University Inclusion Practices – Re-Encountering the Status Quo: An Interpretive Approach

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Abstract

My aim is to forge a feel for the importance of building critical understandings of common forms of engagement with disability and in this way work against the careless-care that seems to surround the ways disability-experience is managed in education. First, I discuss what this interpretive DSE approach entails. Second, I narrate being in the University classroom with my dyslexic ways and counterpose this to “access statements” on course outlines which are now a common occurrence in the Canadian context. I then conduct an interpretive analysis of the meaning of disability as it appears through my personal story and these bureaucratic statements of inclusion. Despite these differing instances of inclusion, I show how both maintain the status quo of university work-life. Through a politics of wonder, this paper aims to invigorate life affirming relations where disability might figure as something other than a pharmakon for the status quo.

Keywords

Inclusion experiences – accessibility statements – individuality as ideology – interpretation – disability as pharmakon – status quo

Introduction

When disability appears in our lives, it seems as if it is in us, as part of our body, mind, senses, emotions, comportment, or feelings and these gone awry. The focus of this paper is on the question of how it seems so. This individualizing of
disability, like all aspects of individualization, is an en-worlded activity, done differently from one time and place to another, accomplished through cultural norms, and recognized differently from one culture to the next (Bauman 2004: 15–16). Thus, the question – how do we experience disability as an individual problem?

I pursue this question by focusing on conceptions of inclusion and individuality as these enter my life as a dyslexic university professor. I will also explore the appearance of inclusion in course-outline (syllabi) access statements (a common bureaucratized inclusion practice that is occurring in many Western(ized) educational locales over the last decade). Between my subjective experience of disability and its objectifying representation in course outlines, I aim to explore what including disability as an individual problem means for university life today.

Before proceeding, however, it will be fruitful for me to expand upon the meaning of interpretive work and the politics of wonder that animates my analysis.

Interpretive Relations & Disability Studies in Education (DSE)

Taking an interpretive sociological approach, it is possible to address appearances of disability in DSE – how disability seems to one’s self, to others, and to collectives – as a legitimate focus for inquiry. This approach treats any appearance or the so-it-seems experience of disability as accomplished through interpretation (Titchkosky, 2008). Moreover, interpretation is engaged not as an individual act, but as something done through the culture within which the interpretation appears and this includes the people who, and systems that notice disability, and orient to it, as an individual problem. Individualizing disability is an interpretive cultural relation and it is necessary to study it as such.

This way of working can be connected to other critical approaches. For example, those who take a social-ecological approach, may connect with a disability studies that attempts to bring out the sense of the house of our living relations as this ecology constitutes interpretations of disability today. It is also possible to connect this way of working to approaches in Critical Indigenous Studies as it offers a way to nurture all our relations conceived without singular frames of cause and effect.1 Attention to disability as situated within relations of the environment, interactional norms, and knowledge regimes can also

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1 A sense of orienting the self and ways of knowing, including disability, through our interrelatedness or through all our relations has been nurtured by various authors including...
resist supremacists’ notions of disability as a “restriction or lack” resulting in an inability to function in “the manner or within the rage considered normal for a human being” (WHO 1981: 8). Such an individually oriented functional version of disability is routinely reproduced by governments influenced by assumptions that disability can be measured in terms of a loss of productivity (Disability Adjusted Life Year calculations (Daly, WHO N.D.)) or defined as such (World Report on Disability, 2011). Within disability studies there are well established critiques of the able-ist assumptions behind the ways in which disability is noticed, measured and addressed in ways that promote values of productivity over and against human flourishing (Campbell, 2009; Erevelles, 2011; Goodley, 2014; Mitchell with Snyder, 2015) Since at least the early 2000, disability studies in education has been attempting to dis-mantle the governing assumptions that only the “abled-disabled” are worthy of supports and/or inclusion (Connor and Gabel, 2013; Titchkosky 2003: 517)

Whether understood as on the edge of ability, as lack of function, or as an unnatural loss, these ways of noticing disability demonstrate that there is no appearance of disability that is not simultaneously a depiction of the culture from which it springs; there is no perception without cultural conceptions. This means that all that seems individual about disability experience can be read for its socio-cultural grounding. Consider the iconic figure of access, for example. This figure is used to find a way into a building, for instances, or to find a toilet once in the building, or to secure services or other accommodations. Disabled people seek signs of accessibility given that the taken-for-granted background order of daily life is typically made-up of barriers to disability and is thus inaccessible to disabled people. The iconic figure of access tacitly reminds all people of the exclusiveness of the normative order in that the figures’ functionality relies on a collective assumption that the general character of daily life is inaccessible. Reliant on a background of exclusion, the figure of access works to show some people a way in. The figure is pedagogical as well as useful – it schools us to take exclusion as a tacit yet necessary social order and teaches us too how to work within a cultural order that does not have disabled people in mind.

