

AHEAD Conference 2014 Summary Publication

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Introduction

You don't have to be Doctor Who to go back 25 years and see the improvements that have been made in education for students with disabilities who are now graduating across all fields of study with the same qualifications as other students. But we may need his time machine to see where we need to go in the future to improve the whole college experience for students with disabilities, including taking part in work experience, clubs and societies, Erasmus and study abroad. Some things stay the same and some must change. The AHEAD Conference 2014 titled "Into the Real World: What does the best higher education experience for a student with a disability look like?" looked at current best practice and possibilities for the future and this publication distilling some



of the presentations, hopes to do the same. So, what do we need to do to create an inclusive college experience? Join the conversation.

Ann Heelan

Executive Director, AHEAD

Note: All conference presenters were invited to submit content for this publication but some decided that due to the practical nature of the content they covered, a publication submission would not be suitable. As such all presenters who opted in are included here. With the exception of the keynote speakers who sit in a separate section, the content is laid out in order of the presentation's appearance at the conference.

Keynote Presentation

Please note Prof. Sarah Moore did not make a submission.

Disablist Bullying and Getting the Chance to Progress to Higher Education: Educators as Barriers to Inclusion.

By Dr Conor Mc Guckin, School of Education, Trinity College Dublin

Whilst educators are well versed about issues relating to special education needs / disability and about dealing with bully/victim problems, not many can successfully put their knowledge of these two areas together to consider issues related to 'disablist' bullying. Involvement in bully/victim problems, whether it be 'traditional' bullying, cyberbullying, homophobic bullying, or disablist bullying, is a barrier to full educational and personal attainment. Considering that it is 20 years since the Salamanca Statement on Inclusive Education (UNESCO, 1994), and 20 years since the Department of Education's 'Guidelines' on dealing with bully/victim problems in schools (DES, 1993), this presentation considers issues that educators need to consider if we are to remove this barrier to the full inclusion of all students in positive educational environments. Only by doing so can we enable students to achieve the educational and personal aspirations that are, rightly, theirs.

Policy, research, and professional practice regarding bully/victim problems has become an issue of immense and growing international concern in recent years. While reports of bullying are not a new phenomenon (e.g., Tom Brown's Schooldays: Hughes 1857), we are at a stage whereby we have a substantive cross-national knowledge regarding the nature, incidence, correlates, and management of traditional 'face-to-face' (f2f: Mc Guckin, Cummins, & Lewis 2010) bully/victim problems among school pupils (see Smith et al. 1999 for a review). We are also fortunate to have a robust knowledge base regarding successful intervention and prevention programmes in the area (for scholarly reviews see Farrington & Ttofi 2009, and Smith, Pepler, & Rigby 2004).

Recently, much attention has been directed towards the emerging issue of cyberbullying, with researchers and policy makers collaborating on a variety of cross-national projects exploring fundamental issues, such as definition, measurement, coping strategies, intervention, prevention, and legal issues (e.g., COST Action IS0801 [http://sites.google.com/site/costis0801], CyberTraining [http://cybertraining-project.org]). With this important new work, it is also incumbent upon researchers, policy makers, and practitioners to not lose focus on the further development of knowledge regarding other important aspects of the bullying phenomenon. For example, while attention does continue to focus on, for example, homophobic bullying (e.g., Rivers 2011), sexist, sexual, and transphobic bullying (SST: e.g., Department for Education and Skills: DfES 2010), and the newly emerging area of alterophobia (Minton 2012), relatively little attention is paid to 'disablist' bullying – where those with a disability / Special Educational Need (SEN) are directly involved in bully/victim problems.

The study reported on here (Purdy & Mc Guckin, 2011) set out to explore the knowledge and confidence of student teachers in Ireland (North & South) in relation to disablist bullying. Two centres for Initial Teacher Education, one in each jurisdiction, were selected for recruitment of participants. Stranmillis University College provided the sample of both primary and post-primary student teachers from Northern Ireland. The School of Education at Trinity College, Dublin and the University's three Associated Colleges of Education (Marino Institute of Education, Froebel College of Education, and the Church of Ireland College of Education) provided the sample for the Republic of Ireland. Adopting a mixed methods approach of four focus groups and a paper questionnaire (n = 257), data were collected and analysed relating first to students' knowledge and confidence in the discrete areas of special educational needs and bullying, and then in relation to disablist bullying. The study highlighted the high importance attributed to SEN and bullying by student teachers but also the sporadic provision and low confidence in meeting the needs of children with SEN. The study also revealed that none of the participants in either jurisdiction had received any guidance at all in relation to disablist bullying as part of their Initial Teacher Education. The study concluded with recommendations to address this shortcoming, including the urgent need for practical, solution-focused and evidence-based courses at ITE and CPD level in both jurisdictions.

Keywords: disablist, bullying, special educational needs, SEN, teachers

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Contributions

People with Intellectual Disability, Staff and Families Working Together to Improve Services By Deirdre Corby, Dublin City University

This paper presents a project based in the School of Nursing and Human Sciences in Dublin City University which commenced in 2009. It was developed in partnership with service providers such as St Michael's House, Saint John of God Services, SOS Kilkenny and groups representing people with intellectual disability and their families. The overall vision is to build leadership capacity within all members of a student team that can lead to improvements and change within services. In addition to benefiting services, individuals also get the opportunity to work as a team within a College and service environment (Corby, Slevin et al. 2013).

Improving Services Initiative

The initiative involves teams, representative of people with intellectual disability, family members and service staff undertaking a module entitled "Improving Service with Cooperative Learning" within the University. While the team members may not know each other they must have the service for people with intellectual disability in common, for example, a residential, day or training service. The module is facilitated through a cooperative learning team approach with supports provided by academic supervisors and service-based mentors. The teams undertake the module and the learning outcomes are focussed on service change and development. All teams work together on a project decided by the team themselves, giving all members equal opportunity to voice their views and opinions. Past projects included developing a user friendly telephone directory within a service, increasing opportunities for community-based activities, encouraging family involvement and creating more activities within day services.

Assessment

Students can undertake the module as certificate only or can elect to present an individual portfolio for assessment at level 8 (5 credits). This offers students opportunities to meet personal as well as team goals while achieving academic credit for their individual work.

Current Team

This team project is presented by St. Joseph's Intellectual Disability Service, based at Knockamann, in Portrane, Co Dublin, a HSE organisation. This is a campus- and community-based service, which offers an individualised approach to care, with a multi-disciplinary team providing care to 217 people with a range of intellectual needs.

A community-based support team is also in place to offer outreach services to approximately 100 people with intellectual disability and their families.

The service has evolved over the years from a campus-based service, providing a holistic care approach specific to the needs of those with disabilities, often co-occurring with mental health issues. People have moved to small group homes in community settings, with a focus on community participation and an emphasis on fostering independence and individuality. This has involved a shift from the traditional group and centre-based care to an approach using community and local service, providing meaningful occupation and a focus on ability over disability. Yvonne lives in a small group home and uses community services for her daily living requirements. She was invited to consider this project and she was very enthusiastic from the outset. Her family were also supportive of the project. This is the first time that this service has engaged in the project with Dublin City University and demonstrates the development of the organisation and the enthusiasm to expand the range of services for people with intellectual disability and families. Geraldine is a Clinical Nurse Manager with significant experience in all aspects of service delivery and Pat is a parent of a man using the services provided by St. Joseph's Intellectual Disability Service.

Team Project

The team project presented relates to increasing opportunities for people with intellectual disability to be involved in two projects, gardening and music. This decision was taken in consultation with people with intellectual disability; staff who work within the service and family members. Success so far has been measured by the introduction of some popular and well-supported music sessions and significant research and planning for the garden project. The plans for the garden include a water feature, tactile wall, mosaic, plants and grass, seating and bird boxes.

The whole project has resulted in a range of offers to help out and become involved by people who avail of the service, family and staff members. As there is a meaningful outcome envisaged, there is a shift in focus for all involved and there is an energy and enthusiasm to make the project work well.

Student Experiences

Yvonne details her experience of having an opportunity to come to college and be involved in this unique team. While she highlights how much she is enjoying this new experience, she also notes the opportunities provided for learning new skills. Working on organisation, researching new information, learning how to reference and building on computer skills are just some mentioned. Being in a College environment is new and exciting, and she enjoys walking around the campus and trying new venues for coffee breaks. Meeting and listening to new people is also a really positive experience for Yvonne.

She also appreciates an opportunity to help improve the quality of life of other people in her service. Finally and most importantly the experience has left her ready for more opportunities.

Pat, as a parent of a man with intellectual disability and with experience in education himself, has identified some key features of his experience. While Pat is well known in the service with regular visits to his son, playing cards, having sing-songs and bringing in some music he feels the course has added significantly to his interactions in the service, saying "there is a great ease about the place". He also highlighted the support the team have had from service management, staff and families. The commitment from services involves providing the mentor to the team but also in other ways such as supporting the team practically by, for example, making venues available for the music session or providing resources for the garden project. Pat identifies the mentor's role as key and found his emphasis was on the process, not on an end product restricted by deadlines, remarking that it was particularly helpful and supportive. He is enjoying every minute of the experience and is glad he joined the team.

Geraldine, a Clinical Nurse Manager, is currently based in Knockamann Day Service and manages a team working in a number of programmes chosen by people with intellectual disability. Geraldine has previously led projects resulting in significant service improvements, and has been very proactive in helping the service obtain 6 green flags from An Taisce for a variety of awards. She has been very committed to leading out this new initiative in service development and an opportunity to work in a unique team.

The feedback from the music sessions which have developed so far from this module has been phenomenal and the service has benefited enormously from the team's participation in this module.

The team wish to extend thanks and appreciation to the staff in DCU, and the management, staff, Parents & Friends group, people with intellectual disability and families at St. Joseph's for all their support.

Further information available from Deirdre Corby on 01-7008524 or deirdre.corby@dcu.ie

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Distributing accessible course literature at the university libraries

By Pia Hasselrot, Swedish Agency for Accessible Media

Swedish Agency for Accessible Media, MTM, is a government body that provides access to printed materials for people with reading impairment, such as visual impairment, physical impairment, print impairment and dyslexia and learning difficulty due to for example ADHD and Asperger's syndrome. MTM cooperates with local libraries to reach the users and to distribute the accessible media.

Students in higher education with reading impairment can apply for support during their studies. They can borrow the accessible course literature at the university library and get individual support at the university.

Since the distribution is part of the services provided by the university, MTM focuses on the production of accessible media in an effective way through procurement. The titles MTM produces are accessible throughout the country through MTM's online catalogue legimus.se and digital distribution. In legimus.se the students will find all MTM's titles, fiction, non-fiction and course literature, as talking books, e-text and braille.

The service and the course literature MTM produces are distributed through libraries, and students can borrow their literature at the library of their choice throughout Sweden, both university libraries and public libraries. This suits the increasing numbers of students who are studying at a distance. The libraries also help the users to get an account for MTM's Personal download service. The Personal download service gives the students full access to legimus.se, allowing them to download the literature directly to a computer or a smartphone. MTM provides the service but it is the library that registers the students and gives information and support on the service. If the student needs a book that isn't already made in an accessible format, she can order the title at the university library. The library checks the order and forwards it to MTM.

Besides accessible course literature, students with reading impairments usually also need other support. The universities offer different kinds of support such as note-taking help, IT-support, extra teaching and tuition, alternative examination forms as well as mentors. The student's service, the library, and the Coordinator of pedagogical support for students with disabilities are some of the instances that cooperate in providing the support needed.

MTM's cooperation with the libraries started in 2002. Previously, students only borrowed their course literature from MTM, while the coordinators at the universities provided the local support. During the 1990's the definition of reading impairment expanded to cover print impairment and dyslexia and learning difficulty, as well as visual impairment and physical impairment. The expanded definition increased the number of possible users to about 6 percent of the Swedish population and more students turned to MTM for support, resulting in a yearly increase of students with 25 percent. In order to maintain the services to the students, MTM decided to partner up with the university libraries, and in 2004 all

MTM's services were distributed through the university libraries. The change was easy and non-controversial, to the librarian's accessible media was just another form of media.

The change to channeling the services through the university libraries has made it possible for MTM to meet the needs of the students, even as the number of students increased with over 600 percent since 2000. A side effect has been the visualization of students with reading impairment, their need of additional help, and the responsibility of the university to provide for that and also to be accessible. As all students are introduced to library services, all students also get information about accessible media. This is of great importance since 80 percent of the students in need of accessible course literature only started to use it at the university level. And most importantly, students with a reading disability get access to all the service a university library can offer, such as help to search for literature, source criticism and to take part of the whole media landscape.

Students with Physical Disabilities in Leisure Activities at college

By Stephanie Martin (School of Work and Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin)

Introduction

The aim of this research is to inform the academic population about the importance of leisure activities for Students with Physical Disabilities (SWPD) in university. Knowing the facilitating factors and the barriers of SWPD in accessing leisure activities will equip the academic population with some knowledge to work towards making more accessible leisure activities for SWPD.

