical reflection on their actions and activities in their daily work and on more sector-wide issues too. This process needs to be informed by sound knowledge of some relevant key sources such as codes of practice and legislation as the very minimum. In addition, there should be some awareness of more general policy matters and their possible implications for disabled students – for example the annual reports from the Office for Independent Adjudicator for Higher Education (OIAHE) on the complaints raised by students (which does include a separate section on disabled students who have raised issues which their institutions could not resolve to their satisfaction). In addition it would be helpful if disability services staff had some awareness of recent relevant research such as that of Fuller et al (2009) whose book is actually called 'Improving Disabled Students' Learning'. They should also be familiar with discussions around various models of disability or about the nature of specific learning difficulties such as dyslexia.

After all, practice informed by up-to-date knowledge is a fundamental characteristic of working as a professional.

I hope that these comments prompt further debate and discussion. Let us not forget where we started and that game of hide-and-seek.

Change is coming – ready or not!

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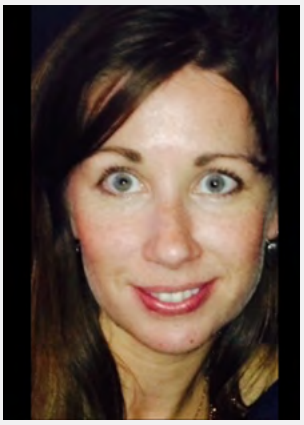
Students' Voices: Listening to blind/visually impaired students' transition needs



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Introduction

This article presents two student profiles from a recent report '**Giving voice to blind and visually impaired students transition experiences, addressing gaps in policy provision**'. (HEA, Dublin, 2015) which represents a small-scale qualitative research study into the senior cycle transition experiences of blind/visually impaired young people in Ireland.

The study reviewed current literature in the field and focused on the experiences of four students while also drawing on the multiple perspectives of family, service providers, educators and advocacy groups etc. The student cohort comprised of **Jack**, a current Transition Year (TY) pupil; **John**, studying for his Leaving Certificate; **Sandra**, preparing for her first year undergraduate degree exams and **Aoife**, enjoying her second year of her undergraduate degree. Pseudonyms are used to protect participant confidentiality. While the student voices are the heart of this study, the research team also chose to include the voices and experiences of their 'support circles' - these include parents, resource teachers, classroom teachers, special needs resource coordinators, parents, disability service, school principal, representatives from Féach parent support group for blind and visually impaired children, and Visiting Teacher Service. To ensure inclusion of as many stakeholder views as possible we decided to host a seminar on the topic of access to third level education for visually impaired/blind students. The 'Access to Higher Education for Blind/Visually Impaired (VI) Students in Ireland' seminar was held at Trinity College Dublin's School of Education on September 25th 2014, and was funded by the National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning. On the day there were 40 representatives from a range of stakeholder groups, including

students who led discussions. Some of the recommendations that emerged during this debate were included in this study (and this article).

The aim of this article is to highlight access to curriculum challenges experienced by two of the research participants, **Jack** and **John.**

Research methodology

The HEA pilot study was designed to investigate the transition experiences of young people who are visually impaired, and inform further more in-depth studies into this issue. As a result, qualitative research which emphasises documenting 'the world from the point of view of the people studied' (Hammersley 1992: 65) was considered the most suitable method. This preference makes this method an ideal match for the research goal of this study, as its investigative lens is sharply focused on the opinions, views and beliefs of the selected participants. This approach also offers as disability scholars Hartley and Muhit (2003:104) recognise 'the opportunity of closing the gap between the science of discovery and the implementation of such discoveries'.

Participants were selected and approached in consultation with professionals supporting these young people. Table A outlines each student participant's educational stage and the family members and professionals who also participated in this study.

Student	Education stage	Family & Professional Participants	Interview time (Approximately)
Jack	Transition year in large rural post primary	Mother, SNA, resource co-ordinator	50 minutes
John	Sixth year in large urban post primary	Parents, visiting teacher, resource co-ordinator, SNA	2 hours 10 minutes
Sandra	First year undergraduate student in a large urban university	Visiting teacher	1 hour 10 minutes
Aoife	Second year undergraduate student in a large urban university	College disability officer	1 hour 18 minutes

Table A: Student participants' education stage and their participating family and professionals

All of the professionals supporting these students have a vast range of expertise supporting young people with disabilities in education. In this study, these individuals shared experiences supporting both these particular students and other current and past pupils with visual impairments. In recognition of the critical role of family support, a representative from Féach, the parent group for visually impaired children, was invited to participate. The National Braille Production Centre perspective is also shared in this study, along with additional perspectives from a school principal, resource teacher and maths teacher from a school with a national reputation for supporting significant numbers of blind and visually impaired post primary pupils. In total, 18 semi-structured interviews were conducted.

Participants (parents & professionals)	Interview time (approximately)
Féach representative	45 minutes
National Braille Production representative	30 minutes
Sandra's visiting teacher	55 minutes
John's visiting teacher	2 hours 10 minutes
Aoife's disability officer	1 hour 15 minutes
School Principal	30 minutes
Resource teacher	1 hour
Maths teacher	40 minutes
Jack's resource co-ordinator	1 hour
John's parents (interview with John)	2 hours 15 minutes
Jack's mother	25 minutes
John's resource co-ordinator	1 hour 20minutes
John's SNA	20 minutes

Table B: Parent and professional participants and length of interviews

All of the student interviews took place face-to-face. **John** was interviewed along with his parents in their home. **Jack** was interviewed with his Special Needs Assistant (SNA) at his school. **Aoife** was interviewed at her college campus and **Sandra** was interviewed in her hometown in a local café. Three Skype interviews were conducted with professionals. These were with both visiting teachers and the disability officer. All of the other professional interviews took place face-to-face in locations convenient for the participants. All interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed.

A case study approach was considered the most effective method to capture the qualitative data, in composing the student profiles for this study. The strategy was adopted to facilitate weaving in the qualitative data shared primarily by students themselves according to the emergent themes. While supporting information from family members and professionals was also included, the individual profiles aim as much as possible to 'give voice' to these students particular concerns, beliefs and experiences. Documenting the supporting perspectives from the wide range of professionals was presented in a thematic analysis format. This method was chosen to support and complement the student profiles, while also presenting emergent recommendations.

Student profiles

For the purposes of this article two student profiles will be shared to reflect access to curriculum challenges experienced by blind and visually impaired students. These accounts incorporate students experiences shared and supported by their 'support circles'. Given the space limitations for this article, rather than zone in on particular access issues, the idea is offer a holistic experience which encapsulates the real lived experience for these students.

The recommendations made in the larger study are derived from these experiences. In order to give a big picture overview all of these recommendations are presented following Jack and John's profiles.

Jack

Jack is a sociable, confident transition year student with a visual impairment, attending a large rural public post primary school. Throughout his education, he has been well supported by his family, who are very proactive in engaging with his school and other national support services for people with sight loss. Jack is linked in with Irish Guide Dogs and attends their life skills course, which focuses on independent living skills such mobility and cooking, which he enjoys. At school, Jack is supported by his SNA, Mary, who accompanies him in all his classes. He has a visiting teacher, who has supported him since primary school, with whom he has less regular contact. Her role is to link in with the school to ensure he can access the curriculum.

Although when he was in primary school he learned Braille, he no longer does. Instead his resource hours are dedicated to improving his maths and spelling. Mary helps his access by taking notes from the board, ensuring the curriculum is accessible, and equipment is set up and working. Mary is keen for him to devote time during his transition year to improving his Braille reading. In class Jack uses an Opti Verso camera to access the curriculum and has been using it since sixth class in primary school. While it is an excellent support for accessing classwork, he finds it quite 'awkward' and wonders whether there would be another assistive technology option for him to access the curriculum. Aside from being a cumbersome piece of equipment, it often breaks which can cause considerable stress, as while he waits for it to be sent to the manufacturer to be fixed, he cannot access the entire curriculum:

> This (the arm of the Opti Verso) continuously snaps. It goes away and it takes three weeks to come back...it's very, very difficult.

When Jack is without the Opti Verso, he must rely on Mary to take notes during his classes, and after school he has to go over all the class work with his Andromeda at home:

> So I just go home and do it all then, like go back over everything I did in school yesterday. You would be wrecked.

Mary arranged a meeting with Jack's mother, visiting teacher and the School principal to request a second Opti Verso, to be stored on stand by for the Junior Certificate, just in case it broke down. This has since been arranged for Jack, which is a great relief:

> It's just good to know there is another one around, if this one breaks in an exam.

Jack is keen to find new technology support before going to college as he 'can't be carrying that around, like, it's too big and awkward'. Working with his SNA during his upcoming transition year, a priority is to investigate other options. Like most of his classmates, at this stage in his education he is not sure about his career choice, but he is considering third level education opportunities in Dublin and has already been to a couple of open days. It was through his network of friends made at Camp Abilities that he has learned about the latest assistive technologies and education options from other young people with visual impairment:

> You're around other people who are visually impaired and they're going through the same stuff as yourself so it's kind of nice for that. And you do find out more about, like, what's out there, different organisations like....as I got older I heard about Child Vision ... and then there's Vision Supports and they had their weekend actually up in Dublin, which I was at over the weekend.

John

John is a bright and diligent sixth year pupil with a visual impairment, currently preparing for the Leaving Certificate at a large urban secondary school. John acquired his visual impairment towards the end of his primary school education. He has many hobbies and interests both in and outside school. Academically, he enjoys business studies and music, while by his own admission he struggles with maths and spelling. John's parents are very supportive of his education and are proactive in engaging with all professionals supporting their son, in particular with his SNA Mary, the school's special needs coordinator Maura, and Sarah, his visiting teacher.

John and his family feel especially well supported by Sarah:

> We're fortunate in the position that the visiting teacher lives a few hundred yards away, she is very helpful, she has come down here on loads of occasions, and at this table she has taught John to do various things, like using that calculator.

They are acutely aware of the close proximity of their visiting teacher to their own home and how this plays a significant factor in the level of support John receives, and that other students may not to be as fortunate. Given the visual nature of maths, and as John was struggling with the subject, his visiting teacher recommended that his resource hours be solely allocated to support him with his maths course work. Typically John has these resource classes during physical education class times. John enjoys sports outside of school, however at school there are limited opportunities for him. His first year at secondary school represented a very challenging adjustment, both academically and socially. Despite feeling social isolation due to disability related challenges such as mobility and orientation within a large school, John has now settled well into secondary school.

John accesses the school curriculum principally through Braille. Accessing the curriculum materials involves Sarah, liaising with his school teachers and his SNA Mary, to order Braille versions and text files from the National Braille Production Centre. In general, his books are delivered in time for the start of each term, however, on occasions when there have been delays caused by last minute curriculum changes, this has caused him a great deal of distress and frustration, as he explains:

> There were problems, however, with some of the Braille books, especially in French - for a couple of months I was left with no book pretty much in the classroom... Mainly just because the books that would have been used for class were changed at the last minute, really, and that was a bit of a problem... I mean, I've noticed myself I've even, in terms of grades and that, I mean it was a lot harder to study, I was almost looking for something to do in class because I couldn't really follow well.

Communication breakdown between all the school personnel involved is identified by John and his parents as the root of the issue and they feel they are ultimately the ones responsible for coordinating communication:

> We primarily had to try and co-ordinate communication between all these people. Seven individuals (John's mother)... We found there were probably too many people involved and everybody thought everybody else was doing something, it was very disappointing. (John's father)

Ultimately, the person who is impacted upon is John, as he reports:

> It's quite frustrating and also quite disappointing to be honest, because as any student I trust my teachers, you know, and even, say, today, in French class, I was sitting there putting my hands out, what can I do, you know. You know, I mean, because even like if the book wasn't there, I don't think it's really too much to expect for the teachers to give you alternative work.

Since completing the Junior Certificate two years ago, John has been planning with the support of his parents and visiting teacher for his transition to third level education. It is not common practice for visiting teachers to participate in transition planning, as their role is focused on primary and post primary access to curriculum. Due to his health condition, John repeated a previous school year so has decided along with his parents to continue into fifth year. Although John's parents suggest that John would have benefited from a transition year, which focused on transition planning for his specific needs, exploring different technology supports, extra tuition in Braille and maths, and independent living skills; this, unfortunately, was not an option:

> Once Maura was saying that transition year would be great for him because he could do this and we could do more of the Braille stuff and get extra support in the weak subjects, but then we were having a meeting with the school about other issues, we realised that the resources aren't there, the money's not there and there's no way we could tailor make a package

> for John for transition year. I'm just saying like, for somebody with disability or whatever, transition year could be great. You could do your mobility skills down in Cork, you could do your one-to-one in your maths... they're the subjects that you want to do for fifth and sixth but there's no way that school was going to tailor make it, they just wouldn't be in a position to do it. (Mother) ...It's an opportunity... independent living skills. (Father)

At school, career guidance is limited to all class discussion and instructions about the CAO application. John's father's understanding is that no extra support is in place for students with disabilities for transition planning:

> I would say the fact that John has little or no career guidance was probably not all that different to his older brother... I don't think it's a factor because he was blind.

John and his parents have been very proactive in meeting with third level education institution disability services. Overall, they have found the experience worthwhile but warn in their experience that reception and support on offer for students with disabilities varies from institution to institution:

> Very non-standard, everything is specific when they teach... it varies from college to college, and supports vary. DARE programme is quite different in one college to another and it doesn't happen in some.

John and his parents have visited several colleges and were weighing up options between local and larger third level institution options. In some larger institutions, John felt adjustment may be overwhelming and he could just be 'a number', while at one institution of technology they came out walking on air:

> We thought oh my God, they're really bending over backwards, they really had a kind of holistic approach to the student, it wasn't all academic, it seemed to be very much like the door is open if there's any problems. (John's mother)

As John's father recognises, this was their individual experience - another student and their family may share a different story:

> Again, that was our experience, you could get another group of people in and they might be completely different.

Nevertheless, the positive openness of the meeting with that institution and their willingness to listen to John's needs was encouraging for both John and his parents:

> The important thing for me coming out of it was that John felt, you know, there's a possibility here. Because when you've got your Leaving Cert hanging over you and all, just to kind of know there's something out there for you... (John's mother)

> It's not the end of the world. (John)

Recommendations

Based on the analysis of the qualitative data gathered, the study made a range of recommendations, all relevant to the two student voices included in this article. These recommendations encapsulate key areas that require attention by the education system and schools in order to ensure effective transition outcomes for blind and visually impaired students and are made at system, institutional and school levels and full details will be in the research report due to be published by AHEAD.

Briefly these recommendations include:

- implementation of the Individual Education Plan (IEP) provision as outlined in the EPSEN Act 2004;
- review of the collaborative framework between school personnel and the Visiting Teacher Service with students and families, to make best use of scarce resources;
- provision for a structured transition plan to engage in outreach educational support activities between post-primary and third level sectors;

- development and implementation of a customised plan for transition year to address the needs of blind/visually impaired students on a national basis;
- provision of tailored career guidance support for blind/visually impaired students;
- review of the provision for reasonable accommodations by the State Examinations Commission and by schools;
- specific efforts to address mathematics and physical education access issues;
- inclusion of mathematics and technology innovation themes;
- mobility skills as part of physical education;
- inclusion of physical education and mobility themes;
- greater exploitation of 'mainstream' technology to address assistive needs;
- alignment of Braille and print materials delivery;
- establishment of peer support networks to reduce burden on scarce resources, for example through **DigiPlace4all**.

One direct outcome of the study related to a need identified to investigate the potential of mainstream solutions for blind and visually impaired senior cycle students - a new low vision aid app is in development. (The low vision app was a finalist in an educational publishing company's annual Hackathon.) The principal investigator together with the educational developer conducted a preliminary proof of concept test with the aid of a student from the study and the initial test proved that the aid demonstrated potential to provide improved access to the curriculum both in the classroom and at home.

This study recommends as a first step to implementing these research recommendations the co-ordination of a strategic meeting to bring together a collaborative team of providers (e.g. Visiting Teacher Service) schools, family advocacy group representatives and students to address these issues.

Implementation

To maximise the potential impact and minimise costs, implementing these recommendations should be done in such a way as to exploit common themes where present as presented in Diagram A. Diagram A (captured in accessible text) illustrates the interconnected strategy required to implement the new recommendations advanced in this study.