Any representation of disability, any way disability seems to be, can be read through this figure/ground relationship. This is why I proceed from the premise

Anderson 2018; Chacaby 2022; Kafer, 2013; Manning 2017; Norris 2014. In Anderson’s review of Disability Studies and the Environmental Humanities (2017), he turns to Eunjung Kim’s Currative Violence (2017: 226) to suggest that eco-crip anti-colonial feminist frames need not get caught up in producing only prescriptions for futures-to-come. Instead, disability studies can attempt explorations of the registers of interpretation through which we already encounter each other and reveal how all our relations make disability meaningful in particular ways.
that all appearances of disability are simultaneously depictions of the culture from which they spring. Further, the examples of inclusion that I make use of in this analysis, also allow me to address the intertwining of perceiver and perceived within the complex cultural scenes of their appearance. Attending to what grounds the appearances of disability as well as to the interrelation between the perception of disability and the situation of the perceiver requires the activation of wonder.

The Politics of Wonder

Wonder is a re-engagement with the constant touch point between imagination and perception, but at a slower pace than happens in daily life when people are simply trying to get on with it. While imagination and perception can be understood as always tied, it is difficult to experience this tie and to engage its consequences (Bottici 2014: 13–16). Thus, wonder is necessary to forge an understanding of the ties among perceptions of disability, including personal experience, and the human imaginary that typically knows disability only as an individual problem (Bottici, 2014; Brim, 2014; Gagne, 2007; Gilleard and Higgs, 2013; Goodley, 2020; Wynter, 1994).

A reliance on a politics of wonder differentiates itself from other approaches (critical, realist, or otherwise) that are tied tightly to diagnosis and amelioration. To diagnose a problem and plan corrective actions can result in including only those conceptions of disability that fit the corrective scene. Insofar as these conceptions remain unnoticed and unexamined, they are reproduced within ameliorative actions. Wonder is a way to interrupt the reproduction of more of the same by forging a focus on the receding grounds of possibility that provide for the appearance of disability, including its appearance as a problem requiring solutions (Mitchell and Snyder, 1997; Lajoie, 2021; Michalko, 2002: 13).

Activating wonder requires that we attend to our perception of disability by uncovering the interpretive actions involved in perception itself. It involves, too, attending to the representations of something that seems like disability, and working with this as a cultural enactment by showing how the representation involves a crystallization of a way of imagining disability reflective of the interpretive grounds of its possibility. Just as it is possible to consider the background order of exclusion against which the iconic figure of access appears, so

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2 A fuller discussion of a politics of wonder can be found in my *The Question of Access* especially the final chapter.
too is it possible to consider the background order of the meanings granted to being ordinary, against which the figure of disability appears. Conceptions of the ordinary, more often than not, diminish, discount, and even degrade the significance of disability, as if being disabled is not part of the ordinary human condition. By revealing this background-order it becomes possible to cultivate a more meaningful life in and with disability since imagination is provoked to invite and seek alternative relations to disability.

Inclusion & the Politics of Wonder

An explicit focus on oriented acts of inclusion, is suggested by Henri-Jacques Stiker in his *History of Disability*:

“To initiate an analysis of the social workings of disability by way of its integration is a method more critical, even more militant, than to address it in terms of exclusion. The motives and factors that lead to rejection, even when such rejection is hidden and subtle, are fairly obvious to the attentive. Integration passes more unnoticed. Sometimes it even seems to occur on its own. It embodies claims that are widely supported today. Everything contributes to masking the reasons for integration, to forgetting them, to jumbling the various means of integration under the aegis of an ethics of integration. From the moment you integrate, who would venture to come looking for how it happens, why it happens, and in the way it does.”

STIKER 1999: 15

A rejection of disabled people as legitimate members of a community is relatively easy to perceive and point out (and even justify given cultural conceptions of disability at play). We may notice, for example, that there are no ramps, no figures of access to be found in a particular environment and we may point out the exclusions that follow. But, Stiker suggests that integration (inclusion) passes more unnoticed and may mask the meaning made of disability and disabled people. People may use ramps and accessible toilets; how those accessible features got there and why they did, as Stiker suggests, goes unnoticed. Still, noticed or not, these acts of inclusion have something to do with the meaning made of our disabled lives.