Leisure activities are an important aspect of the college life. Students may want to engage in leisure activities for the benefits it gives them. Leisure activities provide numerous psychological and physical benefits (Malone et al., 2012, Stumbo et al., 2011) which enhances the quality of life. Leisure activities for all students were examined through an extensive literature review.

Background

According to Bundy and Clemson (2009), leisure activities are defined as the experience of a full engagement in a spare time activity. Students have positive leisure experiences. Warner and Dixon (2013) declared that student athletes experienced a sense of community through common activities, through being leaders, through volunteering and through competition. Students with disabilities also have positive leisure experiences. They socialize, gain new knowledge, ease their stress, are able to support trials, get fit and help others (Jessup et al., 2010). However, they also encounter barriers. Stigma and stereotype are some of the barriers they encounter. Students downplay their disability by applying deflection and normalcy as stigma strategies. To stem these barriers, the university staff must be informed about the needs of students with physical disabilities. University faculties have some knowledge on their legal responsibilities and on the provision of accommodation to students with disabilities. However, additional information must be given to university staff students with physical disabilities adequately.

Methodology

This research explored the experiences of students with physical disabilities (SWPD) in leisure activities at college. The aim was to know factors which influenced the participation of SWPD in leisure activities at college.

The objectives:

- To identify any barriers students with physical disabilities encountered that would prevent them from participating in leisure activities on campus;
- To identify the facilitating factors which helped them participate in leisure activities;

• To explore the knowledge of the university staff about the provision of reasonable accommodation for SWPD in leisure activities.

The rationale for doing a qualitative research on the experiences of SWPD in leisure activities is to add to the existing literature carried out by Shevlin et al. (2004) who did a qualitative study on the participation of students with disabilities in Higher Education. Moreover, much of the research carried out in the Republic of Ireland is about people with intellectual disabilities (Craig et al., 2012, Rose et al., 2010). From a theoretical standpoint the social model guided the research. The social model stresses society's responsibility for disabling people. Purposive sampling was used to recruit the participants for the focus group discussions (FGD). Altogether, 9 people participated. 5 staff of the university and 4 students with physical disabilities. It was intended to conduct 2 FGD with students.

Findings

There were five common themes among the focus group of stakeholders and students with physical disabilities: 1] Leisure activities, 2] Experiences of students 3] Barriers, 4] Responsibility of students, and 5] Responsibility of the college.

Leisure activities included six common sub-themes: free time, social activities, home-based activities, sports & recreation, arts & entertainment and frequency of leisure activities. Free time is essential to give oneself leisure activities. The various leisure activities ranged from going for a coffee, watching TV, swimming to going the cinema. The frequency of the leisure activities varied from almost every day to every week. Students had different leisure experiences whether positive or negative. One stakeholder assumed the participation rate in sports of students with physical disabilities would be lower. This cohort of students has physical limitations that may restrict them in many sports. However, physical limitations do not stop students from partaking in other activities such as going to the societies on campus which for some proved to be positive. Even though students may have positive experiences, they experience barriers. Students experienced internal, physical, and subtle barriers. The barriers should not stop students from participating in leisure activities on campus. Students are responsible for participating in leisure activities. Likewise, the college is responsible for accommodating students to enable them to participate in leisure activities on campus. These findings demonstrate the complexities in accommodating students and trying to address the barriers that they encounter. Still, students are responsible for expressing the difficulties they meet when accessing places where the events take place on campus. In order to have a win-win situation, both parties must not only acknowledge the difficulties, but work together.

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Top Characteristics that Enhance a Student's Success By A. Biba Rebolj

Introduction

Many of the students with disabilities entering higher education have concerns they might experience some sort of failure during their studies, whether it be academic or social. Student's success is often linked with good academic performance, which is often seen as a result and/or combination of good grades/scores, ability to learn in upfront setting, high IQ, etc.). However success is not entirely dependent upon these variables. In fact, their role has little importance in overall aspect of good academic performance.

This presentation addresses several personal characteristics that have been identified as success predictors for students with disabilities, along with other variables that together shape student's good academic and social performance. While these personal characteristics may be given, they can also be learned and therefore, each student has a possibility to reflect upon his/her traits and look for his/her strong sides. Proceeding from case studies conducted at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, several thinking strategies are proposed to acquire skills needed in order to have the most useful and successful higher education experience for students with disabilities.

Academic success and its predictors

The traditional (or "old fashioned") assumption about academic success is, that it mostly depends upon cognitive abilities such as intelligence and/or scholastic abilities. However many contemporary scholars argue that in addition to cognitive abilities, there are several personal characteristics along with one's individual learning style and motivation that contribute to overall successful performance as well (Kappe & van der Flier 2012; Komarraju et al. 2011).

There are many ongoing debates about which personal traits could be seen as success predictors and there's been some general agreement upon five characteristics (so called "Big Five") that have strong impact on academic success. The Big Five Framework of Personality Traits (Costa & McCrae 1992 in Komarraju et al. 2011, p. 472) are:

- O (openness, originality, open-mindedness),
- C (conscientiousness, control, constraint), which predicts success most likely (see Kappe & van der Flier 2012),
- E (extraversion, energy, enthusiasm),
- A (agreeableness, altruism, affection) and
- N (neuroticism, negative affectivity, nervousness), where this one is the least likely to predict success.

Recent research has shown that personality traits may have even more predictive power than intelligence at the post-secondary levels of education (Busato et al. 2000; Furnham &

Chamorro-Premuzic 2004; Furnham, Chamorro-Premuzic & McDougall 2003). The above characteristics apply to a general student population, however when it comes to students with disabilities, a few more things should be taken into consideration. Even though students with disabilities may be very conscientious as they know they would have to work extra time and perhaps twice as much compared to their non-disabled peers, still they might encounter academic failure. Therefore some other variable must exist, that has impact on student's success when it comes to students with disabilities.

Success and students with disabilities

It is said that students who lack an awareness of their specific strengths and weaknesses and consecutively appropriate matching compensatory strategies, seem to experience academic failure more likely (Skinner 2004, p. 97). Ginsberg, Gerber and Reiff (1994 in Skinner 2004, p. 92) noted for example, that highly successful people with learning disabilities were able to reconceptualise their learning problems into something positive and functional. These people also expressed a strong desire to excel and were very goal-oriented. This is so called *self-determination*. Self-determination is a key skill that can be developed to assist students with disabilities in becoming strong *self-advocates* as they move through their educational experience (Gil 2007, p. 14). Self-determination involves knowing and believing in oneself, making decisions and initiating action to reach goals. These skills can be developed through direct instruction and by providing opportunities for students to practice the skills they have learned (Test et al. 2005).

The literature in both disability and educational research has identified the development of self-advocacy skills as crucial to the successful transition of students with disabilities into adult life (Aune 1991, Izzo & Lamb 2002, Wehmeyer 1992 in Test et al. 2005, p. 43). However, research has also indicated that self-advocacy skills and opportunities to self-advocate are frequently not included in the instruction of students with disabilities (Arnold & Czamanske 1991, Izzo & Lamb 2002 in Test et al. 2005, p. 43).

Why is it hard for students to develop self-determination and self-advocacy skills? One of possible answers may be that students with disabilities may have experienced many failures before entering higher education already, so basically it means that they had learned that nothing they did mattered (for example "no matter how hard I study, I can't remember anything", a student with dyslexia might say). Put this together with low expectations and little encouragement from the professors and perhaps even from other important people in student's life, this results in passiveness and little will to take action in the future. The very thought "Nothing I do matters" prevents us from acting and therefore withdraws from us many opportunities. So basically giving up, because our action didn't make any difference no matter how hard we tried means helplessness.

Students with disabilities are more prone to helplessness, because they face more barriers than other students. Because the whole process of attaining disability status puts disability in centre, it seems, that most of the barriers occur because of student's disability. And because student's identity is closely linked to disability as well it is not surprising that the student often puts all the blame on him/herself. But could one escape from learned helplessness?

The big question: can "Top Traits" be learned and how?

The conventional assumption in our education system is that success results from a combination of talent and desire. When failure occurs, it is either because talent or desire is missing. But failure can also occur when talent and desire are present in abundance but optimism is missing (Seligman 2006, p. 13). Therefore it is crucial to explore the style in which a person explains bad events to himself.

Although some people may be born with it, most of us have to learn and acquire skills needed in order to be successful. It is said that one of the most significant findings in psychology in the last twenty years is that individuals can choose the way they think. The top traits can be learned by changing the explanatory style. Explanatory style means a habit of thought. It can produce depression in response to everyday setbacks, or produce resilience even in the face of tragedy. A person's explanatory style even influences the way other people perceive him, disposing them to work against him or with him.

Two opposite basic explanatory styles are optimistic and pessimistic. The defining characteristic of pessimists is that they tend to believe bad events will last a long time, will undermine everything they do, and are their own fault. The optimists, who are confronted with the same hard knocks of this world, think about misfortune in the opposite way. They tend to believe defeat is just a temporary setback and that its causes are confined to this one case. The optimists believe defeat is not their fault: circumstances, bad luck, or other people brought it about. Such people are unfazed by defeat. Confronted by a bad situation, they perceive it as a challenge and try harder.

What's their connection to helplessness? The consequences learned helplessness may cause is that it may become full-blown depression when the person who fails is a pessimist. In optimists, a failure produces only brief demoralization (Seligman 2006).

Ljubljana case study

The basic idea is to help students get an insight into their thinking habit. If a student says he believes nothing he does matters, we try to clarify the logic behind this thinking. So asking questions like: "Is this applying to all situations you are currently in or is it limited to your studies? If so is it one particular course or you think you're bad in all? Did someone confirm this to be true? Could you have reacted differently in such situations? Can you think of recent success you had? Do you think it is possible to achieve it again? How?" ... therefore offering an alternative and trying to present the situation from the distance.

There are three crucial dimensions to explanatory style: permanence, pervasiveness, and personalization (Seligman 2006, p. 44). Some examples from real student experience explained in terms of explanatory style:

Permanence: it's never going to work; I can never learn that; I'll never manage to make it on time; I always fail; my colleagues never have time, etc. So it's a matter of "always" and "never" – all circumstances are viewed permanent. We turn this to "sometimes" and "lately" – to temporary: Sometimes I fail, but so does everyone; my colleagues haven't had the time for me lately, because they've been too busy studying; I can't learn this at the moment, but eventually I'll get there. Rome wasn't built in a day either. Etc. Further, if focusing on good and explaining success: "Guess it's my lucky day; the test wasn't so hard... could be transferred to: "I'm always lucky; I did well in that test, etc." again permanence, but used permanently in explaining good causes. This is important because people who believe good events have permanent causes try even harder after they succeed. People who see temporary reasons for good events may give up even when they succeed, believing success was a fluke (Seligman 2006, p. 46).

Pervasiveness it's about time and space. Because the identity of students with disabilities is so closely linked to their disability that influences most parts of their aspects of life (student, family, social, etc.) it is often they may think of themselves as "I'm no good (because he failed that one exam); I can't make any friends, all is useless ..." so basically if something bad happens, it expands and affects other life aspects as well. This could be limited and not seen so terminal: "I'm no good at maths, but I'm excellent in drawing; I can't make a connection with him, but I can find someone else; this is useless, but this doesn't mean all is useless."

The importance of pervasive explanatory style is that universal explanations produce helplessness across many situations and specific explanations produce helplessness only in the troubled area. Or as the saying goes: »Don't let a bad day make you feel like you have a bad life«. People who make permanent *and* universal explanations for their troubles tend to collapse under pressure, both for a long time and across situations.

Personalization controls how you feel about yourself, but pervasiveness and permanence control what you do: how long you are helpless and across how many situations. For example: "It's my fault" vs. "It's the weather." Changing the explanatory style in Ljubljana students with disabilities runs from 2012. Up until now we had no such case where a student's negative statements would be completely accurate even though they had some point (for example "I'm bad in essay writing" turned out to be true, but the student found out he could have practiced more and his difficulties with written assignments were not so unique among students. As he found out he wasn't isolated with his problems, he found motivation and encouragement to work on his weaknesses).

Outcomes

The benefits of learned optimism grow over time, so the results should not be expected overnight. Teaching students with disabilities learned optimism at the beginning of their studies and certainly before their exam period, so that they are metacognitive (capable of thinking about thinking), turned out to be a fruitful strategy at the University of Ljubljana. When the immunized students use these skills to cope with their first rejections and academic failures, they get better and better at using these skills. They've learned that when they expected to fail, failure became more likely.

What happens over time is that students become more thought-careful, because they know thoughts have tremendous power. And as they become masters of their thinking habits, the skills of self-determination and self-advocacy automatically develop. Which all contribute to successful academic performance.