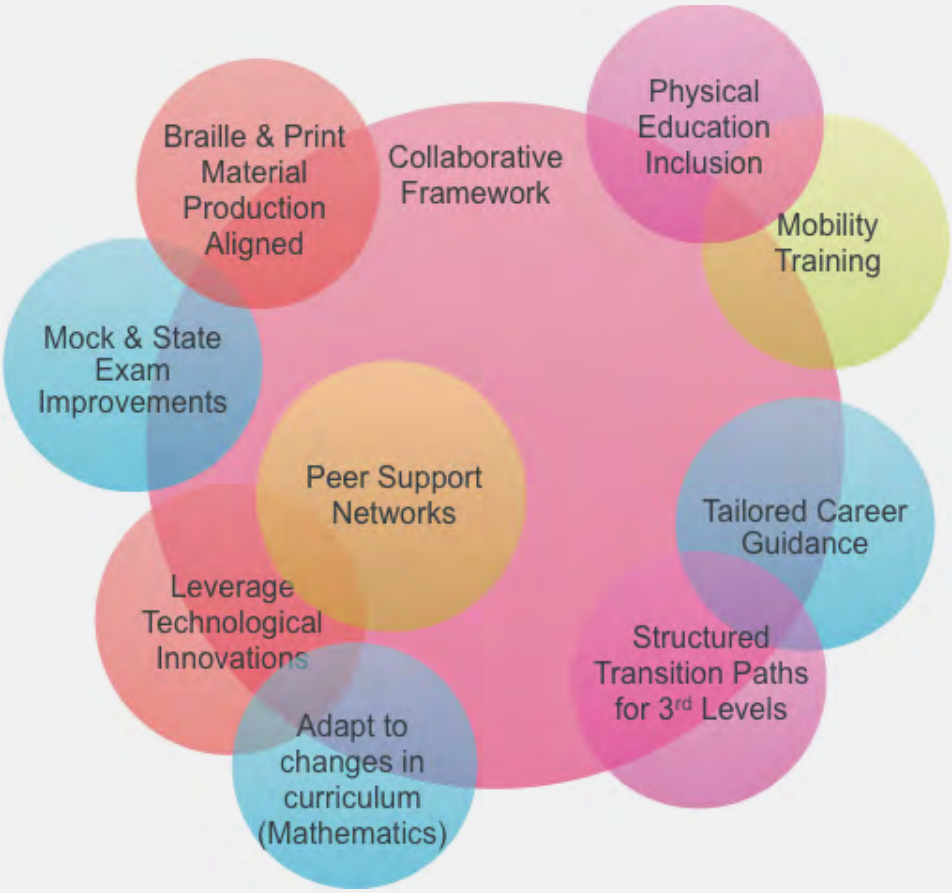

Diagram A: Strategy for implementing new recommendations on provision for blind and visually impaired students.

It is recognised that significant progress has been made in supporting blind and visually impaired students especially through provision of the Visiting Teacher Service. However, while a recent report from AHEAD (2015) indicates a positive trend for participation of blind and visually impaired students in third level, they are far less represented than other students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers.

The study on which this article is based was supported by AHEAD and Trinity College Dublin School of Education's Inclusive Education & Society Research Group and funded by the Higher Education Authority and AHEAD. AHEAD will be publishing the full research report in October 2015. For further details please contact **lorraine.gallagher@ahead.ie** and Dr. Esther Murphy (**esmurphy@tcd.ie**).

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Academic Support Service Adaptations in Response to the Psychosocial Needs of Third Level Students with Dyslexia

Suzanne McCarthy, Reg Psychol Ps.S.I.

Suzanne McCarthy is an Educational Psychologist who manages educational support services for the National Learning Network on a number of higher education campuses. Suzanne works in partnership with key personnel on these campuses to develop and provide academic supports for students who are struggling in college as a result of academic, social, or mental health difficulties. Services have also been developed to support students with dyslexia, dyspraxia (DCD), ADHD, and autistic spectrum disorders. She also liaises with academic, administrative and support staff on protocols and procedures for supporting students with disabilities and specific learning difficulties including reasonable accommodations in examinations, assessment and learning.

Jemma Deegan, B.A., M.A.

Jemma Deegan is an Assistant Psychologist with the National Learning Network. She currently works in the Student Learning Support Service in the National College of Art and Design, which has a high participation rate of students registered with dyslexia. She holds a Bachelor's in Psychology and a Masters in Applied Psychology and her past roles include HSE Adult Mental Health in Cork, St. Gabriel's Centre for Disabilities in Limerick, Bodywhys Association for Eating Disorders, and the Rutland Centre for rehabilitation in Dublin.

Hollie Byrne, B.A., M.Psych.Sc, National Learning Network

Hollie Byrne has completed a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology, a Masters in Psychological Science and is currently completing a PhD in Clinical Psychology. She has worked and researched in the areas of youth mental health, intellectual disability, specific learning difficulties and forensic mental health. As an Assistant Psychologist with the National Learning Network, Hollie has provided one to one assessment and intervention for students with specific learning difficulties, mental health difficulties, neurodevelopmental and physical disabilities in a number of third level colleges.

Dyslexia is conventionally defined as a specific learning difficulty which affects reading, writing and spelling; but perhaps less well known is the potential impact of these difficulties on an individual's psychosocial functioning. Psychosocial functioning is broadly defined as psychological and social development, and encompasses factors such as wellbeing, self-esteem, emotional regulation, coping, resilience, social relationships and interconnectedness amongst others. The unique perspectives of the psychosocial experiences of adults with dyslexia are often lost, as it is more common to study individuals under a broader classification of learning difficulties (Nalavany, Carawan & Rennick, 2010). Despite this, research into the prevalence of struggles faced by those with dyslexia, beyond learning and academic performance, is growing steadily.

This article provides a brief overview of some of the research on psychosocial difficulties among third level students with dyslexia, suggests recommendations for practice based on this evidence, and outlines current practices developed by the National Learning Network (NLN) in a number of higher education institutions in response to these findings.

Links between dyslexia and mental health difficulties have been explored, and dyslexia has been identified as a specific risk factor for anxious and depressive symptomatology (Mugnaini et al., 2009), with apparent gender differences in the manifestation of these difficulties. Females with dyslexia have a tendency to report more symptoms of anxiety and depression (Carroll, et al., 2005; Hales, 1994; Nelson & Gregg, 2012), notwithstanding the greater preponderance of dyslexia among males (Berninger et al., 2008; Chan et al., 2007; Hawke et al., 2009; Miles, Haslum, & Wheeler, 1998). Distinct gender differences in coping styles are also observed among dyslexic students, with females opting for more emotional coping (for example a tendency to experience frustration; lack of confidence; self-doubt; sensitivity to criticism; self-blame, and aggressiveness) and avoidance-based coping (for example, avoiding tasks which highlight their difficulties; opting for simpler spellings) (Alexander-Passe, 2006). Males tend to use more task-based coping, for example, being pro-active, focusing on their strengths, being persistent, stubborn and determined (Alexander-Passe, 2006), however their difficulties must not be underestimated on an individual level. Whilst these findings are useful in providing an insight into the range of coping styles, support that focuses on strengthening coping skills and resilience is best determined on an individual basis and through collaborative planning with the student.

Understandably, individuals with dyslexia experience a higher level of academic anxiety than their peers without dyslexia; however they also experience significantly higher levels of social anxiety (Carroll & Iles, 2006). Schooling constitutes a large proportion of a person's formative years and being a social situation in and of itself, anxiety related to academic performance may consequently

generalise to social anxiety (Carroll & Iles, 2006). Although literacy difficulties are independent of level of intelligence in dyslexia, individuals report feeling 'stupid' and experiencing chronic feelings of low self-esteem (Undheim, 2003). A number of individuals also experience bullying at school as a result of their dyslexia which in turn can compound feelings of low self-worth (Ingesson, 2007). Evidence indicates that people with dyslexia are less likely to thrive socially in general (Mugnaini et al., 2009), which may lead to isolation and a lack of social support.

Although significant evidence points to the prevalence of psychosocial difficulties among individuals with dyslexia, there are third level institutions whose support services are perceived to fall short in addressing this issue. A UK study into dyslexia and psychosocial difficulties found that students do not believe university provides sufficient emotional support, despite the existence of disability services (Carroll & Iles, 2006). Reform and adaptation of disability supports in a number of colleges is warranted in order to provide a more holistic service that addresses psychosocial difficulties as well as the academic challenges. The National Learning Network (NLN) has recognised these concerns and has developed a service which provides social, emotional and organisational support as an adjunct to academic support.

The National Learning Network Approach

NLN employs Assistant Psychologists (APs) in three third level institutions, including Maynooth University, the National College of Art and Design, and the Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown. APs have qualifications at both undergraduate and masters level in psychology, in addition to experience working with populations experiencing psychological distress. APs receive close guidance and supervision from a Registered Educational Psychologist. The APs and Educational Psychologist in this service also work in close collaboration with a wider network of NLN rehabilitation psychologists who have expertise in a number of different areas. NLN invests in the ongoing continuous professional development and training of APs and rehabilitation psychologists in response to the demands of the service and the needs of the students.

Needs Assessment

Within the three third level centres, the APs facilitate a holistic needs assessment in the initial meeting with students in order to obtain a comprehensive overview of the student's needs. This needs assessment process examines the student's past educational experiences, current academic, social and emotional concerns, previous assessment history as well as an examination of any other diagnoses that may exist and how they impact on learning. For students with a mild to moderate level of psychosocial difficulties, the AP employs low-intensity interventions tailored to meet the student's needs, which support achievement of academic potential, improvement of well-being and development of connectedness with their peers.

Where psychological distress is pervasive or complex and needs are high, the AP refers the student to a mental health professional in order for them to access intensive support. This is akin to the stepped care approach in many primary care psychological services where a wide range of individuals can avail of low intensity psychological therapies, reducing the need for specialist supports as a first line of intervention.

These low-intensity psychological interventions are drawn from a number of psychological approaches with a strong evidence-base. In order to provide the student with a set of functional and beneficial coping strategies, key concepts from the Wellness Recovery Action Planning approach are used, namely the 'Wellness toolbox' (WRAP; Copeland, 2002). Wellness tools may include recognizing personal strengths and developing coping strategies - fundamental factors for achieving success (Nalavany, Carawan, & Rennick 2011). For students whose emotional difficulties are rooted in negative thinking patterns, APs draw from Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT; Beck 1967). CBT is used to address the thought processes and assumptions that underlie their difficulties, a strategy that is particularly helpful at targeting an individual's beliefs about his or herself, others, and the world. It works to solve current problems and change unhelpful thinking and behavior that antecede and perpetuate psychosocial difficulties.

Managing, regulating and coping with emotions is also targeted, using skills such as distress tolerance and mindfulness, drawn from Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT; Linehan, 1987). Mindfulness is a well-established and evidence-based intervention which is not only effective in reducing stress for students (Beddoe & Murphy 2004; Rosenzweig et al. 2003; Shapiro, Schwartz, & Bonner 1998), but can also significantly improve reading comprehension, working memory capacity, and focus (Mrazek et al. 2013).

The service recognises the pressure on students to be able to cope with keeping up with college work, living away from home and self-management. Individuals with dyslexia commonly struggle with organisational skills which compounds the stress of trying to manage assignments and study (Peer & Reid, 2013). APs at the National Learning Network work with students to help develop personalised strategies for time management, organising belongings and meeting deadlines.

Given the evidence for lower levels of self-esteem and social anxiety, individuals may struggle to make friends and establish a social network. The importance of social interconnectedness is an essential aspect of building resilience (Bernier & Meinzen-Dick, 2014). To this end, support is provided by the AP's around social skills, which targets the improvement of conversation skills and development of confidence and assertiveness, with the aim of helping students integrate into college life.

Evaluation

Evaluation is a central practice in this inclusive academic support service. NLN has analysed trends in service use and feedback both quantitatively and qualitatively, the results of which have been presented at higher education conferences (McCarthy, Byrne & Larkin, 2014a; McCarthy & Byrne, 2014b; McCarthy and Byrne, 2014c; Byrne, 2014; Kennedy & Stewart, 2014). The service has recently adopted an outcome measure (**Student Outcome Star™; 'About us - Outcomes Star,' n.d.**) specific to student psychosocial functioning which is designed to measure the overall

progress made by the students, not only in an academic sense but in all areas of typical adult development including: practical skills, communication and social skills, learning skills, physical health, living skills, friends and relationships, well-being, social responsibility and work readiness. Evaluation serves to guide the service in its adaptation and development to meet students' needs and is essential to maintaining a high standard of service delivery.

The need for a holistic support service to be made widely available for students is abundantly clear, and a number of recommendations for practice can be made. Students with dyslexia should be made aware that their academic life is often intertwined with their social and emotional wellbeing, and therefore engaging with supports on all of these levels can create positive change.

The NLN service has found that an assessment of psychosocial functioning as part of the initial meeting with a student provides a valuable indicator of the type of support needed. Providing a service informed by research and grounded in psychology allows students to seek help in relation to their perhaps less visible difficulties and access low intensity interventions to improve wellbeing, coping, self-esteem and confidence; manage stress and anxiety, and foster social interconnectedness.

These practices have been successfully adapted by NLN in three Higher Education Institutes (HEI's) to create an inclusive academic support service which the organisation continues to evaluate, develop, and expand in order to meet the complex needs of the increasing population of students with dyslexia in third level. Finally, it is recommended that the inclusion of holistic supports is not only studied in terms of its effects on psychosocial development, but also in relation to academic achievement, student retention and the overall third level student experience.

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Illustrations – freehand illustrations from Ray Watson, Deaf graduate Ballyfermot College of Further Education