Inclusion is, at times, simply folded into other aspects of ordinary life. Consider, when all the toilets in a particular environment become family toilets and (some) accessibility features are included as family needs. Or, consider
the placement of a figure of access or the random (to blind people) appearance of Braille signage in the environment of daily life. All such acts of inclusion are accompanied by messages. Dissolving disability into the social whole, as when family toilets count as accessible one’s, or the random placement of Braille signage, are inclusionary activities widely supported in the West today. Braille is made to appear as a normal visible part of the environment suggesting an orientation that includes blind people and this, even though its utility for Braille readers is often out of touch. Stiker suggests that such inclusive acts are an ideal location for us to unmask and re-encounter the meaning made of disability. It is within these acts of inclusion that the meaning of disability is both located and hidden by those very acts. These acts can be understood as motivated by an intersectional politics, or a will to include, or a progressive attitude. Still, we can wonder about what has actually changed in instances such as Braille signs available only for sighted people or washrooms that are seemingly designed for everyone but which become so crowded that their use relies on a complicated visual, touch, and reading system. Instead of attempting to ascertain the motives behind the acts of inclusion we can address what is made of disability through these acts of inclusion that reproduce the status quo rather than any change. As more and more features are added to toilet facilities, disabled people are understood to be as just like anyone else who has “special” needs but not necessarily understood as reading the environment differently than do parents, children, trans*, or people with medical issues. Disability is configured as a “useless difference” – that is, a difference that ought not make a difference (Michalko, 2022: 99) even as everyday structures are marked with signs that everyone who is anyone is welcome.

Stiker does not rest easy at the moment inclusion appears and, instead, pursues an analysis regarding how such integration happened and what meaning it might carry. He suggests that since the age of rehabilitation (inaugurated by two world wars alongside bureaucratic and technocratic approaches to much of life), Western cultures have become oriented to producing disability as close as possible to ordinary, where integration becomes a “same-ing” project but not one that “claims” disability-as-difference that could or should matter. The difference that disability could make is drowned into the social whole “such as it is.” Contemporary acts of inclusion have contributed to the collective “effacement of the disabled” (Stiker 1999: 143) where there should be nothing

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3 Braille signage often appears throughout the built environment without any indication to blind people that it is there – making this Braille impossible to read for a blind person – thus out of touch.
to complain about, no space of critique, only a fit of disabled people through the doing of ordinary things.

The fate of disability under contemporary Western conditions, serves to position disability where the best difference it is thought to make is imagined as no difference at all. Rod Michalko (2002) traces the movement of this idea not only through everyday life but in disability studies itself, suggesting that

> “Any difference between the two [non-disability and disability] is understood as the unessential difference that comes from doing things differently. The only difference disability makes is collected under the same-ness of techne’; [afterall] everyone does things and everyone makes use of techniques and technologies to do them. The difference-of-disability can now be erased with the invocation of the contemporary rhetoric that seeks to persuade both disabled and non-disabled people that doing things differently is a difference that does not make a difference.”

Michalko 2002: 158–9

Nothing unsettling, disruptive, nothing to make us rethink where and how we are placed in relation to each other, no need to reconsider the house of our living relations; this is the ordinary approach to inclusion that we encounter in the everyday. Disability becomes little more than doing things differently where everyone is assumed to do things, just that non-disabled people are assumed to do those things ordinarily.

Still, it is possible to notice disability as more than the doing of things differently, since we can conduct an analysis following actions suggesting how to do things differently; following the enactment of inclusion; following the various actions which suggest that our relation to disability is now complete. This way of orienting4 to inclusion as not a done deal, ironically orients us to the understanding that acts of inclusion represent a chance to reveal the grounds for

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4 In *Queer Phenomenology* (2006: 8), Sara Ahmed says “Orientations are about how we begin, how we proceed from ‘here,’ which affects what is ‘there’ appears, how it presents itself.” Beginning from acts of inclusion, it becomes possible to orient to what has oriented people toward inclusion. Such an approach aims to uncover the ways in which the solution of inclusion is “there” and go backwards towards the “here” and its/our sense of the problem that made a specific act of inclusion a sense-able solution. This is different from a coalition building approach where what has been done is regarded as a sign of things to come, where who is currently in or out needs to be delineated in a disability futurity connected to a shared understanding of traditionally excluded groups working together. Whereas governments may suggest that disability-inclusion makes good business sense, more progressive disability studies activists and scholars have been suggesting that disability-inclusion makes good coalition-building sense (Kafer, 2013: 26, note 10; 149ff). That disability
treating inclusion as the quintessential solution to the problem of disability. It means, too, addressing inclusive actions as a way of making disability meaningful by exploring what was done, how does this action mean inclusion and to whom, and who or what was included?

**The Act of Inclusion**

I now turn to two examples of “disability inclusion.” These examples provide brief accounts of disability-inclusion in university life and provide an occasion to reveal something about the grounds upon which these acts rely. In this way, I will illustrate that by attending to how imagination and perception touch we can start to cultivate a feel for the importance of building critical understandings of common forms of including disability.

*Example 1: Titchkosky’s Time Warp*

I look at the clock. I look at the people in my class. I attend to my lecture’s sense of time – to that clock, too. They all were clear. And, I felt it – much time had passed; I’m running out of time. The rush from a department meeting into the classroom, the pressing questions from individual students about an up-coming assignment, as well as my on-the-spot verbal rendering of my written directions for this assignment – this, all of this, just before starting the class, certainly took time. I then recall the public talk some of the students said they wanted to attend; that would happen right after this class. . .

I check the clock again, *tic*, too much to cover, *toc*, too much time has passed, *tic toc*.