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Dispelling Myths: College Students with Learning Challenges and Reading

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Introduction

The Strategic Alternative Learning Techniques Center (SALT) specializes in working with students with learning, attention and cognitive challenges at the university level. The SALT Center is located within the University of Arizona, a research one institution located in the southwest of the United States. With over 34 years of experience working with this specialized population. One of the areas of research the SALT Center has made is in the area of reading strategies that students transitioning to college with learning, attention and cognitive challenges have upon entering college. The SALT Center is a fee based comprehensive learning support program at the University of Arizona which supports this population.

Purpose

About six years ago a research team was created to determine areas to begin research on. We wanted to know what strategies students with learning, attention and cognitive challenges had upon entering college. As a research team we developed and delivered a questionnaire to our incoming first time freshman students. There were twenty five short answer questions including four open ended scenario type questions.

College reading is rigorous and college professors don't tent to teach around difficult text nor do they protect students from boredom (Schoenbach, Greenleaf, & Murphy, 2012). How can a student then learn to break down more difficult text? It is known that proficient readers tend to have higher strategy use than non-proficient readers (Wigent, 2013). Is it merely through strategies or do they need to learn a whole new approach to reading now that textbooks are more difficult than what they have been accustomed to? Reading is more than decoding it is problem solving and higher order thinking skills (e.g., metacognition and cognitive skills).

The literature on reading for student with learning challenges is very sparse. We know that students who do not get help with their reading do not do as well in college (Trainin & Swanson, 2005). There is evidence that students with higher reading proficiency do not only rely on reading strategies (e.g., highlighting, annotating, previewing, etc.) they also make use of metacognitive skills and get help (Trainin & Swanson, 2005).

The expectations of reading are different in high school and college. When we meet student, the topic of reading frequently comes up. As a research team we decided to begin analyzing the reading scenario question. The scenario was, "You are reading your science

textbook. When you get to the bottom of the page, you realize you don't understand what you've read. Please identify and describe the strategy(ies) you would use to enhance your reading comprehension."

Methods

The participants of this study were students enrolled in The SALT Center. Participants were between the ages of 17 through 19, all had a history of learning and attention challenges and were entering their first-year experience as first-time freshman. We had participants represented states from across the United States although the majority came from Arizona, California, New York, New Jersey and Illinois.

We distributed a questionnaire to 257 incoming freshmen we had 94.5% completed questionnaires (N=243). The questionnaire which was delivered during orientation had 25 total questions and 4 open ended scenario prompts. As a group we chose to focus on one of the open ended questions which focused on reading and analyze for 2009.

The following is the prompt that was analyzed: Scenario 1: You are reading your science textbook. When you get to the bottom of the page, you realize you don't understand what you've read. Please identify and describe the strategy (ies) you would use to enhance your reading comprehension.

The research team used thematic content analysis to code the prompts (Anderson, 2007). This qualitative method involves taking time to find the common theme among the responses. All codes were done through group discussion consensus of at least three of the committee members. This was done to increase reliability of the coding process. We used, NVIVO, a software program designed to organize data into holding places for later analysis. The program also allowed us to keep notes on our coding and our process. Each response had several codes; however, we put forth maximum effort to assure the theme was only coded once in the response even if it occurred more than once. For example 'go back over the page' and 'reread' in the same response would only be counted once for reread.

We found several large themes, namely, reread, ask and other. Ask was defined as "reach out to someone" with subcategories of 'How', 'Who' and 'What' they were asking for.

The largest theme we found was reread, which we defined as responses that include direct statement of the word "read"(i.e., reread, read again, reading, go back, go over again, go through, look over, etc.) without the mention of another action such as "highlight", "take notes", or any of the other codes. All responses in this category are completed without another person, if another person was involved the response was categorized as 'Ask'.

Outcomes and Conclusions

The reading strategies used for high school by our incoming students were good enough to get our students into college. The most important thing to realize is that they are not a blank slate – our students already have a variety of strategies that must now be taken to whole new level. Our scenario question dealt with the question regarding science text. The first step is to help support and build on the strategies already in place (i.e., scaffolding).

Most of students did not bring up activation of prior knowledge or scaffolding, because often it is teachers and learning resource specialist who have done this for them. Students now must learn to do this on their own and involve others in their metacognitive learning. The second step is asking for help activating prior knowledge. Asking for help often helps build confidence as they have deeper scholarly discussions, clear up misconception, which improves their comprehension and understanding. Our program provides these opportunities, through tutoring, strategy development and learning specialist support; supporting negotiating meaning from college level expository text.

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DICE (Digital inclusion Champions in Europe) - A Peer Support Based Approach to Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Mainstream Education

By Dr Esther Murphy /Dr Mark Magennis, NCBI Centre for Inclusive Technology

DICE (Digital inclusion Champions in Europe) – A peer support based approach to inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream education

The DICE initiative aims to help people with disabilities build the digital literacy skills needed to transition from Vocational Education and Training to mainstream education and employment. DICE is creating an online community to develop and manage peer support relationships and information sharing among people with disabilities and mainstream educators, digital skills trainers and employers.

The use of digital technologies has opened up possibilities for participation in education that were previously closed to many students with disabilities. Mainstream devices such as smartphones, tablets and laptops now routinely include built-in features which give students with disabilities equal access to digital resources such as Learning Management Systems; lecture notes in Powerpoint, PDF or Word; websites and webcasts; statistical analysis software; and online library catalogues. In addition, specialist access hardware and software such as magnifiers, dictation software and communication aids are available to augment mainstream technologies.

However, in order to make use of this potential and achieve effective inclusion, teaching, administrative and support staff need knowledge of how students with disabilities use technologies, how the technologies interact with digital content and how they can be successfully integrated with educational systems and resources. The students themselves, their families and supporters, also need knowledge of what technologies are available, the ways they can help the individual and how to use them.

The European funded DICE project (Digital Inclusion Champions in Europe), led by NCBI Working for people with sight loss, aims to help people with disabilities build the digital literacy skills needed to transition from Vocational Education and Training to mainstream education and help mainstream educators develop the knowledge required to include them on an equal basis.

The DICE approach is to create an online community to help develop and manage peer support relationships and information sharing among people with disabilities and mainstream educators. The community will be promoted and sustained by Digital Inclusion Champions from the VET, mainstream education and employer sectors. This presentation will report on the design of the DICE Community, looking at the results of requirements gathering research indicating what Community members need DICE to do for them. A student and service provider who are members of the DICE national reference group will talk about their motivations, their roles in the project and what they hope to get out of this initiative.

DICE-The story so far

Since the project launched in October 2013 the DICE team have designed, developed and run requirement gathering exercises with all stakeholders (students with disabilities, VET and mainstream educators, IT trainers, disability officers, NGOs, employers and policy advisors. During this time a national reference group has been recruited in each partner country. The role of this group is to advise on the DICE community site's development to ensure user experience is at the heart of the initiative and to identify existing champions in the community to link in with us.

We have developed four distinct questionnaires for students, educators, NGOs and employers which can be accessed on our project website dice-project.eu. These questionnaires have been live since mid-January and are designed to find out about the technologies stakeholders are using in their daily practices and how they currently share and access information about technologies.

Since January we have been in intensive requirement gathering phase running focus groups, semi-structured in person and on the phone interviews with all stakeholders. Each meeting with people in the community offers the opportunity to discuss their current challenges with technologies and explore how DICE, our on-line peer support network could help overcome these difficulties. It also offers the chance to identify existing good practices and identify individuals and organizations who would be interested and would benefit from being one of Digital inclusion champions.

Initial feedback and preliminary recommendations:

As we are currently in the process of analysing questionnaire, focus group and interview data gathered from all stakeholders we will simply present some initial feedback from the perspective of the student and service provider experience. From the student perspective the need for extra support with during non VET and IT trainer contact time has been highlighted. In turn, from their service providers' perspective the existing work load frequently does not facilitate extra tuition. This a space which our on-line peer support aims to reach.

Introducing our Digital Inclusion Champions

Laura Dempsey a keen social media user and Enable Ireland service user and Siobhan Long manager at the National assistive technology training service will share their experiences sharing information about technologies their motivations, their roles in DICE and what they hope to get out of this initiative.

Invite to Participate with us

- Do you know or work with people with disabilities in the community that could use additional support in using mainstream or assistive technologies?
- Are you a VET trainer or mainstream educator that could benefit from additional support from other educators who work with people with disabilities?

- Are you an employer who works with people with disabilities who would like extra support for your company in helping employees with disabilities with their digital access issues?
- Are you an NGO that would benefit from linking with disability organizations that may have more experience with assistive technology training and issues around digital technologies?

We would like to hear from you and invite you to visit our (work-in-progress) website for more information on the project and to take part in our anonymous on-line questionnaire. Looking forward to welcoming you to the DICE community!

For more information please contact: Dr. Mark Magennis <u>mark.magennis@ncbi.ie</u> and Dr. Esther Murphy esther.murphy@ncbi.ie.

Embracing Neurodiversity in Higher Education: Overcoming Attitudinal Barriers for Individuals with Autism By Karen M. DeYoung, M.A. Ed.

As our society grows more diverse, we are challenged to become aware of how dominant cultural, social, political and educational systems may or may not be meeting the needs of all individuals. In a world which simultaneously produces tremendous diversity while demanding conformity, barriers are created. Barriers in education come in many forms including structural, systemic and attitudinal. I would argue that all barriers have their roots in the attitudes and perspectives of the dominant culture. Knowingly, or unknowingly, those in positions of power and privilege act and react according to their personal world view; a view that may or may not reflect an awareness of other realities, other perceptions, other ways of being in the world.

I have a son with autism. Cody is proud of who he is; his unique strengths and also his challenges. Cody identifies with the "neurodiverse" culture. I also have a younger son, Zane, whom one might describe as "neurotypical". Witnessing my "neurodiverse" son's struggles as he came into contact with institutionalized educational settings despite his remarkable intellect and passion for his interests, in comparison with his "neurotypical" younger brother's experiences with those same institutions, was the impetus for my research. Cody's experiences attempting to navigate a confusing and often arbitrary world of disability support services and college instructors, rife with a lack of awareness and empathy for the challenges neurodiverse individuals face in college, made me painfully aware of the need for change. Not just change, but a paradigm shift.

With this shift in mind, I set about to film interviews with a group of neurodiverse college students in order to bring their lived experiences into our consciousness. This film became the focus of an interactive workshop developed during my graduate studies at Antioch University, Seattle, Washington, USA, entitled, "Embracing Neurodiversity in Higher Education: Using Transformative Educational Practices to Overcome Attitudinal Barriers for Individuals with Autism". The workshop brings to light currently held belief systems that may unknowingly be perpetuating marginalization of neurodiverse students. Opportunities for critical self-examination and shared discourse, witnessing personal narratives of neurodiverse individuals and exposure to current critical disability studies research in a supportive, collaborative environment provides the scaffolding for fostering meaningful change in faculty and staff's interactions with neurodiverse students in higher education.

My initial research examined college faculty and staff attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of neurodiverse students with autism in current research and literature as well as on my own campus. In addition to my son's experiences, my research was informed and supported by narratives of parents in an informal discussion group I had started two years previously for parents of neurodiverse college age children as well as personal interviews with faculty at my undergraduate institution (K. DeYoung, 2012/13. Personal Communication). Corroborating research drawn from an international body of work paralleled my son's experience and reinforced the need to examine attitudinal barriers as

one of the important components of neurodiverse students' experiences in higher education (Beardon, Martin & Woolsey, 2009; Bertilsdotter-Rosqvist, 2012; Connor, 2013; Hastwell, Martin, Baron-Cohen & Harding, 2012; Madriaga, 2010; Simmeborn-Fleischer, 2012; Wolman, McCrink, Rodriguez & Harris-Looby, 2004). Ultimately, my inquiry evolved to address facilitating change within higher education, noting the import of addressing systemic change. I asked: "How can attitudes held by faculty, staff and service providers create barriers or avenues to success for college students with autism and can raising/expanding awareness of attitudinal barriers create shifts in understanding and perspectives on the part of those individuals who interact with neurodiverse students in the classroom and on campus?"

Participatory social justice research is a powerful tool wherein truths of injustice, misrepresentation and erroneous assumptions can be revealed. This type of research has the potential to blow apart tightly held beliefs and practices of oppression and marginalization. Miller & Kirkland (2010) say, "we view social justice [research] as seeking to unpack truths that challenge master narratives and unveil[s][sic] counter-narratives that often go untold or ignored altogether" (p. 3). I believe the "master narratives" are created by those privileged with power and authority and the "counter-narratives" are the voices of the oppressed and marginalized within our educational system.

Transformative learning is a way to create authentic and fundamental change: change that empowers individuals and groups of individuals, through a process of critical reflection and action, to become more aware of individual "...habits of mind and points of view" (Moore, 2005, p. 82). With deeper awareness of self, comes the recognition of individual differences in perspective and experience in others. Specific to neurodiverse learners, the transformative educational process creates a learning environment that nurtures and respects individual life experiences and allows those experiences to contribute to the learning process of both student and other individuals with whom the student interacts.