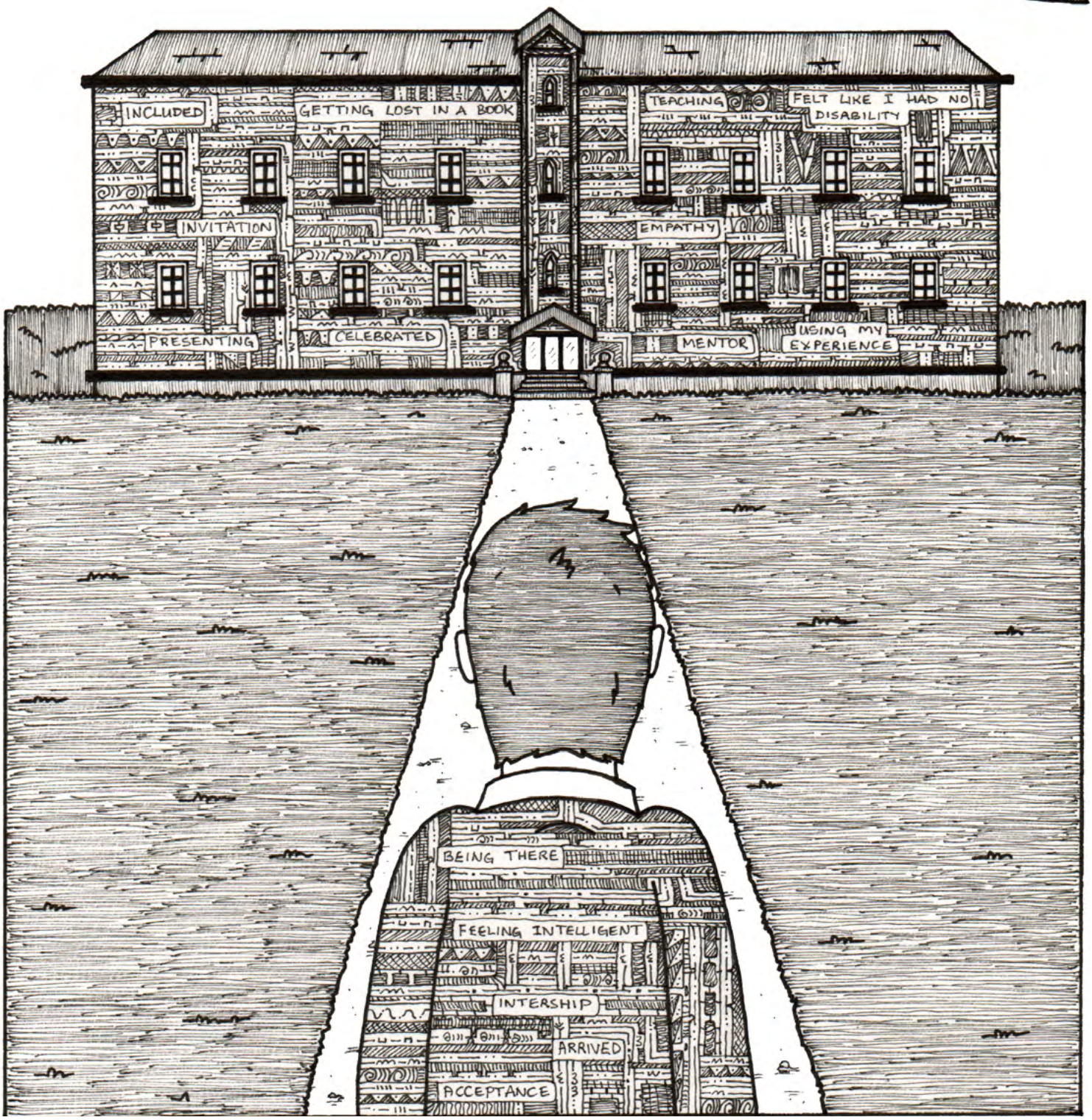
Ray Watson

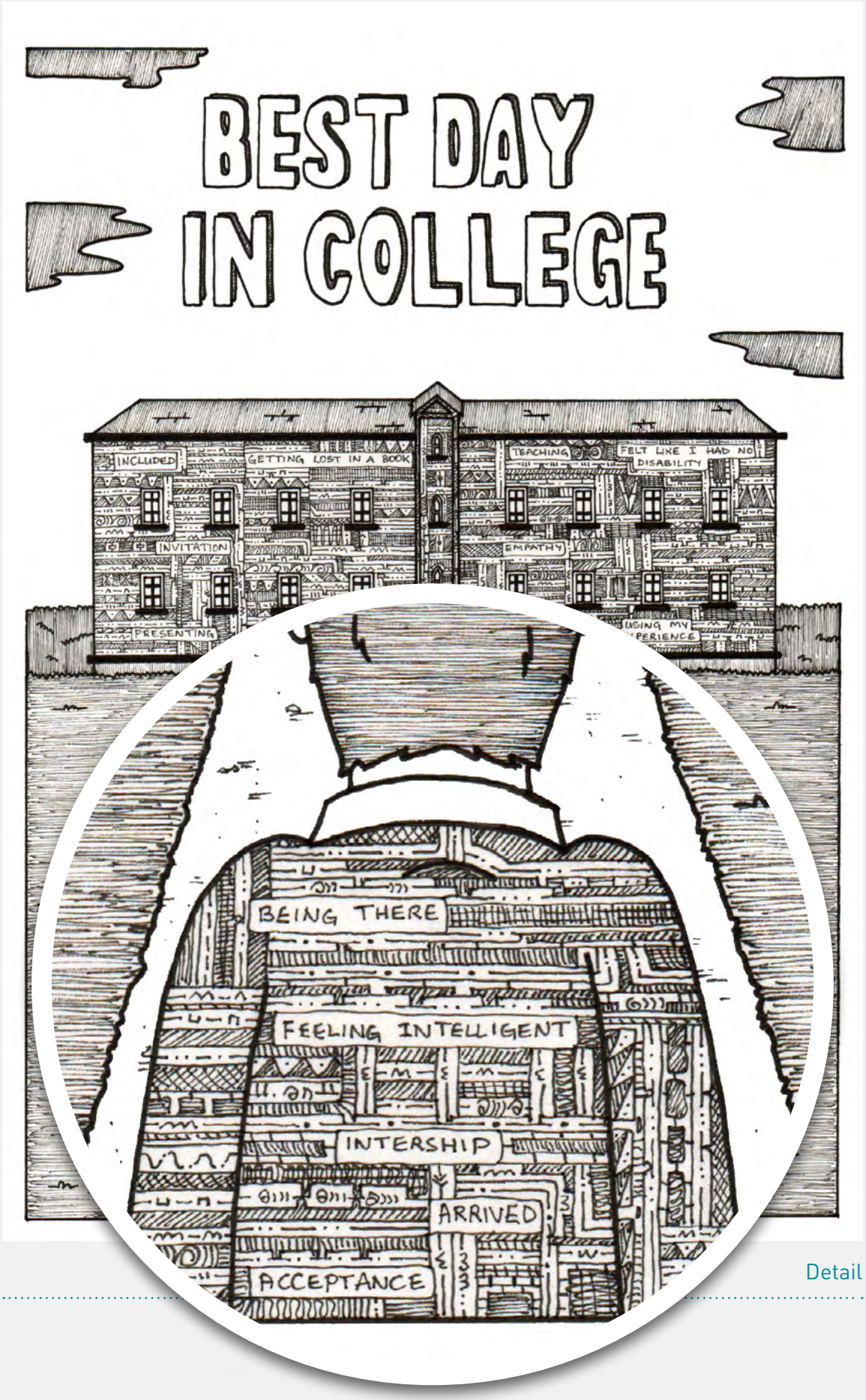
Ray Watson is a Deaf graduate with a Higher Diploma in Illustration from Ballyfermot Further College of Education. His freehand illustrations are unique and detailed, using words of emotion, sentiment and meaning which represents the characters or stories which he depicts. For more of his illustrations which involve occasion cards, 3D framed illustrations, murals and a mixture of photography and illustration, go to his Facebook page - **https://www.facebook.com/pages/Ray-Watson-Art-Illustration/224631707704952**

These illustrations were done as part of the Universal Design for Learning – License to Learn (UDLL) project. UDLL is a European project financed by Erasmus+. The project theme is Universal Design for Learning, and the main purpose is to examine how all students can get equal opportunities to learn using more flexible methods of teaching: **http://www.udll.eu/**

Zoom in (enlarge) to see the detail within the images in the following pages.

BEST DAY IN COLLEGE




BEST DAY
IN COLLEGE
INCLUDED
GETTING LOST IN A BOOK
TEACHING
FELT LIKE I HAD NO DISABILITY
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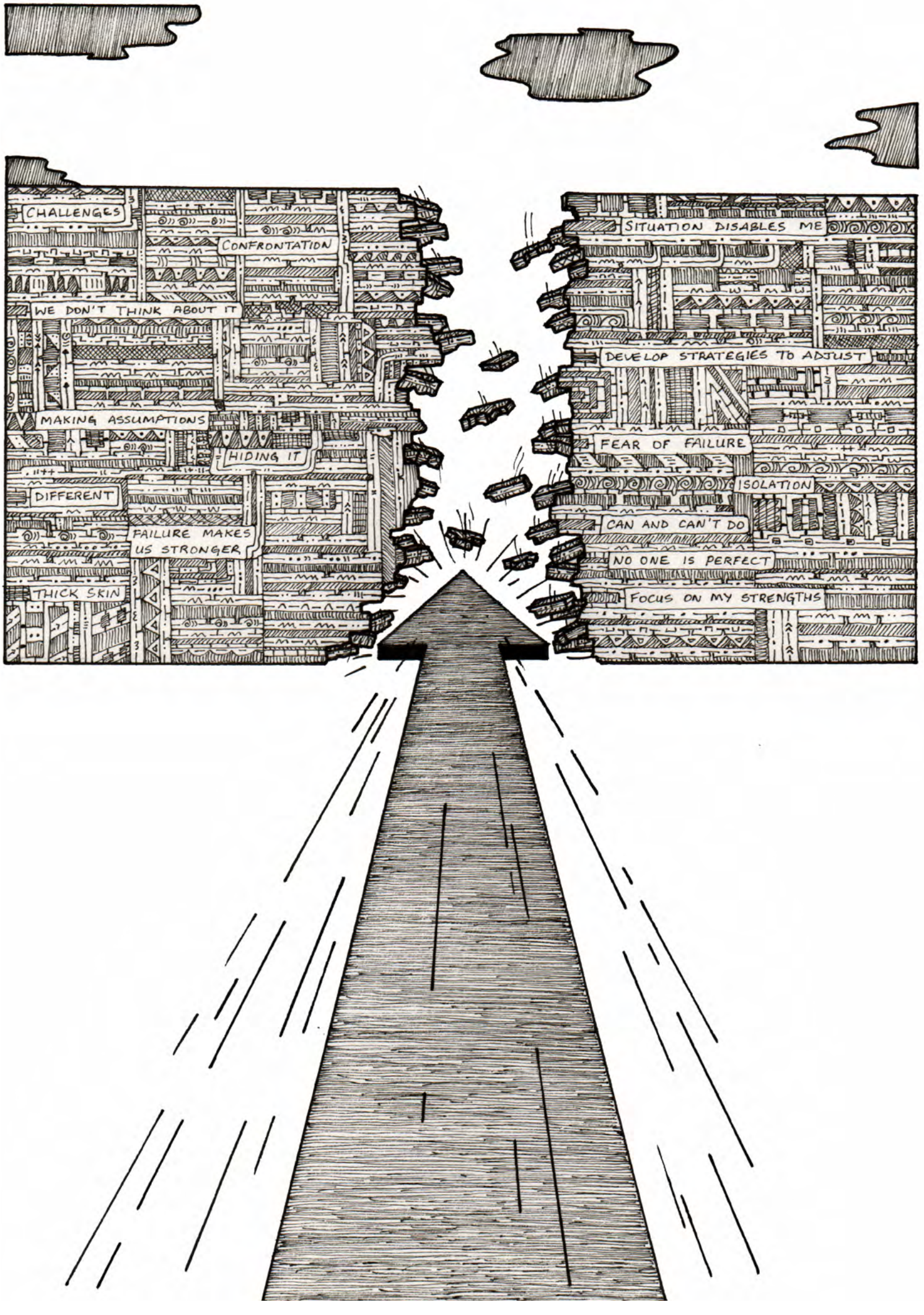
Detail


CHALLENGES
CONFRONTATION
WE DON'T THINK ABOUT IT
MAKING ASSUMPTIONS
HIDING IT
DIFFERENT
FAILURE MAKES US STRONGER
THICK SKIN
SITUATION DISABLES ME
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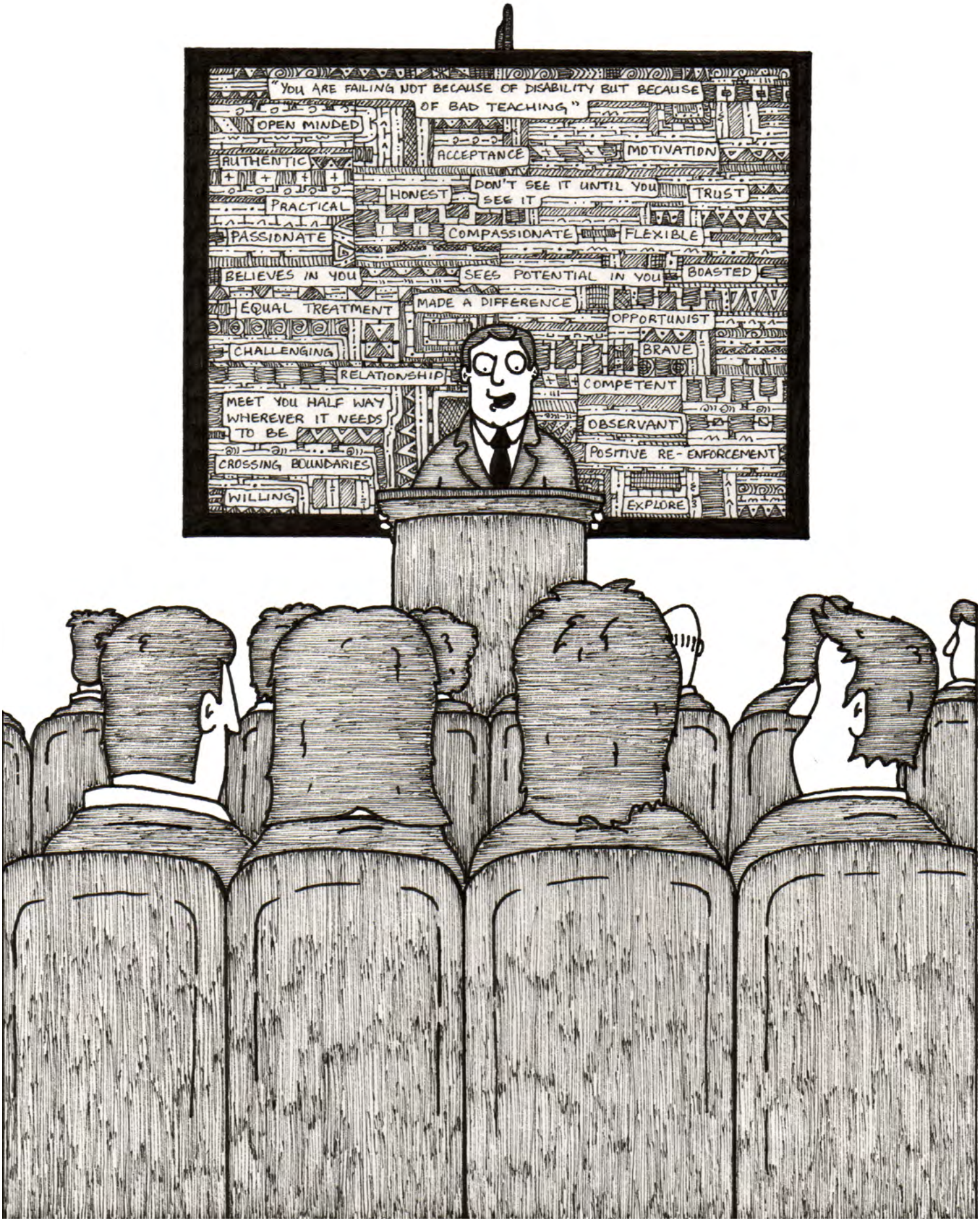
FEAR OF FAILURE
ISOLATION
CAN AND CAN'T DO
NO ONE IS PERFECT
FOCUS ON MY STRENGTHS