“Ok,” I said, “I’m going to have to limit discussion time, because we are almost out of time.”

I check the clock again. “Oh! I’m sorry. I promised you last week we would end class early today so you had enough time to make it to the talk some of you mentioned. And now I kept you late. Let’s end here.”

There is a hesitation, an almost freeze-frame look to the class. Even though no one else moves, *I do*. Quickly gathering up my notes, I leave. They looked surprised.

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5 An earlier version of this story and its analysis, appears as Healey and Titchkosky, 2022: 245–247.

is “good for something,” or that disability inclusion is good for everyone is an important political sentiment and part of disability studies since its inception (Hunt, 1998 [1966]; Linton, 1998). However, my aim in this paper is to reveal the understanding of disability that we must already have in hopes that such reflection also can make for a better future.
As I return to my office, I think about the strange stillness and blank stares I received from some students. Perhaps they were not that interested in going to that talk or maybe I cut off the discussion too abruptly. That’s OK, I reason, we all have lots to do, and I have another meeting. I put away my books and notes, respond to a few emails, and check the time again. Wow, the person to meet me is really late, tic, more than an hour, toc... so unlike them, they’ve never been late before, tic toc.

So unlike them... so strange and ... Tic. Toc. Very slowly, a different time envelopes me.

This time it’s The Time. The time as others know it floods over me and my time, the one that had completely caught me, tangled me in a rush, now slowly falls away... my sense of time, warping all my relations, somehow left me out of sync.

Jeez! I ended class more than an hour early!

I phone my partner “What time is it?” Tic. “I think I ended my class an hour early,” toc, “but I thought I was late.” Tic Toc.

“You really need to pay more attention.”

“They probably thought I was weird. I’ll have to write an email apologizing to the students and tell them my dyslexia mixed me up... I ended more than an hour early yet I told them I was sorry for keeping them late! I am such a fool.”

Inclusion-Wonder

Everything, all situations, including classrooms, not only have their time but also have their specific ways of doing time – of starting, moving forward, and of ending; of fulfilling regular expectations of how time should be spent. Indeed, any version of time and space can be conceived of as the interwoven relations of contexts and their tasks. It is this situation that both establishes and sets time as a normative phenomenon. When we become conscious of the doing of time (H. Sacks, 1984), when the weave between context and task begins to unravel, one way to stitch things back together is to invoke disability. While dyslexia may never leave me as a way of reading the world, it is included in this account as a way to stitch a reasonable sense to what might otherwise appear as weird, sloppy, or foolish.

My invocation of dyslexia brought an understanding of it to the fore, setting the stage for me to become “situation conscious’ while [the] normals present are spontaneously involved within the situation” (Goffman, 1963: 111). Goffman (1963: 111) goes on to suggest that some people gain a “special aliveness” to what otherwise remains a “background of unattended matters.” My inclusion...
of dyslexia, is simultaneously my connection to a special aliveness, often a jolt, regarding the social ordering of the doing of time. Riding the edge of the “normal perspective” where time might remain in the unattended background, my dyslexic self can become especially attentive to the notion that time is moving and that it must be kept. To experience the social character of time, despite one’s best efforts not to, allows a flash of recognition of a failure to keep time which becomes a matter that is startling and unnerving.

Ending class early yet announcing that I am out of time – the class might find me “weird” – I, however, find dyslexia as well as my self-stigmatizing sense that I am foolish, whereas my partner finds me inattentive. It is, however, the disability designation, and not weird, foolish, nor inattentive that I include in the email that I sent to the students after class. My apology email offers the students a way to make sense of the time mix-up but says nothing about the special aliveness to the doing of time that I underwent. Saying that I am late while ending the class a full hour early, is a wrinkle in time flattened by my self-stigmatizing process. It is not that the degradation disappears; the designation weird remains, so too does my sentiment – foolish. Whether “weird” or “foolish” or “inattentive,” and despite the invocation of specific understandings of wrinkles-in-time, it is only dyslexic that I included as a sense making device. A disability is made to serve as an explanatory device to conceptually manage this situation. In the end, I explain my self via an email which features my dyslexia. I offer nothing else (until I start to wonder about this through narrative reflection).

This feel for how dyslexia lives in my life is distinct from how disability is addressed in the more objective accounts of official University accommodation procedures. No apology is needed in these accounts since the primary way we construct disability in the university environment is by noting impaired functionality and by suggesting that private accommodation procedures are on offer. One aspect of the routinized procedures of addressing disability is by making accommodation statements in University course outlines (syllabi). I move now to consider these practices. This is another way to re-encounter the act of inclusion and wonder what it is making of disability by considering what this action means and who or what is included.

**Example 2: Course Outline Accommodation Statements**

In the autumn of 2021, I was teaching an upper level undergraduate course in disability studies at the University of Toronto. At the beginning of the course, we were discussing the social model of disability and its focus on societal barriers and inappropriate responses as they transform people with impairments...
into disabled people (Oliver, 1990; 1996). A student in the class provided an example of such inappropriate responses taken from a course outline that she had recently received in another course. Along with listing the readings and assignments, regulations and policies, the last page, page 18, included an accessibility statement.