Armstrong (2010) uses the term "neurodiversity" to describe autism and Asperger's Syndrome, along with other mental or psychological conditions. He likens it to biodiversity in the sense of the diversity of our brains, the many ways of thinking, processing and experiencing our senses and the world around us. Rather than centering "normal" as the standard and all others in terms of deficits and limitations, which happens with the use of medical, psychiatric and to some degree educational labels, the term "neurodiversity" suggests the inclusion and valuing of difference. In an environment that embraces neurodiversity, individual differences in social communication, behavior, learning, as well as the life interests and activities of neurodiverse individuals are regarded as valuable and important contributions to a healthy and diverse society. By encouraging those of us who identify as "neurotypicals" to become aware of our expectations and assumptions of social and educational norms, we can then begin to accept that there are others in our society with different priorities, goals and perspectives than ours.

Neurodiverse students have unique ways of experiencing their environments. Many have differences in how their sensory systems receive and respond to input, including visual, auditory, olfactory, tactile or proprioceptive systems. Their behaviors and social

interactions reflect those sensory differences and are frequently misunderstood or misinterpreted by others around them (Chown & Beaven, 2012; Grandin, 2012; Hart, Griegel & Weir, 2010; MacLeod & Green, 2009; Madriaga, 2010; VanBergeijk, Klin & Volkmar, 2008).

Accommodations typically offered to students with disabilities do not always provide support in the areas that neurodiverse students may need. For example, many neurodiverse students struggle with social interactions, including verbal and non-verbal communication. This presents difficulties not only in class participation, but in social interactions outside of class. The expectation of self-advocacy for all students with disabilities in higher education creates an additional barrier for neurodiverse students. Consequently, students may not utilize available services, or may do so only after a problem has arisen (Adreon and Durocher, 2007; Gobbo & Shmulsky, 2012; Grandin, T., 2013; Hewitt, 2011; Simmeborn-Fleischer, 2012; White, Ollendeck & Bray, 2011).

One of the most significant barriers as well as significant supports identified by students with autism/Asperger's Syndrome is the understanding and support (or absence) of their college professors, staff and service providers. A common thread linking neurodiverse students' experiences navigating a variety of higher educational environments was shown to have its beginnings in faculty, staff and other students' attitudes towards those students (Beardon, Martin & Woolsey, 2009; Bertilsdotter-Rosqvist, 2012; Connor, 2013; K. DeYoung, Personal Communication 2012/13; Hastwell, Martin, Baron-Cohen & Harding, 2012; Madriaga, 2010; Simmeborn-Fleischer, 2012; Wolman, McCrink, Rodriguez & Harris-Looby, 2004). This root lack of understanding became the focus of my thesis and inspired the film as well as the workshop and presentation.

I have presented the workshop several times at both a private university and a public, State university in the United States with faculty, staff, administrators and students from higher education institutions, (both two and four year), in attendance. Survey feedback from participants has been positive, indicating shifts in thinking regarding neurodiverse students, their strengths and challenges, and participants' belief in their ability to provide the appropriate support. "The student interviews video was stunning and incredibly effective." "The video was a game changer for me. Seeing and hearing these bright neurodiverse students opened my eyes in ways I wouldn't have expected." "This workshop drastically changed my understanding of autism/Asperger's syndrome." (K. DeYoung. Personal Communication. 2013). Anticipated benefits of this and future workshops are potentially large, beginning with the possibility of reducing the stress and anxiety that can accompany interactions between "neurotypical" and "neurodiverse" individuals.

As mentioned earlier, one of the most significant barriers reported by autistic college students is the lack of understanding and support from faculty and staff. Thus, gaining a greater awareness and understanding of the strengths and challenges of neurodiverse students, in classrooms and elsewhere on campus can provide the opportunity to empower and transform the educational and social experiences of all involved. Barriers can be greatly reduced if not removed altogether.

I believe that applications for this project go beyond the doors of the university and out into the community where there is an equally great need to understand and embrace neurodiverse individuals and their families. Just as we understand the great benefits to society by engaging in more inclusive practices for other marginalized populations, so must we embrace the expressions, hopes, aspirations and contributions that neurodiverse individuals bring to the world in order to promote a truly inclusive climate for all.

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What can a Students' Union Do to Better the University Experience for Students with Disabilities?

By Anne Marie Faisst with assistance of Cara Brunner

Preamble:

English is not my first language and therefore I am not always familiar with the political correct words. Words that may be okay in German can be offensive in English. Please note, that I tried my best using the appropriate terms, if I didn't succeed it is not ignorance but lack of knowledge.

The Students' Union of the University of Vienna

The **Austrian Students' Union** is the general students' representative body in Austria and serves as the students' government by federal law. Membership in the ÖH is compulsory for every university student in Austria. Every university has its own board of university student representatives and we are based at the ÖH University of Vienna. It is the biggest university in Austria and therefore the biggest ÖH board. In 2011 the coalition decided that they wanted to establish a department for accessibility and disability. This department is the place to go for matters of disability and handicapped accessibility. By accessibility we understand accessibility of buildings but also of all areas of studying. For example making notes etc. accessible.

We are an information centre about the handling of certain diseases and disabilities. Unfortunately accessibility and barrier free studying has been a side issue for a long time even in our students union. It was pushed towards the people affected in the social department. That was certainly not the way we wanted it to be. Barrier free studying is not just an issue of people with disabilities, it should be everybody's. People become disabled by institutions and other people. Accessibility means the inclusion of all people in the political decision-making process and in society. The ÖH is a democratically organized institution which strives to involve as much people as possible in their structures. Barrier free living/studying is an essential part of any democratic system and that means for us to give everyone the opportunity to participate. Hence we try to make the issue of accessibility an order of business to the students' union.

Mission Statement

Our Mission Statement is: don't speak about people with disabilities, but speak with them and by at their side and on their side. It is the motto of our department and we try to live by that. This means first and foremost to have an open door policy and to listen to people and parties directly concerned. Talking about people with disabilities as a homogenous group of people that need special treatment and should be harboured from university inequalities would be a patronizing approach that we want to avoid. We have the belief that everybody has needs, and that such things like "special needs" don't exist. Calling needs special makes the people who have them stand out of the ordinary. It is usually the same persons who always have to ask about special treatment, that is not their job. We try to

avoid that by asking everyone beforehand what times are convenient for meetings or what everyone needs to feel welcome. One cannot know the needs of every person affected with barriers and disabilities or not. Also needs may differ a great deal from one person to another. For example before we make a statement regarding accessibility at the University of Vienna we invite everyone to an open discussion and formulate it together if possible. We – the members of the department – are the elected officials and it is our job to talk to university staff about problems concerning accessibility. Our stance here is that we are without a doubt on the side of the party affected with inaccessibility and discrimination. We are not unbiased, we stand with them and are their spokesperson and partner regarding inequities done to them by the University of Vienna or other institutions that hinder an equal treatment in regard to student matters.

Double strategy

The students' union sees its task in taking up problems with the university. We campaign to demolish barriers and to make the university experience accessible to anyone. We use a double strategy: we want to sensitize students for barrier free studying and so called disabilities; equally we want to be solidary with students with disabilities and help them to experience university life without barriers. As mentioned before being solidary with the side affected with non-accessibility means not trying to be objective or a mediator in situations but showing support by taking up issues with teachers, professors or other university officials be it physical backing or talking ourselves. We try to listen, identify the needs of a group or person and develop a strategy to tackle problems or help with other stuff.

Students non-affected with disabilities often don't know what it means to study in an environment where you are seen as the exception of the rule, the abnormal. The same goes for the teaching personnel. So our mission is to raise awareness. Barrier free living can be learned. The most important thing we tell teachers and other students to do is that insufficient knowledge can be overcome by a readiness to listen to the people directly concerned. We offer courses in sign language, arrange tutorials about disability for student union officials and everyone who would like to know more about barrier free studying and accessibility. Also we want to develop a guideline paper for teachers on how they can make their courses more accessible.

Three Way Approach of the Department

We divided the tasks of our department in three categories. Of course they often overlap. The first one is counseling. We have opening hours where you can visit, send e-mails, or call. People come to us with various issues which we try to solve with them and not for them.

The second one is that we support projects, external and internal ones. Last year we held a conference about crip theory and activism. "Crip Theory" attends to the cultures of disability and queerness. Both disability studies and queer theory are centrally concerned with how bodies, pleasures, and identities are represented as "normal" or as abject, but "Crip Theory" analyzes thoroughly the ways in which these interdisciplinary fields inform each other.

We also help fund seminars and lectures concerning barrier free studying/living and disability. Sometimes we are more involved and sometimes we function as a distributer of funds.

The third category is the most difficult to describe. It constitutes out of long-term projects and a critical approach towards the normalization of bodies. In terms of social critique, like it happened in Crip theory, one must question which bodies are defined as healthy and which ones as disabled, which bodies our society sees as profitable and which ones as abnormal, which one is seen as productive and a benefit for society and which bodies are seen as unproductive and social supplicants. Again, People become disabled by institutions and other people. For us accessibility means the inclusion of all people in the political decision-making process and in society. We try to avoid using binary oppositions like "them" the 'disabled' and "us" the 'normal people'. Therefore we write articles in the university and student union newspapers and our blog. . A social discussion is needed on that discourse and our assignment as a critical student body is to foster that discussion. Yet we cannot succeed if the universities and society as a whole doesn't acknowledge the importance of that, and that is what we are and will be fighting for.

European Action on Disability within Higher Education. The Beginning of a More Inclusive Process

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In Cooperation with Friederike Trommler (University of Leipzig)

Abstract

Research on the situation of students with disability within higher education in Europe is not as comprehensive as it should be. Since the ratification of the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN CRPD) a legal foundation for an inclusive (higher) education system exists, however the theory-practice gap is large. Despite their ratification of the UN CRPD, concrete implementations towards a more inclusive education system by the EC and its member countries are missing.

The EU project "European Action on Disability within Higher Education (EADHE)" aims to close this gap. Seven universities from all over Europe assessed the needs of students with disability on a local level and establish a platform with "good practices" of how to deal with needs of students with disability This platform is available all over Europe and various institutions and people can use, transform, and modify it. Finally, based on the most widely spread needs and corresponding "good practices" that were collected during the first project phase, the project aims to set up fundamental pillars for (political) actions to improve the inclusion of people with disability within higher education.

The article gives a short overview of the current project processes, first project findings, sustainability aspects, impacts on and effects of the project, and further fields of research and interest.

keywords: disability studies, students, higher education, educational research, comparative studies

1. Introduction

According to the 2011 World Health Organization/World Bank report on disability, about 15% of the world's population live with some form of disability, out of which 2-4% experience severe functional limitations (WHO, 2011, 29). Similar percentages describe the situation in europe, which amounts to about 80 million people that live with some form of disability and means that one in four Europeans have a family member with disability (WHO, 2011, 30). The European Union, all EU member states and applicant countries, ensured the protection of the human rights of persons with disability by signing the 1950 European Convention on Human Rights (ECoHR, 1950) and, more recently, by ratifying the 2006 UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UN-CRPD).

According to the European Disability Forum, people with disability are in Europe still prevented from fully negotiating the terms of their own existence and are likely to be deprived of some of the most fundamental rights (EDF, 2009). In 2010, people with disabilities were in Europe still less than half as likely (9%) as persons with no disability (18%) to reach the level of higher education: These numbers show how seriously underrepresented people with disability are in higher education and how low their attainment rate is. This has fundamental human and citizenship rights, free and independent living, and the full participation in society, what finally causes high social costs.

The UN-CRPD does not specify what inclusive education is or has to be (EDF, 2009, 6). Thus, there is no guideline or agenda which summarizes and clarifies how to establish an inclusive higher education system. Generally speaking, there is a Europe-wide lack of knowledge about (major) needs of students with disabilities, or people with disabilities, who want to start studying.

2. The EU Project "European Action on Disability within Higher Education (EADHE)"

Consequently, it is one of the main aims of the EADHE project to close this theory-practice gap and to establish an open access network, platform or a similar solution to collect and present needs and corresponding good practices.

It is not the immediate focus to establish general structrual guidelines to inclusive higher education structures but to give people, institutions and politics an overview and an impression and also tools, which they can use to work towards a more inclusive higher education.

The theoretical framework of ICF – International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (WHO, 2001), with its bio-psycho-social approach to disability (and more generally, to health) and the consequent evaluation of two major kinds of factors:

- environmental factors, including physical factors and the social environment as well as the impact of individual behaviour;
- individual factors, referring to personality and character.

However, the even more important theoretical basis oft he project constitutes Amartya Sen's theory of capability applied to disability (Biggeri *et al.* 2011), which extends ICF. The capability approach adds three aspects which have not been mentioned by ICF:

- the social and collective dimension of disability (and therefore of any policy, strategy and action towards it)
- the set of individual capabilities
- individual agency

Generally speaking, capability denotes a person's opportunity and ability that allow her/him

to achieve things which valuable and important to her/him. Every person has got a set of capabilities that comprise the range of potentially achievable objectives, of which a person chooses the ones s/he aims to achieve (agency). Therefore, capability finally refers to the effective freedom of an individual to choose between different functioning combinations (i.e. between different kinds of life) that she/he decides for by her/himself (and which are not universally set up as standards that should be achieved).