"YOU ARE FAILING NOT BECAUSE OF DISABILITY BUT BECAUSE OF BAD TEACHING"
OPEN MINDED
ACCEPTANCE
MOTIVATION
AUTHENTIC
HONEST
DON'T SEE IT UNTIL YOU SEE IT
TRUST
PRACTICAL
PASSIONATE
COMPASSIONATE
FLEXIBLE
BELIEVES IN YOU
SEES POTENTIAL IN YOU
BOASTED
EQUAL TREATMENT
MADE A DIFFERENCE
OPPORTUNIST
CHALLENGING
BRAVE
RELATIONSHIP
COMPETENT
MEET YOU HALF WAY WHEREVER IT NEEDS TO BE
OBSERVANT
POSITIVE RE-ENFORCEMENT
CROSSING BOUNDARIES
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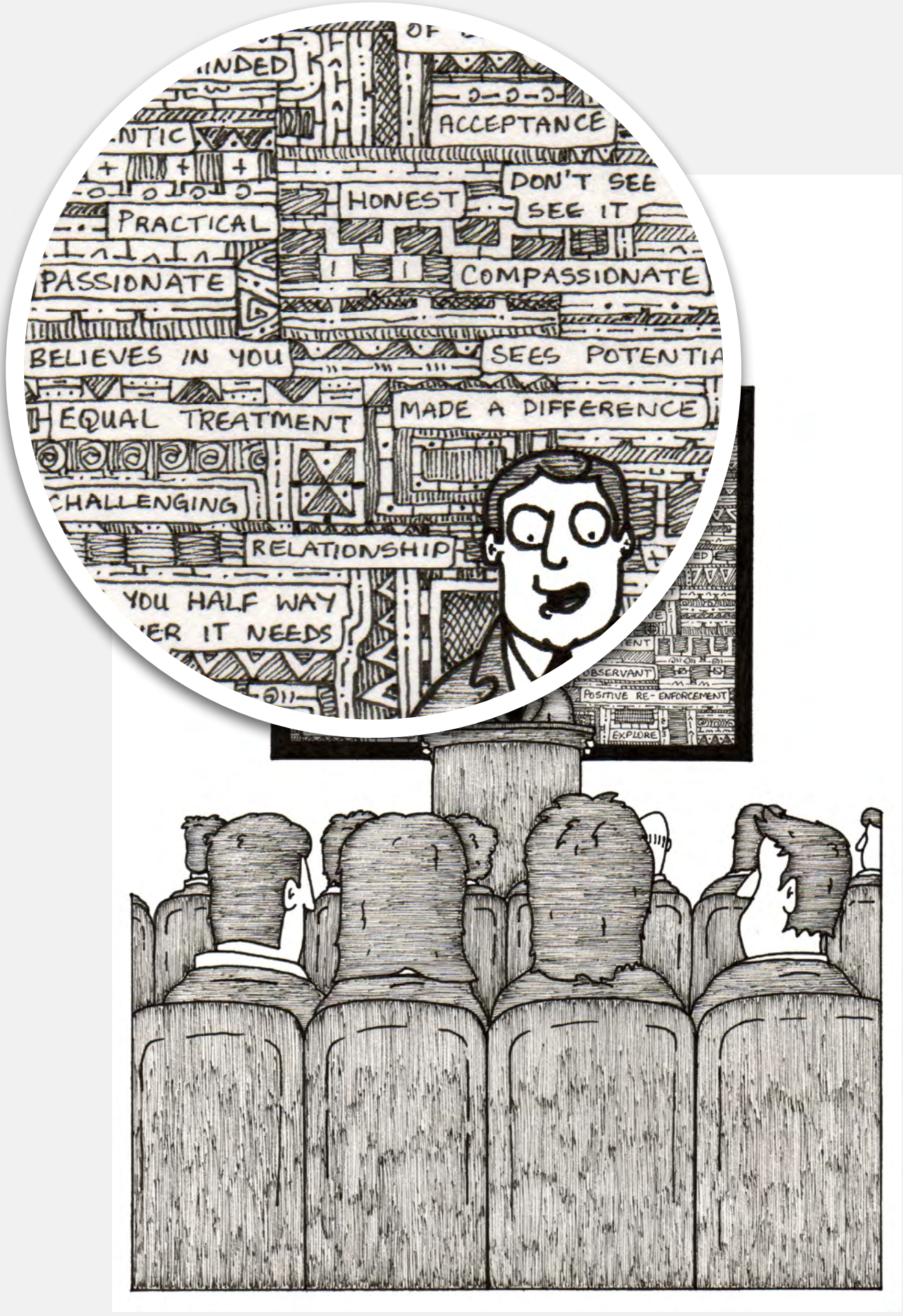
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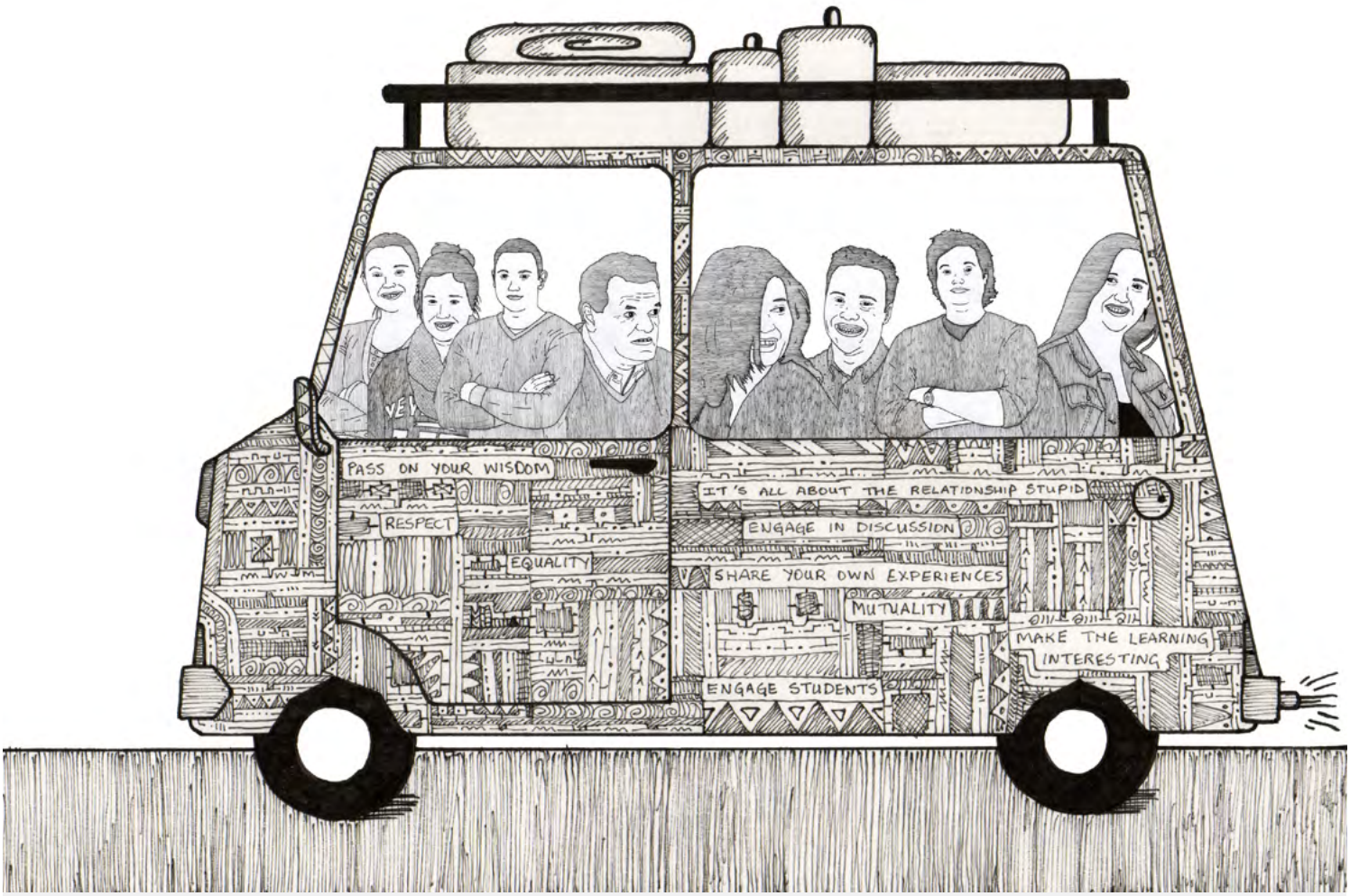
PASS ON YOUR WISDOM
RESPECT
EQUALITY
IT'S ALL ABOUT THE RELATIONSHIP STUPID
ENGAGE IN DISCUSSION
SHARE YOUR OWN EXPERIENCES
MUTUALITY
MAKE THE LEARNING INTERESTING
ENGAGE STUDENTS

Effective Transition to Higher Education for Students with Disabilities through Enhancing the Use of Assistive Technology in Second Level Education

Pat Hoey, Access Manager

Pat Hoey is the Access Manager in the University of Limerick with responsibility for the Access and Widening Participation activity of the University. He was also Senior Disability Officer in Dublin City University and Disability Liaison Officer in Dublin Institute of Technology. He has worked for the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability as Project's Officer managing a number of European funded projects in the area of employment and training for graduates with disabilities. He is a graduate of both Dublin City University and University College Dublin with degrees in Communication and Equality Studies.

Brenda Shinners-Kennedy, Head of Disability Student Support Service

Brenda Shinners-Kennedy is currently Head of the Disability Student Support Service (DSSO) with the University of Limerick. Her experience with students with disability and the technology they use has led to an interest in how students with disabilities are assessed and assigned technology for their education. Brenda has encountered many students who are given assistive technology that does not work for the task (education) that they are trying to achieve. The goal in the University of Limerick Student Support Service is that students are assessed and trained to suit their particular needs. The aim is that students with disabilities get the same opportunities as any other student. The DSSO strives to ensure they are experts in the area of assistive technology.

Conor Hartigan, Regional Assistive Technology Co-Ordinator, University of Limerick

Conor Hartigan has over 11 years' experience in assistive technology and student disability supports, as the Regional Assistive Technology Coordinator in the University of Limerick. Conor is a graduate of the University of Limerick in Information Technology and Telecommunications (2003) and is currently completing an MSc in Project and Programme Management. Conor has an in-depth knowledge, training and experience in all educational technologies. In particular Conor has a specific interest in training and support for students with visual impairments, screen reading, magnifiers, vision aids and researching new solutions to assist students in their education.

This article describes a project undertaken to review existing strategies for assessing assistive technology needs and to establish/adapt a model for assessing assistive technology needs in second level education using the SETT (Student, Environments, Tasks and Tools) model of assessment (Zabala 2005).

Introduction

The University of Limerick established an Assistive Technology Assessment Centre (ATAC) in January 2007 as part of the Higher Education Authority's Strategic Innovation Funding (SIF) activity. Assistive Technology (AT) is a generic term that includes assistive, adaptive and rehabilitative devices for people with disabilities, and the processes used in selecting, locating, and using them. AT promotes greater independence by enabling people with disabilities to perform tasks that they were formerly unable to accomplish, or had great difficulty accomplishing, by providing enhancements to or changed methods of interacting with the technology needed to accomplish such tasks. Some people with disabilities would be unable to attend, participate or complete their education or enter employment without the correct identification of the appropriate assistive technologies, and the training and support for these. For example, students with visual impairments would be unable to read a text book, complete an assignment, or take notes without the full and appropriate use of screen reader software.

ATAC was a key initiative of the Shannon Consortium group of Higher Education Institutions that included Limerick Institute of Technology, Institute of Technology Tralee, Mary Immaculate College Limerick and the University of Limerick. The aim of the Assistive Technology Assessment Centre was to increase the numbers of students with disabilities in Higher Education through the use, by students, of assistive technologies.

Building on ATAC

The newly established Education Assistive Technology Centre (ETAC) at the University of Limerick continues to provide AT assessment and training services to Limerick Institute of Technology, Mary Immaculate College and the Institute of Technology Tralee. The centre also provides services to students and staff in the University of Limerick. The primary goal of ETAC is to increase the participation, achievement and retention rates

of people with disabilities in education (with a focus on second, further and higher education in the mid-west region) through the establishment of a centre of excellence in the use of Educational Assistive Technologies. EATC will also focus on improving the employment opportunities of people with disabilities through the use of relevant assistive technology devices in employment.

Spreading understanding through CPD

The assistive technology team at the University of Limerick has successfully facilitated the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training on assistive technologies for the Special Education Support Service (SESS) of the Department of Education and Skills for over the past five years. This CPD training has included providing the national training programme, for the visually impaired visiting teachers, in the use of the relevant assistive technologies. ETAC has also facilitated the literacy support software training for SESS.

Widening access

ETAC has also run assistive technology courses for the general public every year since 2008. These courses are open to the general public and are attended by teachers, parents, students and educational professionals. The courses are hugely popular and there are a large number of requests from the general public, schools, disability organisations and others for additional courses.

Use of Assistive Technology

We have seen the increasing use of assistive technology by pupils with disabilities in second level education over the past number of years. However, experience in the University of Limerick is that, over a three year period, while 40 students arrived using assistive technology, there was no way of assessing their level of competency prior to their start in the university. Only five students had assistive technology assessment reports or recommendations and only two students were proficient users of their technology (power users). 30 students did not receive formal training in their technology and 35 students did not like using their technology in the classroom because they were too embarrassed or it was too big and it took too long to set up. Students in second level education felt isolated when using their technology - they often had to sit apart from peers because of table size or access to power points. Most of the AT users did not know how to access support for the use of their AT.

Our project approach

There is no evidence of a systematic model for the assessment of Assistive Technology needs in second level education. Assistive Technology (AT) recommendations may appear in various reports (medical, psychological, visiting teacher service, occupational therapist and some assistive technology reports). Currently, if the second level school recommend AT the parents complete a National Council for Special Education (NCSE) application form and the school principal declares the necessity for the equipment. This is passed onto the Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO) who then must approve it and pass it to the National Council for Special Education for a decision. The Department of Education and Skills then sanction the grant for the equipment.

The project – funded through the Higher Education Authority and in collaboration with University College Cork - reviewed existing strategies for assessing assistive technology needs and established/adapted a model for assessing assistive technology needs in second level education. It tested and evaluated the assessment model and used the findings to inform future assessment approaches. The project identified interested second level schools. It established an assessment team and created the criteria for student participation on the project. It explored existing assessment models, including IPAT (North Dakota Interagency Program for Assistive Technology) and UKAT (University of Kentucky Assistive Technology Project). Participants were identified as high needs students with low incidence disabilities including some students already using technology and some users not.

Some of the challenges to the project set up were the following:

- difficulty identifying interested schools
- travel to schools and arranging of suitable times
- ensuring all parties could commit to project
- adapting assessment model to the Irish school context

Goal for participants

The goal for project participants was to provide AT solutions that would meet the individual students' requirements. Also to ensure the collaborative participation of the students, schools and families and support the use of the AT for the students at home and at school.

Project plan

The project encouraged and promoted the independent use of the assistive technology and supported the student and the school with the implementation of the AT. The project also purchased the equipment for use by the student and trained all the relevant parties. The project continues to support individuals as necessary. The main ethos of the project was to encourage collaboration and share findings and expertise.

Critical elements of using the SETT framework

It was decided that the project would use the SETT (Student, Environments, Tasks and Tools) model of assessment (Zabala 2005). The SETT framework is a four part model intended to promote collaborative decision-making in all phases of assistive technology service design and delivery, from consideration through implementation and evaluation of effectiveness. Although the letters form a memorable word, they are not intended to imply an order, other than that the student, environments and tasks should be fully explored before tools (assistive technologies) are considered or selected.

Shared knowledge

One of the major premises of the SETT framework is the decisions about Tools (Assistive Technologies) – the devices and actions that are needed for the student and others to succeed. These are most valid when they are based not on knowledge that one person has (or believes they have) but based on and agreed-upon mutually valid shared knowledge of the student, the environments and the tasks.

Collaboration

The SETT framework is a tool that both requires and supports the collaboration of the people who will be involved in the decision-making, and those who will be impacted by the decisions. Collaboration is not only critical for the SETT framework, it is also critical to gaining the buy-in necessary for effective implementation of any decisions.

Communication

The SETT framework requires that people communicate actively and respectfully. Shared knowledge can only be developed if the opinions, ideas, observations and suggestions of all are respected and respectful.

Multiple perspectives

Everyone involved brings different knowledge, skills, experience and ideas to the table. Although multiple perspectives can be challenging at times they are critical to the development of the accurate and complete development of shared knowledge. Not only are the multiple professional perspectives important to include, but also those of the student and parents. This can make the difference between success and the lack thereof.

Pertinent information

Although there is much information that is pertinent to decision making, there is other information that is not relevant. Knowing where to draw the line is important, but that line may well be a moving target.

Flexibility and patience

When working through the SETT framework or using other means of concern-identification and solution-seeking, there is the tendency to suggest possible solutions before the concerns have been adequately identified. When a solution springs to mind collaborators are urged NOT to voice it until it is time to talk about the Tools (Assistive Technologies) because when a solution is mentioned, the conversation shifts immediately from concern-identification to determining the worth or lack of worth of the suggested solution. Even when a team member thinks of the 'perfect solution', silent patience is urged. It might not look quite so perfect when all important factors are discussed.

On-going processes

Decision making in educational settings includes on-going processes. Whatever conclusions are reached at any point, these are only valid when the evidence shows they have been successful in lowering barriers to student achievement. It is expected that the SETT framework will be useful during all phases of assistive technology service delivery. With that in mind, it is important to revisit the SETT framework information periodically to determine if the information that is guiding decision-making and implementation is accurate, up to date and clearly reflects the shared knowledge of all involved.

Steps in Assessment

The four steps in the assessment framework are noted below:

Step 1 - Student

This involves the gathering of information related to the student and includes the following facets:

- functional area of concern
- requirements related to the area of concern
- current abilities related to area of concern
- expectations and concerns
- interests and preferences

Environment

This involves the information related to the supports currently available to the student in both the physical and curriculum environment and includes the following facets:

- supports available to staff and student
- material and equipment used by others in the environment
- access issues (technical, physical and curriculum)
- attitudes and expectations (staff, family, student)

Task

This involves what is currently required of the student and includes the following facets:

- what specific task is progress required with
- communication
- instruction
- participation
- productivity

Step 2 - Consideration of AT needs

This involves the detailed assessment of the student's assistive technology requirements and includes the following aspects:

- review of difficulties
- highlight areas of concern
- identify tasks affected
- identify current tools or strategies
- identify solutions or
- identify need for further investigation

A summary of the considerations of the generic requirements of the student is produced; this will include the following detail:

- needs currently being met
- assistive technology required
- need for further investigation or additional information
- identify devices and/or services to be provided
- identify who is responsible

Step 3 - Tool (Assistive Technology) selection

This involves the selection of the optimum technology related to the student and includes the following facets:

- identify possible tools
- prioritise tools
- identify availability of tools
- identify training needs (student, parents, teacher and other relevant staff)
- co-ordinate training delivery

Step 4 - Implementation and Evaluation
Following on from the selection of the assistive technology the process moves to the implementation and evaluation stage with the following facets:

- identify areas for change
- identify opportunities for AT use
- identify any additional strategies that may be required for example material to be scanned or the requirement for additional time
- decide on the areas of expected change
- decide what the minimum criteria for success are
- decide who will monitor change
- how will change be determined?