**Students Who Need Accommodations**

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please approach Accessibility Services at (416)978 8060; accessibility.utoronto.ca [sic]. Accommodations include getting a volunteer note-taker and writing tests under special conditions. Do not approach your professor or TA [teaching assistant] about accommodations. Accessibility services has the necessary expertise, and they provide full confidentiality, so your privacy is protected.

With the exception of “Do not approach your professor or TA,” the rest of the accommodation statement is commonly used in the university. It is interesting to note how this accommodation statement differs from the academic dishonesty statement that proceeded it on this course outline.

If you have any questions about what is or is not permitted in this course, please do not hesitate to contact me. If you have questions about appropriate research and citation methods, you are expected to seek out additional information from me or other available campus resources like... [the College Writing Centers, the Academic Success Center, or the U of T Writing Website.]

Whereas concerns about dishonesty invites contact with the professor (“please do not hesitate to contact me”), disability concerns do not. Still, disability is included as the final section. The question now is – to what end, that is, what is being included when disability is included in course outlines? The inclusion of disability is a way to direct the student toward services and away from the professor or the teaching assistant (TA); it is a way to inform the student of procedures such as note-takers and special ways to write tests but it is not depicted as a time to establish relations within the classroom. Disability, “included as excludable,” (Titchkosky, 2003) marks a moment to let the student know that they should go elsewhere to seek expertise, confidentiality and
privacy in service provision so that one’s “diverse learning styles and needs” can be addressed. It is in this sense that the students with “diverse learning styles and needs” (presumably a code for disabled students) are “welcome in this course.” Disability is included as an impediment to success in the course and thus as something to be accommodated (outside the course) if success is possible. Whether the concern is related to their expertise or potential privacy infractions, the professor has positioned themselves as someone who does not need to be addressed through the experience of disability.

But what of the less egregious and more regular, even sensitive, accommodation statements appearing across North American campuses? Separating the student from the professor, the TA, as well as from the class, is perhaps not so uncommon. (See Figure 1.)

The separation of the disabled student from the classroom is in service of inclusion-work. Inclusion requires the work of contact and confirmation of disability, of registration, visitations to offices, of making plans and securing services. Working to establish disability supports and services works the student out of the classroom in hopes of eventually accommodating (working) the student back into it. Even though it is clear that this sort of inclusion-work enacts a separation of disability from the regular and expected aspects of the classroom, we may still pursue a politics of wonder by asking what are we oriented to when we include disability in this way? Of course, there is the inclusion of conceptions of both the disabled and non-disabled student as well as a recommended way to orient to both that is included through accessibility statements. There is also the potential inclusion of the faculty member, presumably non-disabled, as someone who cannot be trusted with accommodation procedures or who does not possess the necessary expertise. Still, there is more.

**Inclusion-Wonder**

As a way to further this consideration of acts of inclusion, I turn to a more detailed engagement with the “boiler plate” accessibility statement being recommended by the Council of Ontario Universities (COU) which is a membership organization of twenty publicly funded universities across the province of Ontario, Canada (COU https://accessiblecampus.ca). This “boiler plate” statement is far less obviously egregious yet no less interesting than the first accommodation statement with which I began. To move from one sentence to the next while wondering about the sort of reasoning that makes these moves reasonable requires a consideration of the component parts of this statement as reflective of the background order providing for it.
A. An American West Coast University Course Statement

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: The University of X is committed to ensuring equal academic opportunities and inclusion for students with disabilities based on the principles of independent living, accessible universal design and diversity. I am available to discuss appropriate academic accommodations that may be required for student with disabilities. Requests for academic accommodations are to be made during the first weeks of the quarter, except for unusual circumstances. Students are encouraged to register with Disability Services Center to verify their eligibility for appropriate accommodations.

B. Sample Syllabi Statement from an East Coast American College

X College is committed to creating a learning environment that meets the needs of its diverse student body. If you anticipate or experience any barriers to learning in this course, please feel welcome to discuss your concerns with me. If you have a disability, or think you may have a disability, you may also want to meet with X of Accessible Education, to begin this conversation or request an official accommodation. You can find more information about the Office of Accessible Education and Student Support, including contact information, here: [web site]. If you have already been approved for accommodations through the Office of Accessible Education, please meet with me so we can develop an implementation plan together.

C. American University sample statement for course syllabi:

If you have been certified by Disability Services (DS) to receive accommodations, please either bring your accommodation letter from DS to your professor’s office hours to confirm your accommodation needs, or ask your liaison in X Faculty to consult with your professor. If you believe that you may have a disability that requires accommodation, please contact [Disability Services at phone number or email] Important: To request and receive an accommodation you must be certified by DS.