In 2011/12, the University of Bologna established the project "European Action on Disability within Higher Education (EADHE)" which is conducted by seven universities: the University of Bologna (Italy), as the project leader, Aarhus University (Denmark), University of Coimbra (Portugal), Ghent University (Belgium), University of Gothenburg (Sweden), University of Leipzig (Germany) and Cracow University of Economics (Poland), as an associated partner. The NGO Ceis-Formazione is the project partner which gives technical and practical support, as for example PR or sustainability strategies.

1.3 Goals and Aims of the Project

The EADHE Projects hast he following objectives:

- to establish a knowledge base issued by the project partners on the major needs of people with disability within higher education institutions and on the good/best examples/practices implemented to meet those needs, and to establish a map of institutions/countries which are the best contact address for good practices;
- to provide enduring tools to progressively enlarge and enrich this knowledge base through the contribution of further European higher education institution;
- to set up milestones for services/facilities/practices that should be taken into account by local policy makers and should be guaranteed to students with disability all over Europe in order to improve their access and participation in higher education.

2. Research Processes

Based on the described characteristics and aims of the project, the project partners decided to focus on two main target groups: 1) students with disabilites and 2) employees at the partner universities.

Bearing in mind different national and cultural concepts of disability and different data security regulations, the project partners issued an online questionnaire, a quantitative research paradigm. The employees could be more easily contacted and were thus interviewed individually or in groups.

Considering the availability of data and the associated exploratory design of the survey, the project partners established a criteria grid as a framework for the data collection via the online survey and the interviews.

The questionnaire was developed in the project language English, and translated into all

project languages. The open source software *limesurvey* was used to provide the survey online. All project partners conducted semi-structured interviews, but the detailed procedure was adapted in order to do justice to relevant local cultural and linguistic features in mind.

That type of interview meets the requirements of the exploratory-descriptive research design, and thus the research objectives and aims.

The seven project universities outlined their local findings in internal local reports, which have all been evaluated and brought together in an overall report.

3. First Impressions on the Overall Results¹

3.1 The Analysing Process (in cooperation with Lieve Carette and Mette Lind Kusk)

The advantage of using limesurvey as the software for data collection is the option to export the quantitative data to various formats. Thus, quantitative information to each topic of the survey could be viewed for each individual partner and for all project partners. The open questions were evaluated on the basis of the key incidents method by Emerson (2004).

The interview material was analysed via the Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) method by Mayring (2010) and a category guidline was established on the basis of Steigleder (2006), who provided an adoption and development of Mayring's method. The category guideline considers theoretically-based deductive processes and inductive processes. which focus on the collected material. During the process of the data analysis, the guideline has been continuously developed.

3.2 Student Survey

In total, 415 questionnaires have been fully answered in the period from March to June 2013. The number of samples are not evenly distributed across all participating institutions (see table 1). Primarily, this is due to the fact that the target groups for the survey were addressed in different ways at the respective universities, as the data regulations differ. Each local online questionnaire was open for three weeks.

University	Questionnaires	Percentage
University of Aarhus	41	9,88 %
University of Bologna	50	12,05 %
University of Coimbra	31	7,47 %

¹ Until now it wasn't possible to involve the captured data from the University of Economics Krakow, because of the later participation within the EADHE project. This will be made up in the final report of the project and/or elsewhere.

Total	415	100 %
Others (not assigned)	13	3,13 %
University of Leipzig	109	26,27 %
University of Gothenburg	58	13,98 %
University of Ghent	113	27,23 %

Table 1. Overview on fully completed and analysed questionnaires.

3.3 Interviews with Employees

In addition to the student survey, the universities gathered qualitative data material in problem-centred interviews (Witzel, 2000). In total, 134 interviews have been carried out (see table 2).

University	Interviews
University of Aarhus	16
University of Bologna	25
University of Coimbra	17
University of Ghent	27
University of Gothenburg	13
University of Leipzig	36
Total	134

Table 2. Overview on interviews that have been used for analysation.

3.4 Overall Summary

Not *all* contextual aspects will be outlined, but the main areas will be presented. It must be kept in mind that the results presented below are derived from different contexts and it is difficult to draw direct comparisons. The results of each university are tightly interwoven with the national context; legislation and the educational & economic organisation differ from country to country. To get a detailed understanding of each university's local context, we refer readers to the local reports.

The good practices will not be discussed here. When the piloting process of the project and the project-internal evaluation of these good practices are completed, they will be presented at the project conference in Leipzig, September 2014.² Therefore, at this stage of the project,

² The project conference will be held at the University of Leipzig on the 21st September, 2014. For further Information visit: www.eadhe.eu/conference.

first impressions and findings of the challenges and opportunities of students with and without disability will be outlined and described.

Main Areas - Challenges and Opportunities

Overall, based on the quantitative and qualitative data from these six universities, two main areas can be described: *information* and *study environment improvements*.

- 1. Under *information* several categories or aspects are summarized: "visibility of supporting services", "direct communication" between students with disabilities and teachers, "transparency" of rules/guidelines for studying with disability and the "flexibility" of these. The main aspect that could be described is the aspect of "awareness". Students and interviewed persons stated that awareness is important for students with disability in several areas of life. In the following, these areas are called micro area (university staff), meso area (the university as an institution), and macro area (politicians and society). In five of six universities awareness was named and described as an important area. Awareness is also understood in the sense of a certain mindset which means that a person is "attentive" to the needs of students with disability, "informative", and "sensitive". The micro, meso, and macro area are interconnected. As another subcategory of *information* the aspect of "financial support" could be added but it depends on the description and the focus of analysis which is described.
- 2. 2) Study environment improvements comprise aspects such as "e-learning and online support", "online-based courses and lectures", "online material", "learn management systems", "video and/or audio podcasts and lectures" and also "accessible university buildings and areas" are submitted. The specific challenges vary across the universities, but for all "e-learning support" is mandatory to support studying with disability.
- 3. At three universities it was elaborated on the term "grey area", which denotes the problem that "not disabled" and "not normal" is not covered by any analysis model or theory.
- 4. These students seem to do succeed in their studies, but have impairments, especially psychological ones, which are not visible as "traditional" disabilities.
- 5. We think that the main group of students cannot be categorized as normal or disabled and that these groups is one of the main challenges within higher education as they need support, but not as obvious and extensive kinds of support as students with disability or students with children etc.

4. Prospects

Within the next 2-3 months the EADHE project will establish an internal toolbox. The aim of the toolbox, and in fact of the project, is it to gather *good practices* or *good examples* to meet the students' needs in terms of studying with (a) disability/ies. The partner universities will issue approaches to their good practices for each other, which will be collected in the toolbox.

In a second step, the other project partners implement, test and evaluate these good practices at their local level. Finally, all tools that were evaluated and obtained high ranks in this evaluation will be publically shared in the toolbox under the CC-BY-SA creative commons licences. Other institutions or individual persons working in the area of studying with disability can use the material, develop it, comment on it, expand it, combine it and share their experiences through this toolbox, which will fully start by the end of September 2014.

Resumee

The EADHE project was devised, developed, and realized with highest attention to make differences in approaches, traditions, backgrounds and practices towards disability, and to value and serve the fundamental and common aim of inclusion. Its methodology, tools and instruments were adapted to the local contexts in which they were applied. Every effort has been made to ensure the comparability of local project results at any stage. Higher education Institutions from seven European countries participated in the EADHE project, further institutions have expressed their interest to join the project, use its tools, benefit of and contribute to its knowledge.

These features, the increasing number of participating institutions, the constant dissemination of the project results, the continuous effort of awareness-raising, and the determined bottom-up push to reach policy makers allow the EADHE project to contribute to the Europe-wide process of working towards a more inclusive higher education system and thus towards the full inclusion of people with disability into society.

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Going to College at NUI Galway: Strengthening Citizenship through Inclusion in Higher Education

By Casey, B., Domegan, C., McCormack, E., Smith, M., Dolan, P (NUI Galway)

Introduction

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and UNESCO express the right of each citizen with a disability to be included in education and lifelong learning, leading to their effective inclusion in society, without discrimination and on an equal basis with others (United Nations, 2008; UNESCO, 2009). A similar vision for Irish society was expressed by President Michael D. Higgins in his inaugural speech - a radically inclusive citizenship, a 'people first' society, where every person's abilities and talents are acknowledged and nurtured as included citizens (Higgins, 2011).

These are also issues that are relevant to higher education in Ireland. For example, the Strategic Plan of the UNESCO Chair in Children, Youth & Civic Engagement at NUI Galway includes a commitment to provide opportunities for students with intellectual disabilities to participate in higher education (UNESCO Chair, 2010). In addition, NUI Galway's *Landscape Submission* 2012 – 2017 commits to "inclusive participation in higher education for students with an intellectual disability" (NUI Galway, 2012, p.12). As a microcosm of society (Grigal & Hart, 2010), university provides an inclusive, empowering environment for students with intellectual disabilities, where transferable learning, knowledge and skills are developed.

Models of Higher Education

Research carried out in the US identified three distinct models of higher education for students with intellectual disabilities (Grigal & Hart, 2010). Models are illustrated in order of prevalence:

- 1. Mixed/hybrid model: students study together in a specially designed programme for a portion of their time and may also have access to lectures and other social activities with students without disabilities.
- 2. Substantially Separate model: students study together in a specially designed programme and may have access to social opportunities with students without disabilities
- 3. Inclusive, individualized model: students are included in undergraduate programmes and do not engage in any "special" or "separate" activities together. Students have access to all the student services on campus, join clubs and societies, and have opportunities to engage in all other student activities on campus.

Trinity College began including students with intellectual disabilities in higher education in 2006, utilizing a mixed/hybrid model of education (O'Brien et al, 2009). In November 2009, NUI Galway began exploring higher education models and initiatives, nationally and internationally. An assessment of need and an extensive literature review were completed, followed by a visit to inclusive, individualized initiatives in Alberta, Canada in 2010. These led to the development of the Going to College initiative to include students with intellectual disabilities at NUI Galway through an inclusive, individualized model of higher education. An inclusive initiative has also been developed at NUI Maynooth.

Going to College Initiative at NUI Galway

The Going to College university/community partnership, is a pioneering European innovation in inclusive higher education for students with intellectual disabilities. The aim of the Going to College initiative is to provide each student with the opportunity, through engaging in the typical student experience, to develop the vision, knowledge and transferable skills to live a more inclusive, inter-dependent life in their own community.

Students are encouraged to travel by public transport to college each day so that over time they can learn to travel independently. Each student follows an existing NUI Galway undergraduate programme of their choice, at their own pace, participating in classes and other learning activities (e.g. tutorials, laboratory work, fieldtrips, seminars, group work), alongside their classmates. To complete coursework, students are provided with needs-led educational support outside of class. To date, students have been included in Earth & Ocean Sciences; Engineering; Human Rights; Irish and Celtic Civilisation; Italian; Marketing; Sociological & Political Science, and Theatre & Performance.

Elizabeth McCormack, Marketing Student at NUI Galway, talks about her college experience...

I came to college in 2011. I thought it would be a good experience because everyone in my family has gone to college and I never got the opportunity before. I learnt to use public transport on my own – I had never done that before college. I choose Marketing to set up my own business and my family has their own business. It was difficult being a student at first; trying to go to class on my own; making new friends. Now, it is easier to make friends and easier getting to class and finding my way around campus. Sometimes classes are difficult because I don't understand – so I have learnt to go the tutor and ask questions. To start with, clubs & societies were hard enough to go to because I live over an hour away from college. Now, I am part of a Choral Society that is on every Tuesday 6-8pm and I got to know some people. I love the societies so far. After I leave college, I plan to stay with a choral society of young people. Now I am in 3rd year, I feel I am achieving more than I did in the 1st and 2nd year. It's easier to understand the subject in 3rd year - I did more learning this year. I'm getting to know people much better, I made friends. It's easier getting around campus. I know that it is not easy to be a student because you are always busy. My family is there to support me.

Each student has an academic mentor who guides them in their coursework and they meet regularly. Mentors foster intentional inclusiveness, (1) in their guidance of individual students through their academic experience, and (2) by providing leadership to academic colleagues in their particular discipline. Since September 2011, over 50 academic staff at NUI Galway have included individual students in their classes. This strong partnership with academic mentors and academic staff has been pivotal for the initiative to unfold successfully at NUI Galway.

Embracing civic engagement opportunities, including undertaking volunteering roles, and participating in clubs and societies, provide opportunities for students to enhance their social support networks and contribute as active, included citizens. Completing a paid work placement is a key element of their college experience and a number of students also undertake unpaid internships related to their academic studies. Having an opportunity to

undertake paid work and internships enhances each student's employability after college and, combined with other civic engagement opportunities, will support each student to gain valuable knowledge and transferrable skills.