Case Studies

The follow two case studies highlight the utilisation of the SETT framework and the outcomes from the process for two students.

Case Study 1
The student was in the senior cycle of second level education with a visual impairment. The student was already using AT (distance camera, laptop computer, magnifying software). The student had not received any formal training in the use of the assistive technology. The student wanted to improve her skills around the use of her technology and stated that she had difficulty using the distance camera because it took too long to set up and it was only being used for one subject. She also stated

> when reading PDF books there are no images, no page numbers so it is difficult to follow where the teacher is or what the teacher is doing

The areas of difficulty identified in the process were the following:

- reading the board
- taking notes
- reading e-books
- carrying equipment

The following recommendations were made:

- light weight laptop
- screen reading software
- Wi-Fi technology
- screen magnification
- books in alternative electronic accessible format

The following solutions were put in place. Firstly, tablet, screen sharing software and Wi-Fi system to read the board, and secondly tablet, magnification software, material in alternative format to access electronic material, equipment - portable, light weight and easy to use.

The training plan included how to use tablet and Windows 8 (one day training); using magnification software (3 X 2 hour one-to-one sessions); using screen sharing software and Wi-Fi for student and staff (4 X 2 hours training).

The training outcomes comprised everyday use of tablet and screen sharing software and everyday use of magnification software.

The feedback from the student and school staff included the following

> I can see the board in every class as soon as I walk in the room... I can take screen shots so easily and now I have my notes.

and

> Good support for staff and student, support available when issues arise, great to see student engaged.

Case Study 2

The student was very motivated and in the senior cycle of second level education and had a physical disability. She was already using assistive technology, Netbook, Windows 7 and voice recognition software. The student experienced fatigue and was very reliant on a scribe for note taking and examinations. She was very also very reliant on parents at home to assist with written homework.

The areas of difficulty experienced by the student were:

- writing
- walking
- carrying books and computer

The following recommendations were made:

- light weight laptop
- voice recognition software
- wireless headset
- iPad and apps
- live scribe pen
- printer

The following solutions were put in place. Light weight laptop, voice recognition software and wireless headset for writing assignments; iPad and Apps for taking notes in class; printer to print material.

The training plan included how to use Windows 8 and Windows accessibility training (one full day); using voice recognition software (one day training and group training 3 X 2 hour sessions and on-going support); iPad, Apps and Live scribe pen (one day training).

The outcomes comprised everyday use of laptop and voice recognition with iPad for note taking, and no longer needing a scribe in examinations.

The feedback from the student and school and college staff included

> I love my iPad

and

> Great that student did not have to spend time training on AT in third level. Student's level of expertise in the use of AT is very good

Project outcomes

The following are briefly the project outcomes:

- SETT model adapted for the partner's use
- process forms re-designed to suit both our schools and university environment
- three schools took part in the UL part of the project
- twelve students participated with UL
- every student had a parent or guardian attend the assessment
- ten students allowed the assessment to be recorded
- students required different approaches (some appeared interested, some needed encouragement)
- some assessments took more than one visit to the school
- all participants received equipment and training
- the training took more time than anticipated
- the equipment solutions were very complex for some students
- the lack of accessible texts is an issue for students
- we have gained an important understanding as to why students arrive to university with novice AT abilities
- AT assessment is only part of an overall plan for support for students with disability at school
- parent participation was informative

Project recommendations

The following are the key recommendations from the project's learning:

- A formal AT assessment model should be developed nationally for second level pupils with disabilities.
- A national strategy should be developed for the provision of accessible (not electronic) text books.
- AT assessments need to be carried out by relevant expert teams contributing expertise from only their own area of knowledge.

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(No) Limits on International Exchange? International mobility and students with a disability

By the SIHO team (Support Centre for Inclusive Higher Education) and Ann Heelan, CEO, AHEAD (the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability) in partnership with LINK (Learning Inclusively Network + Know-how)

Assumptions about disability

Life runs on assumptions. When we wake up in the morning we assume the clock is correctly telling the time. Our assumptions get us through every day without having to re-examine our thinking all the time. Most of our assumptions are based on our experience - if we see a Rottweiler dog in the park we just know not to pet it. However, many of our assumptions are not based on any real evidence. We often make assumptions about people based on very little, the way they look, dress or talk. These assumptions can have a huge impact on the lives of others we come into contact with in our professional lives.

Research conducted by the World Health Organisation (2012) states that negative attitudes are a major barrier to the inclusion of students with disability into education and most of these attitudes arise from assumptions people make about disability. For example if the disability is physical they can assume the person needs help, or deserves sympathy, or is sick, or is a problem.

These assumptions can kick in even when the person is not there, for example when we see an application or a CV of someone who wants to be a nurse, or an engineer. If we meet a student with a disability we may assume they cannot be a doctor or an engineer, or be able to study abroad. We may assume that their disability means they wont be able or won't be as good as another non-disabled person.

Of course these assumptions are simply wrong but they can have a very negative impact on the opportunities open to students with disabilities in higher education. No one sets out to exclude them, but commonly professionals working in higher education make the assumption that students with disability are not their job, it is someone else's job. On the other hand where a professional such as an international officer assumes that students with disabilities are part of their role, then this is a game changer and ensures that these students get the same opportunities to study abroad as other students.

Stories of students with disabilities

In this article we want to share with you the research conducted by SIHO into the stories of students with disabilities who have studied abroad. Their stories give great insight into what international mobility means to them. We will also hear about what they, as experts in their own story, can teach us by sharing their international experiences.

Nine students with a disability from all over the world tell about their experiences of going abroad, in the context of their studies (SIHO Research 2013). They came from The Netherlands, Lithuania, Belgium and Ireland and went to Sweden, France, Belgium, Spain, Suriname and Denmark. They give insight into the reasons why students want to join international mobility, and the way they experience their disability differently depending on the 'place' where they are. Furthermore, they tell us about the supports they need when studying abroad. But what they really showed us was their huge enthusiasm to study abroad!

Reasons to go abroad

For some students an international experience is a way of overcoming barriers and proving (to themselves and others) what they are capable of. A possible explanation for feeling this need to prove that they can participate might be because people with disabilities are still underrepresented within international mobility programs.

> I started to get the feeling that I could do anything as long as I was motivated. I think going to Denmark was the icing on the cake. I had the idea: 'If I do this and everything works out well, I can do anything!' And it did, I had a really great time, made great friends and experienced new stuff. I started exploring my boundaries and for the first time I went abroad without my parents without ending up in the hospital.

Students with disabilities have comparable wishes and goals to other students: improving employability, language and life skills, having fun, being more culturally aware. Indeed an impairment is only one dimension of a person. Maybe we should pay more attention to the similarities instead of differences.

Influence of contextual and environmental factors on disabled students experiences

Students' experiences differ, depending on the nature of their impairment and context. Other countries bring different attitudes towards disability, they may have more or less accessible environments, positive cultures, lifestyles, climates, all of which contribute to a different disability experience.

> I noticed that bus drivers are always so helpful. In Lithuania you can't see the positive spirit in drivers' faces as often... I noticed the same thing when walking on the street. People were not afraid to look me in the eye and even smile! In Lithuania, people are often surprised (sometimes mixed with fear) when they see a disabled person in the street.

Sometimes these differences also influence the choice of destination. It is clear that a society with a certain desire for inclusion, accessibility and participation can make change happen.

The right to international exchange

Some of the students wanted to tell their stories to make change happen. They wanted to defend the rights of persons with a disability and create more and equal opportunities for everyone to participate in international mobility.

> People with disabilities often don't know their rights. I know a lot of students with a disability and they don't go on Erasmus.

They use their personal experience to promote social change. They identified some things that needed to change:

- better and accessible information in relation to inclusive international exchange programs
- more help from international offices for receiving additional grants
- more suitable assistance abroad.

Support

Support needs differ between all students. But for most of them it is not easy to arrange support abroad. Students wanted to be involved in the choice of who would be allocated to provide support. All preferred assistance from people close to them and people they like.

> As an Erasmus Ambassador, I would like to give people with a disability the chance to choose their assistant when they go abroad, and give them a chance to meet them on beforehand. It is important to get assistance from someone you get on with.

Besides support abroad, students highlighted not to forget the significant role people at home can have.

Focus on positive experiences

The students didn't put their disability central in their stories. They focused on the positive experiences rather than on barriers, such as making new friends, getting to know another culture, personal growth - maybe the positive experiences outweigh the negative experiences and the barriers?

When we talked to Joshua, he especially mentioned the positive elements in Suriname: the good weather, the people he met over there, his internship, what he was doing there.

Conclusion

Students with a disability perceive an international experience as positive and enriching. There were differences but mainly similarities in the reasons given by all students going abroad, like improving employability, gaining language skills, improving life skills, having fun and making new friends, gaining awareness of other cultures. Students mentioned at some points they were faced with barriers and challenges. The biggest barrier was the lack of information on how international opportunities might be made accessible. It isn't always easy to find the correct information. They also mentioned it wasn't always easy to find assistance and they wanted to be involved in the decision-making process throughout, particularly in relation to who would support them.

There is an opportunity and responsibility for higher education institutions to more actively encourage students with a disability to participate in international mobility and to support outgoing and incoming students to realise more inclusive international experiences.

Glimpse on the portrait of Laima

Besides the analysis of emerging themes, the students' stories were represented in personalised portraits based on the research method of 'portraiture' as outlined by Sarah Lawrence-Lightfoot (1997).

Laima

Erasmus: Am I able to go?

I started to dream about Erasmus in early spring.
I kept my dream to myself and no one knew about this.
I didn't want to talk about it out loud,
because of the idea that if everyone knows a dream,
it will not come true.

'Am I able to go?'
was the first question on my mind when I began to think about going abroad.

For me, all the things in my life happen so easily.
I just need to dream a little about what I want to happen and it becomes true.
I wasn't afraid to dream,
but when I was reading offers from my home university to go abroad I always noticed the sentences with extra information for people with disabilities.
Well just one sentence, and one main question that kept coming back:
'Am I able to go?'

Still I stayed positive.
Thinking positive comes rather naturally to me.
And I know that I could not reach half of the things I have now without this way of thinking.

Acknowledgements

Great appreciation goes to Leonieke, Joshua, Margaux, Anke, Kevin, Minke, Jessica, Vilma and Laima for sharing their experience and to Delfien Versaevel and Delphine Callewaert for collecting and analysing them.

A shortened version of this article appeared in EAIE's Forum Magazine. References are: Heelan, A. & Thienpondt, L. (2015). (No) Limits, in Forum EAIE Magazine (Spring), p. 32-33.

The ACCESS & Inclusion Expert Group of EAIE, the LINK-network and SIHO are gathering tips to support higher education institutions to support incoming and outgoing students with a disability. Contributions from members are welcome.

More information

The stories of the students were represented also in **personalised portraits**.

Find more information on the emergent themes and the research in the **complete research report**.

Visit the SIHO-website: **Mobility portraits**.

Visit the LINK-website: **Study abroad without limits**.

Visit the AHEAD website: **www.ahead.ie**

Contact the EAIE **ACCESS & Inclusion Expert Community**.

References

World Health Report on Disability, WHO, 2012, pg 216.

Lawrence-Lightfoot, S., & Hoffmann Davis, J. (1997). **The Art and Science of Portraiture**. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.

My Personal Experiences of Dyspraxia: Management strategies and resources for all

Kerry Pace

Kerry Pace is a trainer and practitioner supporting people who have dyspraxia, is a person with dyspraxia and has a child who has dyspraxia. Kerry Pace has had a long and varied career in supporting people with disabilities. After working in Disability Services at Hull University, where she worked on a number of projects with the Faculty of Health and Social Care, co-teaching study skills support to nursing cohorts, Kerry started her own company, inspired by the findings from her last Skype project, and now offers support via Skype 7 days a week from 9am to 10 pm to healthcare students and practitioners who have dyslexia, dyspraxia or mental health needs. The company is called Diverse Learners **www.Diverse-Learners.co.uk**

Introduction

I am sitting here wondering how many of the readers will know what dyspraxia (increasingly referred to as Developmental Co-ordination Disorder - DCD) actually is. Although there is a greater understanding that it is associated with clumsiness, difficulty riding a bike or driving, messy handwriting, difficulty telling left from right, the more complex aspects of dyspraxia, the effects of it on the person with it, and the overlapping features it shares with dyslexia, are less widely understood. There are lots of definitions out there but I particularly like the description by David Grant at **http://adshe.org.uk/dyspraxia** which acknowledges many of the things I talk about in this article, such as the impact on life skills, the influences of environment, reference to social and emotional elements and individuality.

Charities such as Dyspraxia Foundation, Dyspraxia Action and organisations like Dyspraxia UK offer definitions on their websites. However, when I am asked about dyspraxia I want to offer a well-rehearsed, easy-to-understand, short answer that illustrates the many aspects to it but I haven't really found one, and certainly not one that I could remember to recite to others.

I find it difficult to explain dyspraxia because of its all-encompassing nature, and the way it affects so many aspects of life – often in an intrusive, domineering way.

An example of this can be found in a blog called Shoes or no Shoes available **here** documenting my experience of preparing to present at a conference – foremost in my mind was not presenting to an international audience or even the content of my presentation but rather how 'simple' considerations like footwear and travel dominated my thoughts before I set out to the conference. Travelling to it used up a great deal of mental

energy, simply climbing the stairs in an unfamiliar train station, maintaining an internal monologue and (literally) a step-by-step risk assessment – how I positioned my foot on each step, making sure I kept hold of the handrail and my bag without losing balance, trying not to rush and bump into someone, or move too slowly and hold people up. In essence I have used this example to explain the challenges executive functioning - the combination of mental and physical processes that enable people to perform a task - presents to many people who have dyspraxia.

When helping others to describe how dyspraxia impacts our lives I find the phrase 'spaghetti head' often resonates. As a person who has dyspraxia there is far more energy and time that needs to go into simple logistics in order to avoid calamity, things that a non-dyspraxic / neurotypical person would do without thinking.

While I want to avoid this article being thought of as a life story or journey, or a list of the negative things associated with dyspraxia, it may be valuable for those not familiar with dyspraxia to see its effects in the context of everyday life. I would like to make this an awareness-raising, positive piece that uses my personal experiences offering management strategies and signpost resources for all, not just the person who has dyspraxia. It is delivered from my perspective:

- as a person who has dyspraxia;
- as a person who has a child who has dyspraxia;
- as a practitioner supporting people who have dyspraxia;
- as a trainer;
- as someone who raises awareness via blogging and vodcasts.

Strategies that help me

This article will include examples of strategies I employ that show how I have found I need to work as a person who has dyspraxia. For example I'm dictating this to software that types for me (called Dragon that is available as a free app called Dragon Dictation). I captured and organised my ideas on mind mapping software and with a click of a button transferred it to a Word document, added colour to aid differentiation between sections and ideas and then jumped around sections, adding words gradually as they occurred.

For some, this might seem a non-linear, and seemingly non-structured approach but experience of my own dyspraxia, and learning how others who have dyspraxia have responded to how it affects them, underlines the importance of developing self-awareness of needs, preferences and learning preferences, and being open to different approaches to achieve our goals.

This individual approach is demonstrated in the vodcasts I do with Phoebe my daughter who also has dyspraxia. Although there are similarities in our 'dyspraxic profile' that identify areas we may need support in, and although we share a number of genetic as well as environmental influences, we often employ different strategies to reach our goals successfully. Sharing our experiences is our way of highlighting the importance of flexibility and a non-prescriptive approach in order to meet the needs of the person.