D. Western Canadian University

The University of Xi is committed to providing an accessible academic community. Students Accessibility Services (SAS) offers academic accommodation supports and services such as note-taking, interpreting, assistive technology and exam accommodations. Students who have, or think they may have, a disability (e.g. mental illness, learning, medical, hearing, injury-related, visual) are invited to contact SAS to arrange a confidential consultation. Student Accessibility Services [Address. Phone Number. Email]

E. Canadian University recommended Syllabus Statement

The Centre for Student Accessibility encourages and recommends that all instructors include the following statement on their course syllabus regarding accommodations and accessibility:

“The University of X wishes to support all students in achieving academic success while enjoying a full and rewarding university experience. The Centre for Student Accessibility upholds the University's commitment to a diverse and inclusive learning environment by providing services and supports for students based on disability, religion, family status, and gender identity. Students who require these services are encouraged to contact the Centre for Student Accessibility to discuss the possibility of academic accommodations and other supports as early as possible. For further information, please email [email] or call [phone number].

FIGURE 1 A random sample of access statements, USA and Canada.
The University provides academic accommodations for students with disabilities in accordance with the terms of the Ontario Human Rights Code. This occurs through a collaborative process that acknowledges a collective obligation to develop an accessible learning environment that both meets the needs of students and preserves the essential academic requirements of the University's courses and programs. If you have questions about accommodations, contact [Student Success Counselor]. More information is also available on the Accessibility Services website: (https://accessiblecampus.ca/tools-resources/educators-tool-kit/course-planning/developing-courses/ [Accessed July 3, 2022])

This statement begins by tying accommodation to human rights legislation making the provision of accommodations appear as a legal issue. Whether or not provision of accommodation is accomplished in accord with human rights law, it is the law and not charity nor personal choice that frames accommodation. Proceeding from a stipulation that there is provision that plays out within a legal framework, implies that not finding oneself accommodated, or finding accommodation provision difficult to obtain or absent altogether, may also be in accord with the Ontario Human Rights Code. Whatever the case, the statement depicts accommodation as provided and in accord with human rights.

The accommodation statement also tells the reader something about how operating in “accord” with the Ontario Human Rights Code is accomplished. The University’s provision of accommodation is said to be actualized as a collaborative process. The collaboration is not described as between the law, individuals and the university (where both privacy and expertise would be of concern). Instead, collaboration is between students and programs, working with a collective obligation to develop an accessible learning environment while preserving the “essential academic requirements.” Faculty members are undoubtedly an implied but unnamed part of this environment. What was initially stipulated as provided is now in development; what was framed by legal terms, is now framed as a multi-party negotiation with unnamed program representatives. The development of an accessible learning environment occurs among various participants and their different powers; there are the needs of students, the essential academic requirements, and the to-be-developed “accessible learning environment.”

The law intending to secure a connection between human rights and education involves the more uncertain work of collaboration between parties whose interests are depicted as fundamentally different from each other. It is by considering the needs of the students as distinct from (and even in conflict with) essential academic requirements that the parties involved will acknowledge a collective obligation to develop an accessible learning environment. Given
that accessible learning environments are not the same as the essential aspects of University courses and programs, and given that both of these may differ from the needs of students, there is undoubtedly a necessity for much collaboration (Slee, 2018).

One aspect of this collaboration involves ways to move the reader from the assumption of “the university provides” to the assumption that the university, students, programs and courses “collaborate.” This is accomplished not by suggesting that any of the parties involved seek further information from the Ontario Human Rights Code, nor from those who maintain the essential requirements of courses and programs, but, instead, from an office tasked with providing accessibility services. And universities across Canada do have offices tasked with providing such services and supports. Typically, support begins with the requirement that the student provide proof of a disability through medical documentation. In this sense, such offices are not the keepers of the law nor the keepers of essential academic requirements but are the keepers of medicalized bureaucratic processes of disability diagnosis, confirmation and registration. Once a student is registered with accessibility services, the office of accessibility and/or accommodation can manage the allocation of extra time, technology, sign language, or text services for the inclusion of the student back into the classroom of any program, such as they are. This “registration” is, of course, a process of demonstrating worthiness; that, through medical documentation, the student is not only “legitimately” disabled, but also worthy of university accommodation.

What else is included in this process of accommodation?

Disability as Far-Out!