Assessment is continuous over the three year period, using a range of methods i.e. exam, written work, performance, presentation, class participation, lab work, MCQ, learning log, group work, drama and other media. For their final assessment, students complete a portfolio of their academic and civic engagement activities. The development of individual portfolios provides opportunities for students to reflect on the valued roles (i.e. college student, paid employee, volunteer, commuter, musician, etc.) they have undertaken while in college. On completion of their college experience, each student will receive a parchment from NUI Galway detailing their engagement and participation. Each student will also have the opportunity to achieve a Certificate in Academic and Civic Studies (Level 6 on NFQ), if they achieve the required 15 ECTS.

Plan for Life after College

The Going to College Team is also collaborating with LEAP Ireland, a new family-led organization working in Ireland to support persons with disabilities and their families. This collaboration will facilitate a process with each student and their family to develop a transition plan for life after college. This transition plan, combined with a multi-faceted, typical college experience, will support each student on their journey to a more interdependent life as "included citizens" (Higgins, 2011) in their own community.

Going to College Initiative: Underpinning Principles

The Going to College initiative is underpinned by the principle and ethos of **inclusion**. Focusing on the typical student pathway and accommodating the needs of students, it aims to focus on the "will and preferences" (UN, 2008) of each individual student.

Dissolving traditional boundaries and brokering a dialogue with community, the initiative works in active partnership with students, families, NUI Galway community, intellectual disability service providers*, work placement and volunteering organisations. The National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030 highlighted the value of **university / community partnerships in creating long-term cultural and social change** (Higher Education Authority, 2011) and the Going to College university/community partnership model is vital to the success of the initiative and to the individual student experience.

The Future of the Going to College Initiative

An evaluation of the Going to College initiative is currently being conducted by an external evaluator with students, families, academic staff and service providers. The evaluation aims to establish the impact of the inclusive college experience on individual students and discover what might be improved to enhance the experience for future students.

Going to College University/Community Partnership

NUI Galway Partners: UNESCO Child & Family Research Centre; Centre for Disability Law & Policy

*Community Partners: National Federation of Voluntary Bodies, Ability West, Brothers of Charity Services Galway, Brothers of Charity Services Roscommon and Western Care Association

For information on the Going to College initiative at NUI Galway, please contact: Breda Casey, Project Co-Ordinator / Adjunct Lecturer, UNESCO Child & Family Research Centre, AM 124, Arts Millenium Building, NUI Galway, Tel: 091-493621, Email: breda.casey@nuigalway.ie

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An Exploratory Study of an Inclusive Academic Support Service for Higher Education Students

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Introduction

"Inclusive education looks at both the rights of students, and how education systems can be transformed to respond to diverse groups of learners. It emphasises the need for opportunities for equal participation for any students with disabilities or special needs in the education system, preferably in a mainstream environment" (National Council for Special Education, 2010).

One of the key goals of the National Strategy for Higher Education to 2030, is the improvement of inclusive teaching and learning methodologies. In 2003, the National Learning Network (NLN) and the Institute of Technology, Blanchardstown (ITB) through a shared understanding of inclusive education practices and an awareness of the types of difficulties encountered by college students, regardless of diagnosed disabilities, collaborated and developed an inclusive academic support service on the campus of ITB

This psychology led service, provides on-site assessment and intervention for students with diagnoses of learning, mental health, neurological, neuro-developmental, and physical difficulties. Students access a range of study, wellness, social and organisational support sessions with a psychologist. The service adopts a holistic approach and recognises that student well-being is intertwined with their academic experiences. Research has demonstrated that students' perceptions of academic performance are closely related to their current levels of anxiety and depression (Dooley & Fitzgerald, 2012). Therefore NLN utilises psychological approaches to ensure that students are managing thoughts, feelings and beliefs about their academic lives effectively.

This combination of a specialist service provider and a mainstream educational institution has ensured that individuals have been provided with a high quality service that has identified their needs and offered practical support and remediation. This has resulted in a higher number of students attending and completing their education and training and moving on to the workplace to a job that reflects their potential. This complies with new Irish and EU legislation and reflects the ethos described in several UN conventions focused on educational rights.

Methodology

The present study was exploratory in nature, and aimed to construct a profile of the frequency of NLN use, service users and the precipitating factors which influenced students' decisions to seek the assistance of the service.

This exploratory study employed a mixed methods approach. The first phase aimed to qualitatively evaluate the precipitating factors which prompted students to seek support.

The profile of students on a wider scale was investigated using quantitative methods. Specifically, non-parametric tests of difference and relationship were used, as well as Chi Square and crosstab analyses. These analyses explored the relationship between key demographic variables such as gender, age, diagnosis and frequency of service use.

Results

Results indicated that over a four year period, 403 students were referred to the service. Although more females attended the service, the gender balance was fairly even (53% females) and gender itself, had no influence on the likelihood of attending the service. The age range of the students was 18-57 (*M*=27.02, *SD*=8.55; see Table 1). Most students attended for between 1 and 3 sessions, although one student attended for over 60 sessions, demonstrating the individualised nature of service use.

Students were more frequently referred to the service in the first semester of the year (66.3%), while a significant number also first approached the service in the second semester of college (17.8%). The remainder were referred in the summer months or did not have the month of referral available on file (see Fig. 2).

A bimodal pattern was highlighted, whereby referrals peaked in September and February to coincide with the start of term and the release of semester one exam results respectively. These times are undoubtedly associated with changes in the frequency and intensity of the academic demands involved in each course.

Reasons for Contacting the Service

Referral information for some students was not available (n=86). Many students highlighted more than one difficulty upon referral, with 46% of students presenting with one concern only, 34% of students presenting with two concerns, 15% presenting with three concerns, 4% had four separate concerns and 1% with 5 separate concerns (see Table 1). It was clear that queries about reasonable accommodations was the most prevalent concern (29%), followed by difficulties with academic writing (11%).

Table 1: Difficulties outlined by students at initial referral

Presenting difficulty according to student	Number of students presenting with difficulty	Prevalence of this concern among students
Student requests an "assessment"	32	6%
Student feels they may have Dyslexia	22	5%
Student highlights a difficulty with particular subjects	19	4%
Student needs reasonable accommodations in exams	132	29%

Student has difficulty with attention and concentration	19	4%
Student is experiencing an emotional difficulty (anxiety, depression, stress)	24	5%
Student is having difficulty with time management	21	5%
Student is having difficulty with organisation	10	2%
Student is experiencing difficulty while learning subject specific terminology	9	2%
Student highlights a difficulty with academic writing	51	11%
Student is finding revision difficult	8	2%
Student has a general query about supports available	15	3%
Student has a difficulty with social skills	5	1.5%
Student is experiencing comprehension difficulties	18	4%
Student is aware of weak literacy ability (poor spelling, grammar and reading ability)	51	11%
Student wants assistance with presentation skills	5	1.5%
Student highlights a diagnosis of Dyscalculia	4	1%
Student is experiencing difficulty with memory	11	2%
Student has difficulties with computer literacy	2	<1%

Age

Interesting trends emerged when age was analysed as a key variable. Age was a statistically significant influence on the number of sessions which a student attended. Students in the 30-39 age group had the highest average number of sessions (see Table 2), although more 18-22 year olds attended the service overall. This suggests that the 30-39 age group are likely to seek academic and well-being support more frequently than other age groups. 50-57 year olds also had a higher average number of sessions.

Table 2: Average Number of Sessions Stratified By Age

Age Group	Mean Number of Sessions (SD)
18-22	4.68 <i>(9.66)</i>
23-29	6.02 <i>(7.58)</i>
30-39	10.28(12.94)
40-49	4.67(6.38)
50-57	8.75(11.34)

Gender

Males and females did not differ in terms of their likelihood of attending one or more sessions with the service. Furthermore, it was apparent that there was no difference in terms of the likelihood of males or females having a diagnosis upon referral (see Table 3). However, more males presented with Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, Asperger's and ADHD when compared to females.

		Referrals		Total
		Referred but did not attend an appointment	Referred and attended one or more	
			appointments	
Gender	Males	61	125	186
	Females	57	156	213
Total		118	281	399

Diagnosis

128 (31.7%) of the students who attended the service, presented with one or more of 21 diagnosed learning, physical, neurological, mental health or neuro-developmental difficulties (see Table 4).

Table 4: Categorisation of types of disabilities.

Learning & Neurodevelopmental	Physical / Sensory	Neurological	Mental Health
Dyslexia	Hearing Impaired	Epilepsy	Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
Dyspraxia	Vision Impaired	Erb's Palsy	Depression
Attention Deficit Disorder	Tuberous Sclerosis	Multiple Sclerosis	Bi-Polar Disorder
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder	Scotopic Sensitivity Syndrome	Neuro-Fibromatosis	Seasonal Affective Disorder
Dyscalculia	Arthritis		
General Learning Difficulty			
Expressive Language Disorder			
Kleinfelter Syndrome			

Diagnosed students presented with Dyslexia (73.4%), ADHD (4.7%), Dyspraxia (3.1%) and Asperger's Syndrome (3.1%) among other disorders as listed in the table above. Almost 6% of students who had a diagnosis also had a secondary, concurrent diagnosis. One student had as many as three separate disorders, demonstrating the complex nature of the needs of students.

Conclusions

The above results suggest that regardless of whether a student has been diagnosed with a defined disorder or not, they still feel the need to seek help for their academic difficulties. Students typically seek the assistance of the service to help them with issues relating to the provision of direct resources and services for example, access to a reader or a scribe.

Students also attend for skills focused and exploratory work, for example, developing their academic writing skills or presentation ability. Anecdotally, concurrent mental health difficulties, in particular anxiety, stress and low self-esteem can seriously hinder the performance of the students who seek to use the service. It is a distinct strength of the service that these difficulties can be addressed within the context of the academic tasks which are provoking these negative emotions. Troiano, Liefield & Trachtenberg (2010) state that students with learning difficulties who attend academic support services, are more likely to have higher levels of academic attainment and are more likely to graduate. ITB and the NLN have recognised this, but more crucially, have recognised the circular relationship between diagnosis and difficulty, whereby, difficulties may still be present when a diagnosis is not, and therefore, all students, regardless of diagnosis, are given the opportunity to seek the support they need. The service may therefore be viewed as a preventative method of supporting students who may otherwise be at risk of dropping out of college.

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Fostering Mobility of Students with Disabilities in Erasmus Programme

By Ms Agnes Sarolta Fazekas, Mr. Kenny Ho; Erasmus Student Network

Erasmus Student Network

Erasmus Student Network (ESN) is one of the biggest interdisciplinary student associations and it is a key volunteer student organization in international higher education in Europe. It provides opportunities for cultural understanding and self-development under the principle of SHS - Students Helping Students. ESN was born on the 16th October 1989 and legally registered in 1990 for supporting and developing student exchange. ESN works in the interest of international students; aims to improve the social and practical integration of international students; represents the needs and rights of international students on the local, national, and international level; provides relevant information about mobility programmes; motivates students to study abroad; works with the reintegration of homecoming students; contributes to the improvement and accessibility of student mobility; cares about its members; values volunteering and active citizenship. ESN also provides relevant information and encourages the future exchange students to gain the international experience and gain relevant insight to different cultures.

ExchangeAbility

Mobility offers young people opportunities for self-development and enhances their future employability. This becomes even more important when we consider groups of risk from social exclusion, such as people with disabilities. Participation in exchange programmes is a challenging for young people, as they are facing an unfamiliar environment, such as a new language and culture. It can be even more difficult for students with disabilities who may face inaccessible environments or disability-related stereotypes. As recognition of such challenges, Erasmus Student Network developed the ExchangeAbility project to make our organisation accessible for students with disabilities, and to help remove obstacles to enhance participation in exchange programmes and promote the opportunities available. The ExchangeAbility project was also initiated due to recognition of the situation regarding the mobility of students with disabilities. According to the data from the European Commission, a total of 257 students with disabilities participated in Erasmus in 2009-2010, which represents 0.12% of the Erasmus students. Despite the modest increase that has been observed, the participation of students with disabilities in mobility is still very low. In 2009/2010, the 1st phase of ExchangeAbility was to make ESN an accessible organization in all level of its activities and provide the conditions and opportunities for student with disabilities to actively be involved in the work with international students with the support of European Disability Forum, Youth Agora and Network of Universities from Capitals of Europe. In 2010/2011 the 2nd phase of ExchangeAbility Project together with the Network of Universities from Capitals of Europe and involved HEIs (funded by the European Commission under the "Erasmus Accompanying Measures") was to increase the number of students with disabilities participating in exchange programmes. The main goal was to raise

awareness on the need of promoting inclusive policies and practices at universities involving stakeholders and students; improving the information provision schemes about mobility programmes for students with disabilities; promotion of active citizenship, community participation among young people; exchange of good practices, and create a common dialogue among relevant stakeholders and students with disabilities. The site visits among involved universities have reached their objective to raise awareness about all the aspects to be considered when sending and welcoming students with disabilities at universities and collection of good practices, challenges. During each site visits a video was recorded to compile an eye-catching accessible film providing information about the accessibility of involved universities and the obstacles that students might encounter. The media chosen, i.e. accessible website, videos with the testimonies of 'ExchangeAbility Ambassadors; blog, story competition and social media had a great multiplier effect. During the final event, the future prospects and follow-up of the project were evoked. The project resulted an effect on policies and services through identification of challenges an increased interest and participation of students with disabilities, higher education institutions, student organizations, and relevant stakeholders from a civil society organizations. More than 1,000 followers on Facebook, many views on YouTube, and two international prizes were received.