This informs my approach in working with others, and through this I know it can facilitate self-awareness, self-acceptance, self-confidence, and independence, all of which are increasingly recognised by researchers as secondary issues for people who have dyspraxia. For educators, employers and family members it is important to listen to the needs of the person, and to work in partnership with them to address the issues they find challenging, even though it may be seem frustrating or illogical to those in the support network. The goal should always be to enable the 'neurodiverse' person to function more effectively and efficiently in whatever way that best enables them to do so.

For educators, family members, and the person who has dyspraxia, it is important to remember that they are capable of achieving whatever they want. However, in order to achieve this, there are some things to take into consideration:

- **It may take longer** (I eventually passed my driving test after nine attempts over six years)
- **It might involve technology** (my phone and iPad mini are a substitute brain)
- **Could apply unusual triggers to secure memory / recall** (coding onto the body, silly rhymes, visual cues, songs to help step-by-step process)

- **Having a template for each process that you do** (an internal monologue or coding steps on to fingers)
- **Need for the skill to be repeated often** (useful to develop muscle memory or schema - when you can begin to do things with some degree of automaticity)
- **Require establishing of a routine** (Phoebe has a very successful (and rigid) morning routine)
- **Finding a different way of doing something** (I got my degree through the Open University recounted in this **OU film**)
- **Relearning a skill if it has not been used for a while**
- **Have to be multisensory** (**Seeing** an image, as well as **saying** things out loud, so you are **hearing** the information/ instructions, as well as **doing** or **touching** something)

How is this relevant in higher education?
Returning to the lack of awareness and understanding of dyspraxia, this seems – to me, at least – a particular feature of student support in higher education, and I believe there are three main and interrelated reasons or this:

1. Most articles on dyspraxia are child-focused
2. Many articles mention the headlines of driving, hand-writing and clumsiness and that it used to be called clumsy-child syndrome but make little reference to the activities of daily living, and to me this is the crux of dyspraxia
3. Lack of research, especially into dyspraxia in adulthood

Point 1: Most articles on dyspraxia are child-focused

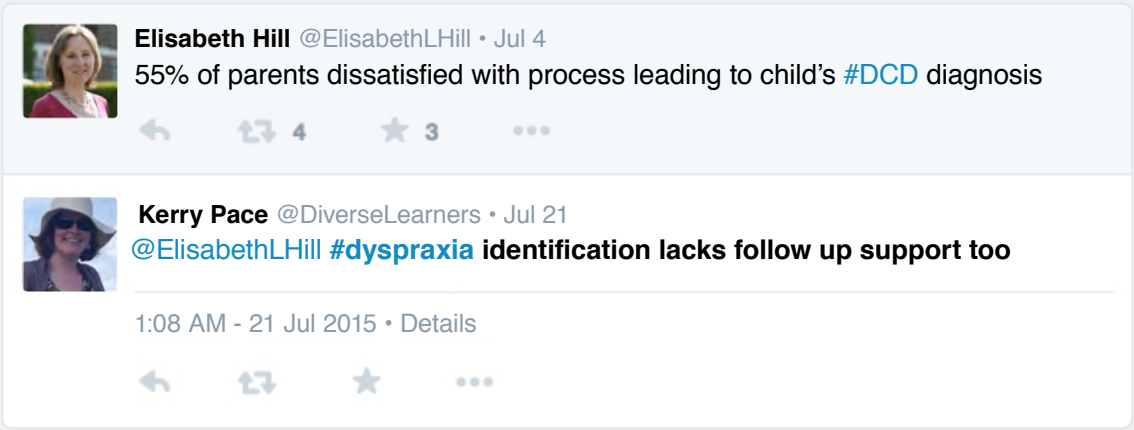
Any Google search perpetuates the idea that you grow out of dyspraxia or everyone is identified as a child.

There is an unspoken myth that if you have dyspraxia 'badly enough' then dyspraxia will be identified when a child. This can leave those who are identified as adults believing that they must have a milder form of dyspraxia and therefore should be able to cope. In my experience this can leave adults unwilling to divulge the challenges they are experiencing, less likely to disclose to others or seek support, believing they should be able to manage.

The idea that it is a childhood condition is reinforced by the three main issues listed above as well as that most publicity has a child's face on it and websites and support groups have lots of info for primary school, less for those of secondary school age, and reduces the older you get.

Point 2: Limited range of understanding and guidance

Elisabeth Hill from Goldsmiths University, and Charlotte Miles, Liverpool Hope University are both conducting research on dyspraxia and a recent conversation on Twitter regarding lack of guidance for parents to support their children who are identified prompted this reply from me:



Whilst this research and tweet is welcomed, the lack of guidance and access to support is even more marked for those identified as adults. I can argue this from my own experience as a practitioner, those I share with, people I follow on social media and those adults we support at university and in the workplace via my company Diverse Learners. I was 33 when I was identified, had just started working as a dyslexia tutor yet only recognised the implications of what dyspraxia was when I was reading a report from an educational psychologist that could have been my life.

This lack of awareness, and focus on children, means that specialists /practitioners who often find themselves supporting adults at higher education and in the workplace are completely unaware of all the areas that are affected by dyspraxia. Most specialists complete a post graduate qualification in supporting the 'dyslexic learner' and can leave specialist feeling exposed or under confident in how to support adults with dyspraxia. Thus, practitioners may not have the knowledge or confidence and adults who have dyspraxia do not receive the specific support they require leaving them frustrated and feeling alone.

- My tutor kept talking about dyslexia but I'm not dyslexic - Laura
- I had to keep reminding them I didn't have an issue with reading because I was not dyslexic - Amy
- Oh I don't know what to do as I don't know anything about Dyspraxia Chloe recounted a response from a practitioner
- summed up well by Lauren's blog for support workers **https://whyiwonttalk.wordpress.com/2015/03/11/advice-for-support-workers/**

It is not only practitioners who are underprepared but there is a lack of dyspraxia awareness by the adults I support who are often surprised when they see our vodcasts (video blog) on **eating**, **cooking**, and **difficulty getting out on time**. The people we support are also relieved when I highlight their associated anxiety about travel, getting lost and new social situations to having dyspraxia.

Most people, whether neurotypical or neurodiverse, experience some anxiety regarding new situations. The severity is heightened for people who have a neurodiverse profile who experience feelings of being overwhelmed. What to expect of 'the unknown', can lead to catastrophising or having numerous back-up plans in case things go wrong, all of which require a lot of time and energy. The lack of executive functioning mentioned earlier can also induce anxiety and happens/extends to an environment that is familiar but you are unclear as to what is required of one. How this can affect someone is well demonstrated by this BBC video **http://www.bbc.co.uk/diversity/disability/neurodiversityatthebbc** demonstrating life as a neurodiverse person as video game complete with energy levels depleting and bonuses when people offer help.

There are several demonstrations of simple tactics that others can employ to lessen these feelings of being overwhelmed and I have listed some below:

- **clear instructions** possibly with a demonstration of what is wanted
- **provide a reference document that support instructions** - bullet point list, flow diagram, colour-coded list, map, (remember to ask the person how they prefer the information)
- **give one or two tasks at a time** - too much information at once makes demands that our working memory often cannot meet
- **offer to repeat information** – we might be too self-conscious to ask but welcome someone else suggesting it
- **offering to physically take us places or showing us where to find things** greatly helps reduce anxiety and stress levels. Be prepared to do this more than once

Some of the life experiences such as being ridiculed for lack of automaticity in tasks, tripping up, spilling things or being forgetful as well as behaviour of others encountered due to lack of awareness – the tuts and sighs - is acknowledged by Dyspraxia UK and Dyscovery Centre as a much overlooked / underestimate area the impact on self esteem.

Many adults are affected and a Facebook message from a 78 year old man said he felt so emotional when he watched our eating vodcast, he was going to show it to his family before dinner on Christmas day so they would understand why he ate so messily and not make fun of him. As well as doing vodcasts I freely share Kerry Calamities on my Facebook page to show others they are not the only ones these incidents happen to in the hope of boosting self-esteem. I encourage others to share similar incidents.

What you can do for self-esteem issues strategies

- Avoid the exasperated sighs, the tuts at how long it is taking us to do something, or if we've just spilled our dinner down our front – we can hear them you know and it is not helpful - you are just making it worse and damaging self-esteem and self-confidence.
- Stop using the statement 'if you tried/ concentrated harder / focused more...' We are trying harder than you can imagine so my top tip is **praise the effort not the outcome**.

Some simple solutions that can be incorporated into everyday life without effort

- **reinforce success by acknowledging improvement, contributions and ideas**
- **say 'take your time'** as it can make a HUGE difference – we work better or we'll find that thing in our bag we've been searching frantically for
- **give prior warning** – in 5 minutes we will... time is nearly up you might want to think...
- **strategies reminders** – ask 'do you need time to mind map that' or ' send a voice file if easier' or use 'I can wait whilst you put that date in your phone/diary/calendar'
- **build in time to let us practice skills/tasks** – adopt a multisensory approach (say, see, hear, do) model, scaffold the task and repeat

I used the simple solutions listed above when I worked at a university. Students who had dyspraxia were often referred to me to have specialist support sessions supposing that as I had dyspraxia too I would be better placed to support. Whilst I understand why this happens, organisations must heed that this approach limits expertise as the knowledge becomes held within one person and leaves a skills gap when the person leaves the organisation. Indeed I did develop expertise and also embarked on and led research projects in supporting health and social care students who had specific learning difficulties/differences. The outcome was that I identified a void in information specifically about, and designed for, adults who had dyspraxia.

Thus, in late 2012 I decided that if I wanted more awareness of dyspraxia it was up to me to share my experiences and knowledge in the hope of reassuring others and offering advice to all offer some tips for everyone – not just the person who has dyspraxia but friends, educators and family too. Firstly, through my Facebook page then doing vodcasts via YouTube and finally via Twitter. It has been successful and I've had pieces in various newspapers, radio interviews, and featured in articles like this blog from **BBCOuch** and an invitation to parliament from Emma Lewellyn Buck (MP) and the Dyspraxia Foundation to thank me for my activities and celebrate Dyspraxia Awareness week 2014.

Raising awareness and getting feedback has boosted my self-confidence and self-esteem but change will happen faster with research to provide underpinning evidence which brings me onto point 3 the lack of research.

Point 3: Lack of research

There is little research about dyspraxia compared with other neurodiverse conditions categorised specific learning differences/difficulties such as dyslexia, attention deficit hyperactive disorder, and autism. There is anecdotal information that is widely acknowledged within the field such as increased likelihood of obesity, less engagement in sporting activity, higher levels of unemployment and links to mental health issues, though little data to support it and even less qualitative (personal experience) evidence regarding adults and dyspraxia. I recognise the role that research has in changing practices, and as I want changes in attitudes and awareness to happen more speedily. Therefore, I complete and disseminate questionnaires as well as voluntarily participating in a number of research projects focusing on dyspraxia in adulthood - most recently Goldsmiths University of London and Lincoln Psychology Lab. I do this not only because as a researcher I know how hard it is to get participants, but also to enable more awareness to be raised through the publication of the research. If you are an adult who has dyspraxia I encourage you to do the same.

Finally

And so to culminate in the last and most important bit of awareness raising I leave you with an insight of what it is like for adults who have dyspraxia - ask yourself

> How well do I operate / function when I'm tired?

That way you may understand better why an 18 year old changes into pyjamas as soon as they come home exhausted mentally and physically from navigating school and why students cry, paralysed by tasks they don't know where to start, so do nothing. Finally, why writing this article has sparked tears and an almighty tantrum.

Tiredness and fatigue are overwhelming for many adults who have dyspraxia due to the effort it takes in planning, prioritising, processing and performing everyday tasks whilst trying not to get distracted. Please consider this, remembering how you feel when tired before you make your next tutting noise.

Incorporating some of the simple solutions in this article will be appreciated. By listening, reassuring, reminding and giving more **time** you can make a big difference. All of those things were freely given to me by the editors of this AHEAD publication enabling me to find success – at my pace and in my way.

References Researchers

Elisabeth Hill, Goldsmiths College, University of London **http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0891422215000505**
Twitter
@ElisabethLHill
55% of parents dissatisfied with process leading to child's #DCD diagnosis http://bit.ly/1LKzLpC @NICEcomms @DYSPRAXIAFDTN @DCDLiverpool

Dr Charlotte Miles Liverpool Hope University **https://calm201.wordpress.com/why-it-matters/**

Lincoln **psychology lab**

http://dyscovery.southwales.ac.uk/

You can access a range of podcasts and vodcasts and other information from **www.diverse-learners.co.uk** and **www.youtube.com/diverselearners**

Dyspraxia, exercise, sport and team games (**vodcast**)

Join Kerry on her **Facebook page** and on **Twitter** and hear **radio interviews**;

Students with Disabilities in Higher Education: The numbers in pictures

Dara Ryder, Online Communications/Events Manager, AHEAD

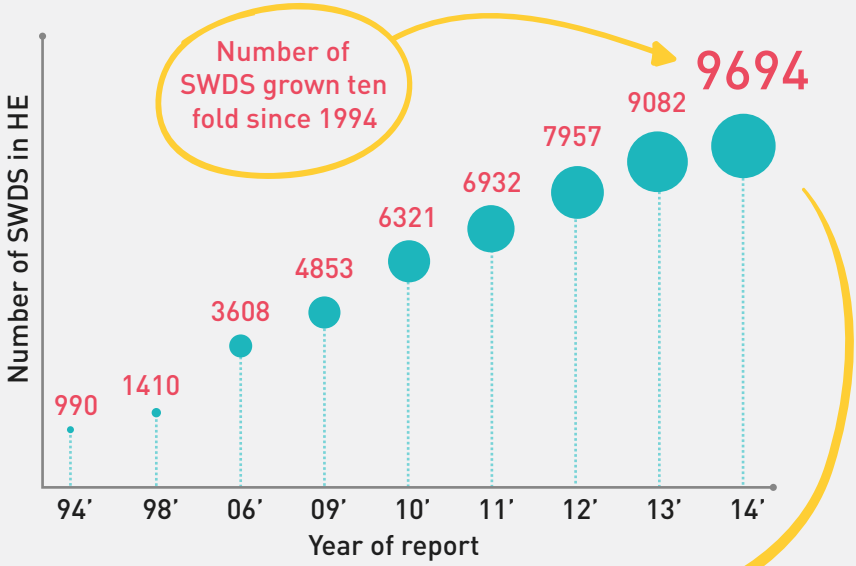
Dara Ryder is currently managing online communications and events for AHEAD and couples this role with the conducting of annual research into the participation of students with disabilities in higher education in Ireland. Having gained a BSc in Music Technology from Queens University, Dara joined Dun Laoghaire College of Further Education as a lecturer, where he became interested in inclusive education when working first-hand with students with disabilities in his classroom. When the opportunity arose in 2008, he joined AHEAD where he has been working ever since in a variety of roles involving administration, training, multimedia, communications, events and research. Dara has a particular passion for using multimedia to convey information accessible to everybody.

Every year AHEAD collects Ireland's only verified statistics on the number of students with disabilities participating in higher education. Each year a survey is sent to the Disability/Access Officers of all HEA funded institutions covering many areas from fields of study to examination accommodation types and the information returned is collated into a written report and an accompanying set of interactive tables, allowing you to interrogate the data as you wish.

The following graphics represent some of the key findings of our most recently published report covering the academic year 2013/14.