Even before a student is referred to a University accommodation office or to a testing facility, disability is included as a far-out issue. It invokes the law; the need to collaborate with essential requirements of the university; it invokes the need to confer with external supports and diagnostic procedures. Disability’s power of invocation is far-out putting students with disabilities in tension with essential academic requirements of programs and courses. Whatever else disability-inclusion may mean, it empowers those who are not disabled, be they the provider of the accessibility/accommodation practices and statements, or merely subject to them, to invoke a variety of established forms of institutionalized action. While only once have I read “don’t approach me or your TA” as part of an accommodation strategy, distancing of some sort regularly appears in accommodation statements. The extreme stipulation of “do not approach” can be interpreted as making explicit what is a tacit but common practice in
accessibility statements that tell disabled students to go elsewhere. There are many “in order to” and “because” motives that are at the ready to make sense of acts of inclusion through distancing and exclusion (Schutz, 1973: 22–26). For example, in order to keep unsympathetic faculty from acting badly, in order to stop pretenders and people taking advantage of the system, or because of the need for expert advice, because each situation is different, because no one knows what to do, or because education is complicated and at the end of the day we all need to get on with the task at hand – any of these explanations could be used to make inclusion through exclusion sensible and reasonable. While some motives seem more just than others, ascription of a motive lends reasonableness to the practice that makes inviting the student to go elsewhere “stand in for” inclusion and accommodation.

Regardless of the welcoming tone and regardless of a provision of a good set of reasons, access statements regularly proceed with an invitation for the student to leave the classroom. Many course outlines at the University of Toronto, for example, accomplish an invitation to leave with a simple two-pronged approach; first, welcoming the student in to the classroom by, second, suggesting that they move elsewhere.

Students with diverse learning styles and needs are welcome in this course. In particular, if you have a disability/health consideration that may require accommodations, please approach Accessibility Services at [phone number; email].

Between these two moves lies an image of disability as well as the background order of assumptions that makes it a requirement and, a normal one at that, to understand disability as, at least in part, a health consideration together with the contradictory sense that diverse learning styles and needs are welcomed in this course. But how is disability imagined such that it becomes easy to put into practice a “welcome” that actually means “leave”?

Within my time-warp story, it is interesting to note that my own inclusion of disability into the classroom, also moves disability out, out to the edges of the classroom, to my office, then back home through a phone call with my partner where I engage in a kind of privatization of my disability-experience. My sense of being mixed-up, foolish or inattentive, is brought back to the classroom via an email explaining my time mix-up through dyslexia. Through this email, I try to repair the wrinkle in time with an apology, one that lands firmly on my dyslexia mixed me up. My email does not topicalize the house of our living relations where my role as the instructor can easily become a hub of multiple interests, nor does it show any need to describe the movement of time as an organized
and organizing feature of social space. Instead, my email simply depicts disability as a reason for being out of sync, making disability far out once again. All the other potential relations with the social sense of time that my dyslexic ways bring to the fore are not only privatized but hidden behind a reduction of dyslexia to a singular cause/effect logic of what mixed me up.

My story and the bureaucratic one found in accessibility statements both follow a similar plot of individualization and both include disability in the classroom only through a sense of the need to move it out. Mitchell and Snyder’s work on disability narrative can help us better understand this as they speak of similar narrative patterns among different representations of disability.

“The story must first subject a character to the vagaries of life with a disability only to erase it in the pat resolution of plots that dispense with the very disabilities that propelled those plots forward... [where] seemingly benign neoliberal administrative structures ensnare rather than support disabled people in disciplinary social relations.”

MITCHELL AND SNYDER, 2015: 128–9

Regardless of different stories, one a personal account the other a bureaucratic rendering of disability, one highly subjective the other highly objective, both rely, re-assert, even re-insert a rather limited plot for disability. These narrative forms are, moreover, ensnared in neo-liberal disciplinary social relations; neither story allows the meaning and movement of disability-experience itself to have any place “in” the classroom.

It is, of course, likely that the bureaucratic story that renders disability as a far-out accommodation issue has more power than does my personal story, since it has official reach which comes wrapped in routine procedures cloaked by laws, rules, documents, and offices of management and resource distribution all of which are delivered through province-wide dissemination mechanisms. My story, while it having some reach (appearing in a Goffman Studies book and re-told in this paper), still appears more individual and subjective, that is, less routine than accommodation statements published in course syllabi. Still, the spark that flashes between these stories (Asenjo, 1988: 62–636) might yet have something more to reveal.

6 What Asenjo (1988: 62–63) says of words, he also says of fields of inquiry and in this sense holds for narrative in general: “The spark that flashes between two words is what in mathematics is called an independent variable, a factor not fully explained by the words themselves. Not only is the spark unpredictable but it also has the power to burn away any cliché and in so doing illuminates the context, whose existence – like that of everyone whole – is dependent on how it is reflected in its parts.”
Disability as Pharmakon

The gift of phenomenology, or as Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1958: xxii) says, its “Chief gain,” is to “have united extreme subjectivism and extreme objectivism in its notion of the world or of rationality.” Rationality, he continues, “is precisely proportioned to the experiences in which it is disclosed” (Ibid.). In this sense, rationality is less an individual capacity than it is the formation of meaning made by people similarly situated in their experience of the world. Given that the examples of inclusion I have been discussing can be experienced as common ways to perceive the inclusion of disability in the university classroom, the question becomes – What version of rationality is proportioned between the extremes of subjectivity and objectivity embedded in these ways of representing disability? Between extreme objectification (the documentation of disability) and extreme subjectification (my time warp narrative with its apologetic self-stigmatizing email) what do we have? Within these many representations, there is a political one, namely, the assertion of a rationality of normalcy that forges the reasonableness of regarding disability as an individual trouble that nonetheless tacitly functions as a pharmakon for the social whole (Featherstone, 2020: 112; Titchkosky, 2022). Disability is a pharmakon; included as simultaneously a remedy, poison, and scapegoat which maintains the status quo.