Challenges and barriers

There are many challenges for all students to participate in study mobility such as financial resources, adequate level of foreign language skills, convertibility of knowledge and credits transfer across HEIs in Europe. Students with disabilities encounter additional overarching problems in the EU countries, various procedure of supplementary grant, barriers of ICT and built environment, insufficient cooperation within and between HEIs when it comes to supporting (international) student with disabilities, difficulties of availability and transportability of services, such as personal assistance for people with disabilities and problems of adequate exchange of information.

The former Erasmus Programme and the new Erasmus+ pays particular attention to ensure that students or staff with special needs can take full advantage of the European mobility arrangements, with the availability of a supplementary grant to contribute to additional costs regarding the access needs. It was emphasised in the ExchangeAbility project by students with disabilities and HE professionals that the funding support is essential but there are still barriers and the complexity of unknown risks which hold back the students with disabilities from study mobility.

How ESN can help HEIs to support with disabilities regarding all aspects of the whole college experience during the mobility?

Students with disabilities desire the same educational opportunities including participating in exchange programmes. To this end the adequate student support services are important. Not only funding support but also the networks of higher education institutions and other stakeholders, such as youth organizations like ESN, and disability organizations are essential to help students with disabilities in mobility. Through the ExchangeAbility project a gap was

realized when it comes to mobility of students with disabilities. It means that sometimes students with disabilities and disability officers are not fully aware of the exchange programme opportunities. In order to realize the effective support for students with disabilities ESN sees cooperation as a key factor with Higher Education Institutions, National Agencies to provide practical information to students with disabilities giving them the information they need to make the decision and be confident about going abroad. Strengthen a "knowledge *quartet*" is one of the potential solutions. It means to compose a wider dialogue among International Relations and Disability Officers, local ESN sections and students with disabilities elaborate the best solutions in order to create a smooth exchange experience. Students are more confident to ask for advice from their peers besides the official bodies. In order to support effectively the (international) students with disabilities it is needed to share and balance the workload among International Relation and Disability Officers and include the help of student organizations such as ESN.

As one of the barriers of mobility was recognized, the environment of the host country is a key factor. In 2013 ESN applied to the European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe with a project called MapAbility: Mapping the HEIs (Higher Education Institutions) accessibility for student with disabilities. It is a sub-part of ExchangeAbility with the aim to create a map (a web-based information tool) about the accessibility and services of European Higher Education Institutions for students with disabilities, in order to provide practical information to HEIs and students with disabilities to be confident participating in study mobility programs. To accomplish the main aim, information is gathered through an online questionnaire by the HEIs with the help of local ESN Volunteers. ESN Volunteers who are active in working with and for international students are charge of implementing the project and directly benefiting from it. The project enables them to develop their skills in volunteering with students with disabilities and enhance their tolerance and mutual understanding towards diverse groups of society including people with disabilities. The gathered information about accessibility of higher education institutions and services for students with disabilities will be available and maintained on the ESN's webpage. The webbased tool will help the work of HE professionals and give a firm point of reference to students with disabilities when considering study abroad.

ExchangeAbility itself is part of ESN long strategic framework to promote the opportunities and support offered for students with disabilities to study abroad. ExchangeAbility works with ESN sections, HEIs and organisations that are experts in the field to create the best conditions possible for students with disabilities during their stay abroad. ESN volunteers will be recruited by the international board to implement the follow up strategy of the project.

Enhancing Access and Transition to Higher Education Utilising an Assistive Technology Outreach Model

By Mary O'Grady, Disability Support Officer/Head of Service, University College Cork

Background:

The transition from second level to higher level is a challenging one for all students; particularly for students with disabilities. The Disability Support Service has a long tradition of linking with second level to promote the use of AT, as a means of enabling students with disabilities to achieve their goals and make a better transition to higher education.

Successful transition of students from second to third level has recently been identified as an issue at governmental level, and also by international organisations.

Evidence Base:

It is well recognised that the full potential of AT is not being realised when preparing young people with disabilities and/or SPLDs for postsecondary education (National Council on Disability & Social Security Administration 2000, Burgstahler 2013). The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) 2004 outlines the provision for inclusive education in Ireland. The act declares that students have the right; "to leave school with the skills necessary to participate, [...] in an inclusive way in the social and economic activities of society and to live independent and fulfilled lives..."

In their 2008 report, Shevlin, Kenny and Loxley identified the following systemic oversights in the education system:

- ✓ Limited access to assistive technology that facilitates personal, academic and career development.
- ✓ Inadequate AT training and on-going support.
- ✓ Little or no utilisation of AT in State Examinations.
- ✓ Difficult transition from second level to third level education and/or employment.

In his 2001 study, Tom Daly states that students may be enabled by adopting, amongst other things, an effective assistive technology support system, which "would facilitate functional literacy and communication through the use of adaptive, computer-based technologies, for pupils with disabilities".

Introduction:

IN the 2012/2013 academic year, the Disability Support Service initiated an Assistive Technology (AT) Outreach programme to enhance access to Higher Education for students with disabilities through promoting awareness and use of AT in second level education in UCC's catchment area. The use of AT can help students to maximise their potential in their academic work and, in the longer term, enhance access to Higher Education opportunities.

Objectives of the Programme:

1. Enhance Access the Higher Education for Students with Disabilities

To engage with relevant stakeholders in the field of education and disability with the aim of promoting the role of AT in second level education working towards:

- Maximising their academic potential
- Enabling maximum independence
- Enhancing access to Higher Education
- Facilitating a smooth transition to, and success in, Higher Education
- Enhancing transition to employment

2. Raise AT Awareness

• To increase awareness of the AT available to students and of what it can do to support students with disabilities to maximise their academic potential

3. Provide Essential AT Training

 To provide essential training and support to students and their parents and educators in using the relevant AT effectively to engage with the curriculum

How Does The AT Outreach Model Address these Objectives?

A two staged approach was employed to target the relevant students, parents and educators. Firstly the AT Outreach Model was promoted through Information Evenings, held in a variety of localities across Munster to which all local students, parents and educators were invited.

A second avenue of accessing the relevant stakeholders was to distribute a calendar of AT training events held in UCC for educators to all second level schools in the catchment area inviting educators to book training relevant to their school's needs. An offer of a variety of options for in school presentations or training was included in this mail shot to schools.

This two staged approach both increased AT awareness and generated interest in attending AT training. A variety of AT training was provided as follows:

- UCC based training for teachers/SNAs and separately for students and parents.
- In-school training for teachers/SNAs and separately for students and parents.

Stage 1 Information Evenings to Increase AT Awareness:

• In order to raise awareness of AT a number of General Information Evenings were held, one each month, across UCC's catchment area.

- On these evenings a general overview of AT for a broad spectrum of needs was presented and a student with a disability gave an account of their experience with AT in education with time for questions and discussion afterwards.
- All participants (students, parents and educators) were invited to sign up for training
 in the specific AT they found relevant from the presentation. This provided the
 platform for hands-on training.

Stage 2 Provision of AT Training:

• Training was provided to students and parents and, separately, to teachers and SNAs either in UCC or in their own schools as best met their needs.

UCC Based Training:

Hands-on, practical training sessions of up to 3 hours were carried out for those who signed up on the Information Evenings. These were hosted in UCC.

The calendar of training events was distributed to all the second level schools in the catchment area and teachers, SNAs and other educators were invited to book training that suited their needs.

Participants received training in Assistive Technology for:

- students who are blind and visually impaired (including Kurzweil 1000)
- students who are deaf/HOH
- students with physical disabilities
- student to benefit from free accessibility features on PCs and iPad and general freeware
- literacy support (including Read&Write Gold)
- mind mapping (including Inspiration)

In-School Based Training:

Awareness-raising presentations, demonstrations and training were also provided to students, parents and educators in their own schools. As each school's level of awareness and/use of AT varies, a range of options were available to best meet the AT needs of individual schools as follows:

- A presentation to staff on an over view of assistive technology available to second level students with disabilities/learning difficulties
- In school training of staff and/or students
- Presentation and training for parents in relevant technologies.

When adopting new technologies follow-up support is crucial and this was provided to students, parents and educators *via* phone and email

The objective of the programme is to promote the use of assistive technology for second level students, their parents and educators but we have offered training to primary schools also. This is particularly important for students in 5th and 6th class for their progression to second level education.

Monitoring and Evaluating the AT Outreach Model Employed by UCC: Year 1:

Evaluations were completed at the end of each training/awareness raising event and over 90% of participants rated the event as a "very effective", the maximum rating on the scale provided. In order to capture the on-going effectiveness of the programme a questionnaire was emailed out to the educators who participated in the spectrum of AT training provided.

Over 300 questionnaires were emailed out to determine how the AT Outreach Programme has impacted on schools and to gauge how awareness of, confidence in and use of AT has been affected by engagement with the training. Some of the results are as follows:

Educators Experience of the AT Outreach Model Employed by UCC:

- 100% of respondents agreed the training was a productive use of their time
- 100% of respondents agreed their awareness of AT for students with disabilities is now greater
- 69% agreed they are now more confident about using AT in the classroom environment
- 61% stated they are now using AT more frequently with their students
- 70% would like to avail of more training and support from the AT Outreach Programme

Educators Evaluation of their Students Experience after Engagement with the AT Outreach Model Employed by UCC:

- 66% stated their students were making greater use of AT to access their curriculum
- 66% stated their students are now using AT more effectively
- 79% stated AT is now enhancing their students' independence in their school work
- 83% stated AT is enhancing their students' ability to maximise their academic potential
- 66% stated their students would like to avail of further training and support from the AT Outreach Model.

Figure 1 Key Results of the AT Outreach Programme Year 1:

Statistics from year 1	Term 1 of Year 2 of programme	
Information Evenings to raise AT awareness and target stakeholders	177 participants	122
Training events	73	25
Number of Participants		
Students	201	90
Parents	124	73
Teachers	363	139
Special Needs Assistants (SNAs)	125	44
Special Education Needs Organisers (SENOs)	17	_
National Educational Psychologist Service (NEPS)	10	1 Ed Psych

There are 4 Key challenges in successful implementation of the Programme

- 1. The need for the whole school to "buy in" to the use of AT across all the students' subjects and school activities.
- 2. Great demand for A.T. for students with SpLD sometimes overshadowing the AT needs of other target students.
- 3. Implementing the use of AT on the ground seems to be a slower process than anticipated.
- 4. Level of IT knowledge in educators and the lack of IT support in schools.

Response to Challenges:

- In 2013/14 the programme co coordinator promotes the use of schools "Croke Park" hours to include all staff in AT awareness and training events.
- A concerted effort is being made to further develop links with Munster Education Centres.
- Targeted A.T. training workshops are being held during the midterm breaks to specifically support students who are blind/visually impaired, deaf/HOH or who have physical or multiple disabilities.
- The programme continues to offer links to free resources and sites for IT knowledge as part of each presentation/training session.

Future Development of AT Outreach programme

The Disability Support Service is developing a video gallery of podcasts on a spectrum of AT training options to reach a broader audience thereby enabling greater access to information on role of Assistive technology in enabling and empowering students with disabilities. The programme co coordinator is targeting DEIS schools in Cork City and county to raise

awareness of AT amongst cohorts who are doubly disadvantaged as result of disability and lower economic status

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Combining current hardware and software applications to create bespoke comprehensive solutions for students with disabilities

By Gillian J. Dunlop MSc, Adv. Dip. Inclusive Education, GMIT Access Office

Background

In recent years technology has been moving at a rapid pace. In particular, the advent of Apple products has opened up a myriad of possibilities especially in relation to individuals with disabilities. This paper outlines methods used to combine certain technologies and provide unique solutions to individuals with disabilities. The main focus of the paper is on people who have a physical disability; and have limited fine motor skills. Examples of disabilities for which the technology described may be useful would be Fredericks Ataxia, Cerebral palsy and various disabilities which cause limited motor skills. Technology which was used was combination of Apple products and Lenova laptops coupled with commercially available applications from Apple and laptop downloads.