Students with Disabilities in Higher Education

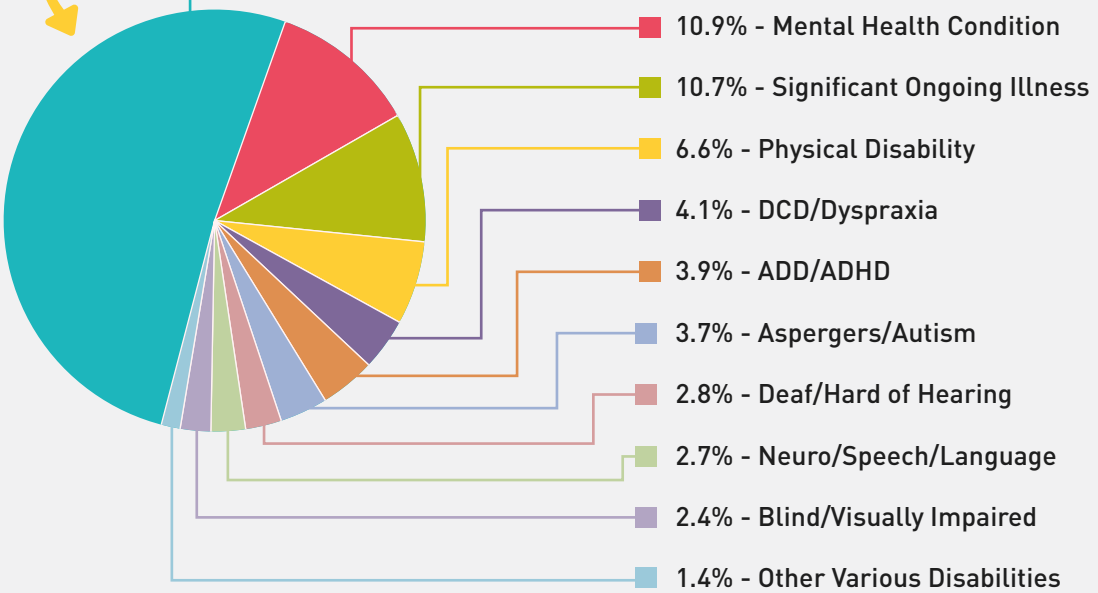
SWDs = Students with Disabilities
HE = Higher Education



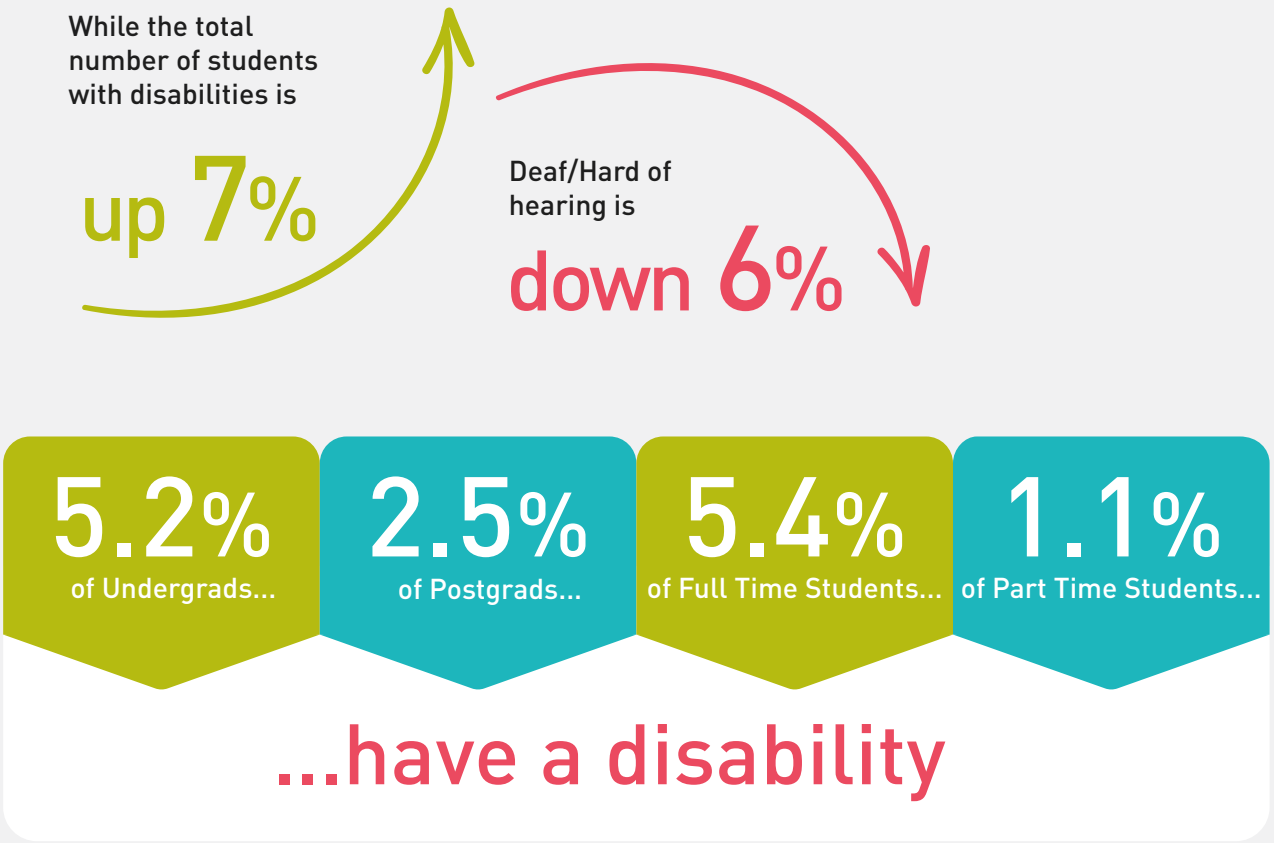
There are now almost
10,000
students with Disabilities in HE in Ireland

representing
4.7%
of the total student body

Breakdown



Concerns



Unless stated, data referred to is for 2013/14.

To read the full report or play with the interactive tables, visit **www.ahead.ie/datacentre**. A text version of the data in this graphic can be found here: **http://www.ahead.ie/journal-autumn15-stats-textversion**

Enhancing Teaching and Learning for Diverse Student Groups in Higher Education

Terry Maguire, Director, National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

Terry Maguire, originally a science graduate, spent 14 years working in higher education in Scotland where she pioneered flexible and blended approaches to teaching and learning. On her return to Ireland she worked with the National Council for Vocational Awards. Her PhD research focused on the professional development needs of those providing adult mathematics education. In 2006, she was appointed to the post of Head of Lifelong Learning with Institute of Technology Tallaght, Dublin where she was responsible for the provision of part-time students and e-learning. She is currently on secondment from this post to the National Forum. Terry is the chair of Adult Learning Mathematics, an international research forum.

Elizabeth Noonan, Research Coordinator, National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education

Elizabeth Noonan is responsible for developing a number of the Forum's research activities including: sectoral level Focused Research Projects, the Forum's Research Ethics Framework, a research project on the inaugural Forum Teaching Heroes, the National Forum IRC Scholarships, and a scoping project on unaccredited CPD for teaching and learning. Research and scholarship is central to the Forum's mission to work in partnership with the academic community to foster teaching and learning that is informed by up-to-date pedagogical research and scholarship. Elizabeth is currently on secondment to the Forum, from University College Dublin (UCD) where she is Director of Academic Development.

Introduction

Ireland's National Forum for the Enhancement of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education is a key consultative forum and an evidence-based change agent for higher education in Ireland. It acts as an enabler of teaching and learning enhancement and innovation for impact. Its work is characterised by sectoral consultation, scholarly research, strategic framework development and fostering a coherent and connected approach to higher education pedagogy.

The Forum supports and engages with all 38 higher education institutions inclusive of both publicly and privately funded institutions. It operates according to the principle that 'together we can do more' and it seeks to develop mutually beneficial solutions to shared problems that add value for national impact. The National Forum works in partnership with students, teachers, experts, learner support providers and researchers - and with institutional and system level leadership throughout the sector

to provide thought leadership on developing future-orientated aspects of teaching and learning on Ireland's emerging higher education landscape. The National Forum also has a central role in taking forward the recommendations of the Hunt report (HEA, 2011). Its work is informed by the European Commission's HLG reports on the modernisation of higher education (High Level Group on the Modernisation of Higher Education, 2013 and 2014),

A key dimensions of the Forum's focus is to ensure the effective distribution of limited funding for enhancement activity across the sector through establishing 'informed, expert groups to make the most of the great legacy work that has been achieved through a number of previous initiatives within the sector' (National Forum,2015).

Sectoral Level Enhancement of Teaching and Learning

The work of the National Forum must be considered against the backdrop of the predicted changes to the higher education population of learners. This is expected to show a 10% increase in student numbers by 2016, a 25% increase in new full-time entrants by 2030 with an increasingly diverse student body. The overall staff/student ratio for the sector is currently 1:19, (as against the OECD average of 1:15-1:16) and there is significant variability between different parts of the sector (HEA, 2014).

The Forum aims to ensure that the enhancement of teaching and learning is focused on building national and regional capacity across a number of strategically important themes and initiatives. These are aligned with the overall policy directions for the management of the higher education system and the longer-term priorities of the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030. Its activities relate to enabling purposeful collaboration and efficiency of approach towards issues with a focus on developments in policy and practice which are research-informed.

Key activities include:

- achieving coherence in the approach to building digital capacity
- supporting and developing the scholarship of teaching and learning
- leading a national learning impact award system
- facilitating a sectoral approach to professional development for those who teach in higher education.

Through partnership and collaboration with the higher education sector, the Forum has developed a national vision for building digital capacity and is currently designing a Professional Development Framework for learning. In all of these core activities there is a focus on supporting institutional and sectoral responses to increasing student diversity and the changing higher education landscape.

Building Digital Capacity

The National Forum's digital roadmap - Teaching and Learning in Irish Higher Education: A Roadmap for Enhancement in a Digital World 2015-17 – was developed in collaboration with all higher education institutions and is designed to help guide institutions and organisations in the advancement of local and national digital strategies. This is with a strong view to ensuring alignment, coherence and a sense of common endeavour at sectoral level. The roadmap gives voice to the multi-layered nature of building digital capacity, which reflects sector-wide efforts and concerns. Strategic and sectoral digital capacity building offers new ways of addressing complex problems of increasing participation rates and student diversity. It emphasises the importance of strategic integration and advocates a focus on how technology can be used to enhance the experiences of all students from all backgrounds with a multiplicity of needs.

Professional Development

Increasing diversity coupled with a reduced resource base for higher education places additional emphasis on the capacity of higher education staff to respond to a dynamic educational environment. The provision of an outstanding teaching and learning experience for Irish higher education students will be greatly enhanced by the adoption of a sector-wide commitment to professional development. A national professional development framework (scheduled for piloting at end of 2015) will help develop all those who support learning, inspire great practice and enable innovation in a fast-changing educational environment.

Looking to the future

The National Forum is committed to developing and implementing initiatives that work across institutions – and to understand and enhance the teaching and learning experience of our increasingly diverse student population. While many key innovations in Irish higher education have been developed to address specific sectoral themes such as first year retention, there has been much less focus on the very real differences that exist between the learning needs of diverse student groups who face particular barriers in terms of their teaching and learning experiences, for example, mature students, international students, those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds, students with disabilities etc. There is a clear need to build an evidence base to inform how diversity-supportive teaching and learning environments can be created, sustained and enhanced in higher education.

Knowing how and why students' learning and teaching needs may vary according to their particular needs can drive the development of evidence-based improvements in effective teaching and learning. The National Forum will lead and support initiatives to support the design and delivery of targeted innovations to enhance teaching and learning. These initiatives will focus on building processes and frameworks that can be used by institutions to inform and optimise their institutional practices and processes.

The scope of the National Forum's role is wide. Across all dimensions of its work plan, it is committed to:

- engaging with the higher education sector and other lead bodies to identify key aspects of higher education provision that have particular importance to enhancing teaching and learning for diverse student groups.
- developing a teaching and learning framework that recognises the needs of different diverse student groups as a resource to institutions in order to identify and improve excellence in teaching and learning.
- building a commitment to the utilisation of student data within institutions and regional clusters in effective and evidence-based ways.
- engaging with students as partners to seek out students' perspectives on all aspects of the Forum's work plan.
- ensuring that outputs will be integrated with the developing national framework for professional development.

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Employers! Stand Up For What You Believe In! - Challenge the perceptions of disability in the workplace and explore the transition of graduates with disabilities into employment

Mary Quirke

Mary Quirke is Assistant Director of AHEAD, and is currently managing the Willing Able Mentoring (WAM) project - a work placement programme which aims to promote access to the labour market for graduates with disabilities. Mary also has responsibility for the GET AHEAD project, which focuses on building the capacity of graduates with disabilities, enabling them to make positive transitions to work. Mary is a qualified career guidance counsellor with a keen interest in mentoring and empowering people seeking to attain their personal goals. Mary has worked in the area of disability, education and guidance for over 20 years and past roles have included working with the HSE, the National Learning Network, FETAC and the Institute of Guidance Counsellors.

Leslee O'Loughlin

Leslee O'Loughlin is Group HR Manager with Enterprise Rent-A-Car, and a WAM employer. Leslee joined Enterprise Rent-A-Car's Graduate Training Programme in the United States in 1997. After successfully completing the training programme, Leslee received a series of internal promotions which afforded her the opportunity to assume key roles within the organization in both a managerial and marketing capacity. In 2004, Leslee was promoted to Group Recruiting Manager and was responsible for developing strategic partnerships with key universities throughout the San Francisco Bay Area. In 2007, Leslee was promoted to Group Human Resources Manager for Enterprise in the Republic of Ireland. Since 2007 Enterprise has been the proud recipient of several awards including a Gradireland Employability Award in 2009, an AHECS Engagement Award in 2012 and 2013, the Gradireland Diversity Recruitment award in 2013 and 2014 and the Chambers Ireland Workplace Award in 2014.

Ask yourself if you believe the following to be true or false?

- Graduates with a disability need to be more prepared when starting in the workplace ..... true/ false
- Graduates with a disability present differently at interview ..... true/ false
- Graduates with a disability are prepared for work, but they are not prepared to discuss their disability (disclosure) ..... true/ false
- Technology really makes all the difference for a graduate with a disability? ..... true/ false
- The employer gets to decide what a reasonable accommodation is ..... true/ false

There has been considerable change over the past decade in the education and employment of people with disabilities and specific learning difficulties. Greater numbers of students with disabilities consider their options in higher education with a view to accessing professional and graduate jobs. There are now 9,000+ students with disabilities in higher education in Ireland, but what is most interesting is the variety of courses that these students are engaged in. Initiatives from Government in the form of equality legislation, grants, additional funding, additional resource teachers and support assistants mean that students with disabilities now, more than ever, have a real chance succeeding in education. Out of this success they, of course, have expectations of exciting careers.

Employers too are increasingly aware of the benefits of a diverse pool of talent. People with different and new ideas and those that can bring something new to an organisation are highly valued. However, while there is a greater awareness of the diversity of graduates available, including those graduates with a disability, have recruitment practices kept apace with these developments? Leslee O'Loughlin together with Mary Quirke set out to explore this question.

Background

A little bit of background: WAM (Willing, Able Mentoring) is a project of AHEAD that promotes access to the mainstream labour market for graduates with disabilities using a structured mentored work placement method. This support structure enables graduates with disabilities and employers to engage in a positive, reciprocal learning experience together.

The primary object of the WAM Programme is to ensure employers understand disability with a goal of creating attitudinal change. This in turn generates more opportunities for employment for graduates with disabilities and results in improved mainstream inclusive practices and policies. To this end WAM has delivered 250+ placements to date. This means that 250+ teams have gained experience of working with a graduate with a disability. For over 10 years now the WAM team has provided training to 600+ professionals; been cited by the NDA, Amnesty International and **Eurofound** as a model of good practice; and resulted in 45% of graduates progressing to full-time work.

The benefits of mentoring

From the beginning, WAM has emphasised the benefits of its structured mentoring program. Mentoring is core to the learning on the WAM placement – it is the space where employers can learn a little bit more about the impact of disability in the workplace and can ask the questions they need to ask safely. While on the one hand graduates with disabilities can explore what the workplace has to offer, sometimes for the first time in a graduate level position, on the other hand employers can see inclusive practice in action and learn from the experience. It is these employers and graduates with disabilities who are leading positive change in attitudes; it is they who recognise the benefits of learning from each other. Bringing different perspectives together to sometimes challenge long held beliefs about disability in the workplace can make for some very interesting conversations and learning.

While the mentoring program was initially a face-to-face training session which took place over 2 to 3 days, over the past 10 years the expectations for training in the workplace have evolved. In recognition of this, WAM together with the support of Enterprise Rent-A-Car have developed the training into an online version, so that it is easily accessed by mentors and meets the needs of the workplace.

Together with its employer leaders, including Enterprise Rent-A-Car, WAM is rethinking the workplace.

Let's hear the employer's perspective

Ms Leslee O'Loughlin

Leslee, tell us a little bit about your company?

Enterprise Rent-A-Car (ERAC) is part of the larger Enterprise Holdings. We are the largest car rental service provider in the world, have 16 billion in revenue worldwide and over 80,000 employees. We are a privately held company, owned by the Taylor family from St. Louis Missouri.