In this way, disability is imagined and addressed as a far-out departure from normalcy in need of remedy through treating disability as through and through an individual problem which is a poison (perhaps more a drug) that feeds the system exactly what it needs in order to stay as it is. Representations of disability as “people with disabilities” is perceived as the only “real” problem thus sustaining the system with its rule bound norms and constrained collective imagination as it is. Such a representation, whether in research, policy, infrastructure; or in personal stories and experiences; serves as a sense making device. It is used to make sense of disruption to the normal workings of daily life that simultaneously maintain these normal workings.

Including disability as an excludable type, then, serves as a solution to any disruption to the normal ways of proceeding but also as a poison, and a scapegoat. We dissolve any disruption supplanting it with the poisonous notion that disability is not really an essential aspect of anything. Disability as merely a

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7 For more on this see Judith Butler, e.g., 1993: 32 where she says, “... to be material means to materialize, where the principle of that materialization is precisely what “matters” about the body, its very intelligibility.” Rationality, intelligibility, reasonableness can be understood as tied.
personal trouble in need of bureaucratic management, such as, an apology email or a visit to the office of accommodation that simplifies everything into an individual matter. Moreover, disability is used so as to leave the status quo unchallenged securing its place. Disability is the problem whereas the socio-political situation within which disability appears (e.g., education), is left virtually untouched except for a statement here or an email there, thereby leaving the organization of university work-life unexamined. Disability, in these ways, serves as a perfect scapegoat.

Remedy, poison, scapegoat, disability as a pharmakon, becomes primarily an aggravating individual condition and, depending on how far this conception has travelled into the organization of knowledge, the built environment, and interactional norms, there are few chances to think about or experience disability otherwise. Recognizing, however, that our knowledge regimes, alongside the physical and social environments, serve as the background to the figure of disability, disability studies can examine normal (inclusive) relations to disability with the aim of remaking the status quo (Goodley, 2021; Antebi and Jörgensen, 2016).

Remarkably, this pharmakon conception of disability echoes across all institutional images, practices and structures shaping our experiences of disability, and has done so decade after decade. While the social character of disability is often stipulated in collective responses to disabled people in the university today, its articulation asserts the rationality of understanding disability as a problem condition of individuals, signifying individual functional limitations. The message is that little can be done other than for the individual to adapt, that is, to find their particular accommodations. In this way, disability becomes its own limitation, aggravating the possibility of inclusion at every turn.

Conclusion

My analysis suggests that rather than making disability into the substance used to keep the status quo in place, we could imagine what we could do to make disability something other (and more) than the pharmakon it has been made to be. Doing so requires a careful-care regarding the meaning and movement of disability rationality in university life. It requires attending to aspects of what is already in the pharmakon-mix but with a twist.

Instead of using disability as a scapegoat as an appeal to the re-assertion of the status quo that makes it reasonable to include disabled people as excludable at every turn, we could consider how the status quo itself has come to be understood as reasonable. Such a consideration allows us to evaluate the
norms that make the movement of university life restrictively limiting and singularly caught-up in the reproduction of its own routines. Instead of proceeding with the notion that all is good, reasonable and fair, if it were not for the vagaries of embodied existence, we might ask how institutions such as the University proceed by acting as if disability is absent and we could begin to act as if disability is present and will remain so. Rather than “seeing” disability as a problem in need of a solution, disability may be the occasion for us to develop a way to perceive social structures, along with their practices, that are not at one with how things usually work.

What is needed is to begin again where all disability begins, in collective imagination embedded in and enabled by the cultures within which we find ourselves as disabled people. I began this paper with the commitment that how we perceive, experience and act toward disability, whether our own or that of others, is grounded in implicit cultural conceptions of being human and of human embodiment. Ordinary conceptions of ordinary relations help produce and govern our highly restrictive and, often, devastatingly oppressive relations with disability. Following this commitment, I regarded perceptions of people as tied to imagination which allows me to go on to treat representations of disability as reflective of the culture from which imagination springs and to which its consequences return. Attending to collective imagination that crystalizes into representations of disability in the everyday of university life, uncovering the implicit conceptions that provide for their appearance, and understanding their social and political significance, are my analytic aims. This way of proceeding asserts that disability is more than how people treat it and it occasions the possibility of rethinking what we are doing when we do university work. To borrow the words of Sylvia Wynter, “We must now collectively undertake a rewriting of knowledge as we know it.” (Wynter to McKittrick 2015, 18). It is this re-writing of how we know disability that this paper attempts.

References