Who and what do you recruit?
We recruit graduates into our management training program because Enterprise promotes almost 100% from within. Most of our senior management team world-wide began their careers as trainees, learning to run the business in one of our local offices. In Ireland and the UK we are actually one of the largest graduate recruiters, recruiting from all disciplines - business, finance, humanities, marketing, HR – you name it!

What do you look for?
While we are looking for graduates - we are not looking for any specific degree. We recruit across all disciplines specifically honing in on key competencies and interests such as the drive to be entrepreneurial, the dream of running a business, and the ability to sell and influence others. In essence we are teaching the graduate everything they need to know about running the business, and to be a successful business leader. We promote based on performance so if a graduate has the interest and ambition to be a business person and they meet minimum performance expectations - we support and develop that ambition.

What has been your experience with disabled people?
We have hired employees directly from university and also from the WAM program, we have partnered with AHEAD for a number of years now to develop our knowledge and understanding of disability so that we can be a more inclusive employer. As an employer we have also supported employees with acquired disabilities by accommodating their needs through different initiatives. Without sharing any particular story we aim to be open and communicate with employees themselves, to be flexible and to challenge our own perceptions of disability.

What have you changed as a result of your learning?
We have learned that it can be a challenge - with regard to disability not all employees have the same needs so we seek not to make assumptions. We have reviewed our processes including recruitment and appraisal, to ensure that we are in line with best practices and are more inclusive. We have also engaged in bespoke training for our senior management team and our hiring managers to ensure that we are fostering an inclusive culture and leading from the front. Most importantly we are open to continuing to change.

As you are aware WAM is a program that has engaged with employers for over 10 years now. We have learned much about recruitment and expectations of both the employer and the graduate. Let's discuss our experiences with a particular focus on the following statements – are they myths or truths?

Graduates with a disability need to be more prepared when starting in the workplace.

Mary: It's true that graduates with disabilities have different considerations to other graduates. They first of all need to think about the topic of disclosure – do they or don't they speak about their disability. Furthermore they need to consider how they might explain their curriculum vitae or application form - a lack of work experience or the lack of an Erasmus program, gaps in their experience due to illness or lack of hobbies if their disability prevented them from engaging in such things. What do employers need to do?

Leslee: Employers also need to prepare for this; they need to be able to engage in the dialogue in an appropriate way about disability and the necessary accommodations. The graduate is the best person to advise an employer in what will enable them to reach their full potential. This has to be an open and honest dialogue and we have to be ready to listen.

Graduates with a disability present differently at interview

Mary: Graduates with a disability have a different story to that of their peers so it's true they need to be ready to discuss that story while presenting their competencies. It is also often the case that they underestimate what they actually have to offer – their ability to multitask, organise, and negotiate or other such skills that they rely on every day. What is most notable is that they need to be comfortable with their experiences and be able to talk to them. As their experiences are often not typical they need to prepare differently. Again, what do employers need to do?

Leslee: A truly inclusive employer should be able to identify the transferable skills that a candidate with a disability is communicating or presenting during an interview. Often the achievements and atypical experiences of these candidates relate specifically to many of the traditional core competencies relative to graduate roles. While it might be an atypical experience - it is just outside of their typical candidate experience. Employers need to approach any dialogue with an open mind and a position of advocacy. They need to ask themselves - how do you 'screen in rather than screen out?!'

Graduates with a disability are prepared for work, but they are not prepared to discuss their disability (disclosure)

Mary: It is true that disclosure is not easy. Disability is something that can make both parties in a conversation feel uncomfortable. When engaged in the recruitment process, a traditional process whereby an individual wants to present their abilities and motivations in the best manner possible, disability can be perceived as a weakness. What graduates need to know is that they, more than anyone, understand how they do things and achieve results. They know what they need in order to get the job done. In this scenario disability is more than just a label – it is about understanding the job that needs to be done and also being able to discuss how this can be achieved. And again – what do employers need to do?

Leslee: But it's a myth to suggest people just aren't prepared to discuss disclosure. Again this is where the dialogue is critical - an employer should have the confidence to engage openly with the candidate and they should be prepared to listen to what the graduate is saying.

Another aspect that impacts on disclosure and disability at work is the work itself. Often recruiters and hiring managers might not be familiar with all the aspects of a job - in fact that is why we recruit across all disciplines. A great and successful business person might not be studying business. We have learned to recognise that it is about what a person wants from their career. What they can bring and how they best achieve results. That is why we in Enterprise can engage with a graduate with a disability and offer opportunity irrespective of how they need to work.

Technology really makes all the difference for a graduate with a disability?

Mary: Yes and no – it depends on the job and what needs to be done. What might need to be reviewed are the considerations about how someone can use technology in the workplace – particularly if recording devices are being used. It is a good idea to have a code of conduct and to go over this with the graduate.

Leslee: More importantly an employer should not make assumptions that they will have to transform their business at a great cost and thereby screen out a qualified candidate. Uninformed assumptions are often made around technology; around issues such as cost and usage which can put the candidate at a disadvantage in the recruitment process itself. More often accommodations are simple and technology is basic - adaptions can be minimal.

The employer gets to decide what a reasonable accommodation is

Mary: While employers do have a say on cost and also what is appropriate – it is not just about who decides if the employer employee relationship is going to work. It is good practice to have an open and honest conversation whereby all parties are involved in deciding what is best. A needs assessment contributes to this and puts a framework in place. In the event of a disagreement, there are factors that need to be reviewed such as what is appropriate, what is safe and the legislation that covers these issues. And yet again - what does an employer need to do?!

Leslee: Again, engaging in an honest dialogue with a candidate is best. Honest and open communication sets both the candidate and employer up to win.

Mary: Finally Leslee – what would you say to the statement **traditional recruitment methods do not work for graduates with a disability**

Leslee: It is true - employers need to be willing and prepared to adapt their recruitment processes. This will allow them to better assess the competencies of a graduate with a disability. It is a one size fits one philosophy not a one size fits all across recruitment.

We need to apply this across all our recruitment or we will just screen out the best candidates, disability or not!

In conclusion

The inclusiveness and flexibility of the mainstream labour market still has a long way to go to fully tap into this new talent pool, as traditionally people with disabilities have been seen as burdens rather than resources. This is particularly notable in professional areas such as teaching, engineering, professional health care and other areas. There are still fears for employers around legislation, supports required and work productivity. This thinking needs to shift. Together with our employers we are seeking to learn more and address these issues.

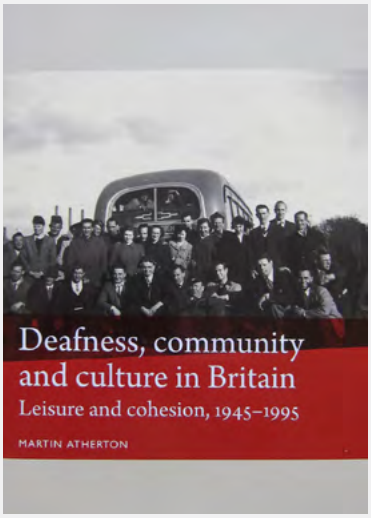
This article is based on a presentation delivered by Leslee O'Loughlin of Enterprise Rent-A-Car and Mary Quirke of AHEAD at the LINK conference in Sweden, September 2014 and the NADP conference in the UK in July 2015.

10th Anniversary of the WAM Programme

AHEAD is very proud to have been invited to Áras an Uachtaráin for the 10th Anniversary of the WAM programme. 50 graduates and employers who participate in WAM along with AHEAD members and staff put on their 'best bib and tucker' and headed to the Phoenix Park, where the sun shone and they enjoyed afternoon tea in the presidential reception rooms. President Michael D. Higgins greeted everybody personally and spoke eloquently about the success stories of the graduates who demonstrated not only their skills, but resilience and creativity in achieving their professional goals. He also praised the employers who have partnered AHEAD on the WAM (Willing Able Mentoring) programme for their openness and capacity to try new things. He affirmed the need to work together as a community, and to collectively learn from each other and find new ways of working.

WAM Graduates with President Michael D. Higgins

WAM Employers with President Michael D. Higgins



Book review by Alan Hurst
Atherton, M. (2012) Deafness, Community and Culture in Britain: Leisure and Cohesion 1945 – 1995

Manchester, England: University of Manchester Press, 176pp
ISBN 978 0 7190 8467 6, hardback. £65-00

The focus of this book is on the role of deaf clubs, especially those in North-West England, in creating, sustaining and promoting notions of a shared community and a shared culture among deaf people.

The main source of information is the newspaper British Deaf News (BDN) and the events reported between 1945 and 1995. The introduction to the book is easy to read and provides a useful summary of the book, and outlines its organisation into eight chapters and their content. It is here that readers encounter for the first time the important concept of topophilia which underpins much of what follows. The term refers to feelings of love and affection that are felt for particular places and the folk who are associated with them. It is here too that the author mentions the decline of deaf clubs since 1995, a point repeated later in the book. The decline is linked to the development of more instant communication modes such as texts, emails and SMS messages which obviate the need for deaf people to have face-to-face communication. There is also the lack of interest amongst young deaf people.

An additional important discussion concerns the use of D/d in relation to those who are the focus of the book. Atherton explains the origins of the usage, noting especially that use of Deaf has tended to act in an exclusionary way to embrace only those born pre-lingually deaf and use sign language as their method of communication. He outlines the reason for his preference for the term 'deaf' which he then uses throughout the remainder of the book because he wants his writing to be much more inclusive in terms of who can be considered to be part of the culture and community

The next few chapters discuss some important fundamental issues. Chapter Two, for example, considers whether deafness is a disability and the dilemmas faced by deaf people who do need to regard themselves as disabled if they are to access additional funding to pay for interpreters etc. The Disabled Students

Allowances in the UK are an example of this and relevant to the work of staff in disability services. The place of sign language in this is acknowledged in the following way: 'The non-recognition of British Sign Language(BSL) as a native language of Britain, coupled with the continuing dominance of medical perceptions of deafness, is at the heart of the deafness as disability debate for many deaf people'(p.17) (In relation to this point, one must note that BSL is recognised now as an official language in the UK.)

With regard to leisure and sport, deafness has not proved to be a major barrier although it is interesting to read of the relationships of the national organisations of deaf sport with the paralympic movement. Another important matter covered is the attitude to the participation of hearing people in deaf clubs and their activities (e.g. the families and friends of deaf people). The author points out that the growth of courses in Deaf Studies and in sign language in colleges and universities has meant that many more hearing people have become involved in deaf clubs. There is also a converse effect - with the increase in the numbers of hearing people who have some competence in using sign language, deaf people find less need to go to segregated activities like those provided by deaf clubs.

Chapter Three describes the historical development of deaf clubs from their origins in Victorian social reform to their decline at the end of the twentieth century. It was fascinating to read about and reflect upon several of the points raised – for example the effects of having different interest groups such as the Royal National Institute for Deaf People and the British Deaf Association, whilst a more recent concern is the membership of deaf people from ethnic minority communities in deaf clubs.

Chapter Four provides a similar historical outline of leisure and sporting activities and their contribution to the development of a deaf community and a deaf culture. The history of the 'British Deaf News' is covered in Chapter Five and the justification for its use as a key source. The newspaper depended on contributions from deaf clubs and deaf people themselves rather than making use of staff reporters.

Atherton states that this is a powerful argument for using the content as a true reflection of the major interests and concerns of deaf people. Given its national coverage, it means too that the deaf community can be defined more broadly than those involved with local deaf clubs. Based on his analysis, the two themes which are recorded throughout the period he examines are leisure activities and sport. This leads smoothly into the focus on these two topics in Chapter Six in which he reveals that based on the BDN, there were 242 deaf clubs existing during the fifty year period. The types of leisure activities were no different from those undertaken by hearing people and can be classified under eleven headings. However, many club activities involved visits for social activities to other deaf clubs locally, regionally, nationally and internationally.

With regard to sport, England created an overall national body for deaf sports in 1930 some twenty years after one had been established in Germany. In England the major sports were football in winter and bowls in summer. Importantly, these were often in leagues involving hearing teams thus enabling deaf people to demonstrate their prowess and skills irrespective of having an impairment. However, the overall range of sports featured in the newspaper was restricted to just eleven different ones.

Chapters Seven and Eight explore the general concerns outlined already but in the specific geographical context of the north-west of England, the area outside London that had the greatest number of deaf clubs (28).

The second of these two chapters, the longest in the book, includes some very interesting specific examples of leisure activities and sports. In this region, 24% of activities involved trips and holidays, 16% parties and dances, and 15% fund-raising. Individual illustrative examples provide interest and depth to these bare statistics. As for sports, 18% were each spent on football and bowls whilst 26% were spent playing snooker/billiards/pool.

The closing chapter begins by looking at the future of deaf clubs and their lack of appeal for young deaf people. Atherton suggests that one reason for this is the decline of segregated school education and the shift to including deaf pupils in mainstream schools. This is also important for the lack of continuity which used to be found between segregated special schools and local deaf clubs. Additionally, there has been greater acceptance of sign language in society. The latter contributes also to strengthening the challenge to seeing deafness as difference rather than disability. Many years ago, Michael Oliver said that disabled people are prevented by their disability from engaging in 'normal' or 'ordinary' activities. Atherton's response to this is that 'As for being disabled through an inability to do ordinary things, the evidence of deaf people's leisure activity contradicts this entirely.'(p.169)

It should be clear from my summary that this book is not crucial to the work of staff in disability services in post-school education. However, I do consider it to be something that colleagues would benefit from reading and then reflecting on a range of implications for their roles and responsibilities. For me, it is an example of the desirability of moving away from being 'trained' about disability to becoming 'educated' and taking the position of being a well-informed, widely-read professional. Agreed, the book does not address directly the day-to-day concerns of disability services, but it should make colleagues think about some basic issues, most notably the treatment of deaf people as disabled. What's more, this acquisition of new knowledge can be achieved in an interesting and enjoyable way through reading this book.

Despite my considerable positive feelings for the book, I have some points of concern. Some of these can be attributed to the publisher in terms of the small type-font size used for the text and the high cost of the book - the latter I am sure will act as a deterrent to potential readers. I recognise that the target market might be small and specialist but I wonder if some cost-cutting might have been achieved by publishing it as a paperback for instance.

The matters which relate to the author are fourfold. First, in

terms of deaf clubs, the development of culture and its theoretical underpinning, I was surprised to find no mention of the Marxian idea of the development of 'class consciousness' and the change from being a 'class in itself' to a 'class for itself'. At the theoretical level, links could have been made too to the work of Alfred Schutz and the 'taken-for-granted' in exploring social attitudes to deaf people.

Secondly, again relating to theoretical underpinning, I found the concept of topophilia fascinating. There is a promise to return to this in the conclusion which I looked forward to reading and indeed on page 160, there is some discussion but with no specific mention of the concept by name (and despite it being listed as such in the index).

Thirdly, I would have liked more illustrations. On pages 78 and 79, two very differently-focused front covers of the BDN are reproduced demonstrating the move away from domesticity to a more political stance – what a shame there is not more of this at regular intervals. One or two personal stories would have been really welcome.

Finally, I was a little surprised by the number of typographical errors which seem to have escaped the eyes of the proof-reader – there are three on pages 36 -37 for example.

It would be wrong and unfair to end this review with a short paragraph about a number of shortcomings. I want to be clear. These were a minor irritant and did not detract from my overall favourable impression and enjoyment. I can recommend the book in the strongest and most enthusiastic of terms. I hope that my comments do encourage the readers of this journal to get a copy and enjoy reading it as much as I did.

Ahead would like to thank all contributors to this publication for their time and input.

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ahead
Association for Higher Education Access & Disability

THE AHEAD JOURNAL - No. 2
A Review of Inclusive Education & Employment Practices

AHEAD, the Association for Higher Education Access and Disability, is an independent non-profit organisation working to promote full access to and participation in further and higher education for students with disabilities and to enhance their employment prospects on graduation.

AHEAD provides information to students and graduates with disabilities, teachers, guidance counsellors and parents on disability issues in education.

AHEAD works with graduates and employers through the GET AHEAD Graduate Forum and the WAM Mentored Work Placement Programme.

AHEAD coordinates LINK, a worldwide network of professionals promoting the inclusion of students & graduates with disabilities in Higher Education managed by six European partner organisations.

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