Airplay Mirroring

The use of Airplay Mirroring in Apple devices has many functions between both a pc/Apple Macbook and a handheld device or tablet such as an iPad. Airplay is a proprietary protocol suite which allows for the wireless streaming of audio, video and photos between devices. Essentially Airplay can be used to replicate what is on an iPad to a laptop/pc. This is particularly useful for students with limit motor skills, as they may view the iPad display on a screen at eye level, whilst negotiating various applications using either a hand or foot or limb. Airplay was originally only implemented in Apple's software. Apple has licensed the audio-streaming portion of the Airplay protocol suite as a third-party software component technology to manufacturer partners for them to use in their products in order to be compatible with Apple's iDevices. There are two types of AirPlay devices: those that send audiovisual content, and those capable of receiving the content and rendering it on displays and speakers. Airserver is an Airplay receiver for a Mac and a pc. It is an application which performs similar functions to an Apple tv but is available as a download. Airserver enables the user to beam an iPad or iPhone screen to a Mac or PC. Another example of an Airplay receiver would be Reflection. For the purposes of this paper Airserver was used predominantly.

Using Airplay Mirroring between an iPad and a PC or Laptop

In order for mirroring to function both the iPad and the pc or laptop must be on the same Wifi connection. The Airserver link on the laptop or the pc must be open and running. Then the user must swipe up on the iPad in order to view another menu option which allows the user to switch the iPad to mirroring and thus replicate that screen to either the laptop, Macbook Air or pc. This technology may be used successfully for individuals to swipe an ebook on the iPad and read it onscreen on the laptop or pc. The iPad may be swiped using hand or limb or foot. In this way, where using any form of keyboard is difficult, the

individual may use this technology to read both ebooks and notes which have been converted to ebook format using ibooks author available from itunes. Another means by which mirroring can be used is Apple tv. This is also using the same WiFi connection and to a HD monitor or television. This mirroring function could be used for ebooks, youtube videos (audio is mirrored through the pc speakers) and a variety of media such as powerpoint presentations, and word documents. The accessible features of the ipad such as enlarged text size and enlarged icons and keyboard using limited motion, combine well with the mirroring feature to give potential for independent writing, and creation of files using various apps. Immediately this is done a screen should appear on the pc or laptop with the image on the iPad. Now anything which is executed on the iPad will be shown on the pc/laptop.

For the interest of this trial the student used their toe to activate the iPad and mirror to the pc or laptop. An ebook was opened on the iPad and this was then read using a toe to turn the pages. Finally other technology such as Apple TV may also be used to mirror between a HD television and an ipad. The ipad can be set up and used as a remote control with Apple TV by use of an application, and by use of zoom the student may then stream using mirroring to the tv and also *control* programmes/ photos/ videos/ programmes display.

The main disadvantage for use of this technology in college would have to be limited college Wifi access and compromise of network. The means by which the trial was done was by using an independent source of Wifi from a telecom provider. This issue could be addressed in the interim by the student having their own wi fi dongle (For e.g. Mi Fi). In this way the student is not limited by certain areas or the college and could use a lightweight laptop/netbook and an ipad to access their coursework in any area of the college independently. The possibility of mirroring two ipads was investigated but it appears to be difficult without compromising the ipad in a process known as "jailbreaking".

Panther Connect Application: Using Panther Connect application and laptop

This application coverts the iPad into one large touch pad which has a slow and fast setting for those with motor difficulties. Using this application, individuals with motor difficulties successfully surfed the internet, opened a document, played music, and various other functions including sending an email. The various elements of the Panther Connect application make it incredibly user friendly for an individual with motor difficulties. Videos available on Panther Technology website are extremely comprehensive and demonstrate the potential of this type of application.

Panther has also developed an application called Panther Writer which has four choices of keyboard and is very user friendly for the student. The disadvantage to this particular application is that it currently only interfaces with wordpad and email but not Microsoft Office; however in time it may improve to the level that it does.

Conclusions

Both Mirroring and the Panther applications are currently being used successfully by a student in GMIT with a physical disability. Both technologies have improved this students'

inclusion and independence as they can read independently and also negotiate the Internet and documents with minimal stress. Currently students with other physical disabilities in GMIT will be offered trials of similar technologies in combination with either the same hardware or an alternative depending on their needs.

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An Analysis of the Benefits of Using the iPad as an Assistive Technology Device at Third Level in Ireland By Maria Lawton-Murray

This study seeks to gain a better understanding of the iPad as an assistive technology (AT) device within Higher Education in Ireland. Online research indicates that there is a lack of information on the specific area of using the iPad as a form of assistive technology for the benefit of students registered with the DSS within the third level education sector in Ireland. The purpose of this research was to explore what could be learnt from the views of pilot-program participants, with the intention of substituting traditional AT devices currently in use with a stand-alone all-in-one device, the iPad. The results from the research will inform future incorporation of emerging technologies such as the iPad into higher education. Participants in this study were registered students of the Disability Support Services (DSS) at the National University of Ireland, Galway (NUIG).

The AT devices currently used to support the numerous types of disabilities catered for by the DSS, range from simple digital voice recorders to complex computer software that is capable of reading documents aloud. The question remains as to whether these supports are adequate or if more be done to accommodate users in a cost-efficient manner. Figures gathered from NUIG and Trinity College Dublin (TCD) show that dyslexia is the largest disclosed disability in both colleges. This correlates with international studies in the area of third level students with disabilities. The testing of the iPad will be mainly based on catering for students with Specific Learning Difficulties (SLD) such as dyslexia. The main beneficiaries of this research will be the student users, staff within the DSS, lecturers and other relevant individuals at NUIG.

The research was based on a mixture of qualitative and quantitative research methods. Using both methods is recommended as each has recognised strengths and weaknesses, and when used in tandem these can balance each other out (Arnold 2009). Surveys and focus groups were used to gather information to provide answers to the research questions. At the outset, students registered with the DSS were invited by email to take part in the study and those who were interested were invited to attend a focus group where the objectives of the research were discussed and questions were taken by the researcher. The focus group started with four prepared questions before moving onto a demonstration of the iPad. The aim of the questions was to determine what the participants knew about the iPad, how comfortable they felt about testing it and of what benefit did they think it would be within their educational environment. The group then discussed the area of AT in general, the problems they felt the iPad could address and the problems that they felt could not be solved by the iPad. The central issue raised was access to notes prior to lectures, and the next most important issue was problems with recording lectures. Students with dyslexia have problems trying to take down lecture notes while also trying to listen to what is being discussed at the same time [Kirby et al., 2008; Kiewra, 2002; Maydosz et al., 2008; Boyle, 2012; Surisky & Hughes, 1996].

A short questionnaire was given to each participant to be filled out prior to testing the iPad. When the iPad was returned a second Survey Monkey™ questionnaire was completed by the participants, and the data analysed through SPSS.

The results from this research showed that there is a strong link between the perceived ease of use of an item and the user's intent to use that item. This was measured using the TAM. Studies conducted by Ajzen, 1985, 1991; Davis 1989; Davis et al., 1989; Mathieson, 1991; Moore, 1987; Taylor and Todd, 1995; Lu et al., 2003; Turner et al., 2010 support this theory whereby a person is more inclined to use an item if they believe that it will be of benefit to them. Central to the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) are perceived usefulness and perceived ease of use. Perceived usefulness refers to a person's subjective belief that using a particular system will improve job performance, or in this case improve academic performance.

Questions one to five were based on the TAM and the students response was very supportive of using the iPad as an AT device. The majority of the students who were selected to test the iPad agreed that the device was useful as an AT device. This follows the findings of a previous single case study conducted by Gasparini et al (2012). The majority of participants agreed that the iPad was very easy to use. In relation to the research questions posed: the findings confirmed the suitability of the iPad as an AT device that can be used by students registered with the DSS at NUIG. According to the literature a well-designed product is both easy to use and understand. If the design is considered easy to use, then the likelihood is that the user will employ the system being proposed or developed. These ideas are also consistent with the Technology Acceptance Model which was used to measure the effectiveness of the iPad as an AT device. The vast majority of participants of this study strongly agreed that the iPad was useful in the context of use as an AT device. The participants were also in agreement as to its ease of use and its effectiveness as a device that would help them with their studies. The majority agreed that as the iPad was easy to use, it was their intention to use the device frequently.

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Supporting students with Autism and mental health to survive the college experience

By Silva Aparecida, Undergraduate of Applied Social Studies with Applied Social, Limerick Institute of Technology

This paper is not a result of a research, but a reflexion of my experience supporting my own son, that is Autistic and also has mental health problems, on surviving his college experience.

The decision in writing a proposal paper for AHEAD's conference, has come after my son's life changed due to the intervention that his college; Limerick Institute of Technology, made that changed not just his life but our whole family's life. I am a mature undergraduate student of a B. A. (Honours) Applied Social Studies in Social Care in this college, which allowed me to watch my son's journey.

My son was diagnosed with Asperger's Syndrome, when he was eleven years old. He was born in Brazil, where I'm originally from. While living in Brazil, as a mother I always felt that there was something different about him, but our doctor told me that my son was perfect in every way, so no reason to worry about it.

On the other hand, his development was somehow different from his two younger sisters. When he started school, at the age of five, his teacher said that he was very smart and was the best boy in her class as he followed every rule and guidance that was given to him. While his first teacher thought that obeying every rule and following all guidance without resistance, was the reason to be her best student, his second teacher a year later was concerned for his behaviour.

My son was then referred to a Psychologist, he really enjoyed going to see his Psychologist as that meant one to one interaction. Where he did not have to mix with other people, where he could just play on his own and enjoy this world in his own terms. This journey lasted for a long time, but the Psychologist did not come up with any conclusions as to why he was somehow different from other boys his age.

As myself and my husband decided to seek a better life, for ourselves and our beloved children, we emigrated, leaving our beautiful children in the care of my mother. One year later, we decided to bring them to live in Ireland with us, as we felt that they would have the life we dreamed for them.

My son came to Ireland, thinking it was a holiday and to this day he says that I have lied to him. For this reason, he decided that he was not going to be happy in Ireland and when he started school, he did not talk at all. In the beginning it was fine, as the children did not have any English but once he learned the language and still refused to open his mouth in class, his teacher became concerned.

The English teacher swore that he was fluent in English and had long conversations with her, but in class he would not talk at all. The Principal asked my permission for an assessment, I gave my consent and he was assessed, the diagnoses came as Asperger's Syndrome.

While now the school understood, the reason of my son's behaviour with his lack of interaction with his peers, I only understood that for secondary school he would need extra support. Due to my limited English at the time, his diagnoses was another foreign language to me.

Once he started secondary school, I gave a copy of his diagnoses to the school resource teacher, in order to avail of extra support for him. When I had a meeting with his resource teacher, I was told not to worry as all his teachers had information on his "condition".

The statement of his resource teacher, was a shock for me as I had no idea that my son had a condition. The resource teacher then shared the information, which he had given to the teacher, with me. I went home in shock as I could not believe that someone had written about my own son and that's when I met Asperger's Syndrome.

Secondary Education:

During his secondary education, my son had a very hard time as one of his teacher thought it was a great idea to read the book "the curious incident of the dog in the night-time" by Mark Haddon, in class.

Once the story developed, the boys in the class pointed out that the character in the book was just like my son. Then the bullies started to make his life hell, his life at secondary school was, in his own words, hell, and he could not wait to go to college as he thought that there were no bullies there nor teenagers making loud noises and "stupid" jokes.

He had great support during his secondary school, from the person who cleaned the schools, to the school's Principal, but the best support came from a boy that saw my son on his first break facing the wall while others were happy playing together, and he came to my son and said "come with me, I will be your friend".

As for people with Autism spectrum, a relationship is much easier to develop on a one to one, my son trusted that little boy, and they supported each other until the little boy was transferred to another school. My son was the first Brazilian student that completed his secondary education at the school that he attended as many others Brazilians boys started there but dropped out, this made him very proud of himself and confident to sit his Leaving Cert.

The result of his Leaving Cert, came as a huge achievement for him and his school. Everyone there, was delighted for him and wished him well as he got his first choice to attend an undergraduate program in LIT.

Surviving the College experience:

Third level education is almost everyone's dream, as every student is prepared to sit the final exam that will prove that they have learned their share in school and are ready for college life.

College life seems almost like the "American dream", where you will land where you always wanted to be in life, there won't be any diversion in your journey. Right? Well maybe, it would be just like the "American dream", that only happen during our sleep.

The experience of third level education, can be indeed very hard, to the point that some students do give up, or in college terms they "drop out". People that drop out, do it for different reasons, such as financial issues, change of courses, moving from one place to another, and in some cases due to their health.

Surviving the college experience, may sound like you did four years of an undergraduate program, and at the end you got your professional qualification. Well that would be perfect but in reality surviving the college experience is indeed much harder than it seems, and can also last way longer than four years.

While knowing that you have got your place in college, is a dream come true, it can also be a stressful situation as everyone that you got to know in school could have been going to various colleges. Also that safety that you know your surroundings, is then gone bringing an overwhelming feeling to every new student joining the third level education.

All the fear of the new experience plus the excitement for achieving the Leaving Cert, can be a completely different experience for students with Autisms Spectrum and mental health issues. To survive the third level education, students with a disability and or mental health need loads of support.

In my son's case, as he enrolled in college, we were delighted to learn about the access office in LIT. We were told about all the extra support that they had in place for students with disability, the notes from teachers that they could receive in advance of the lecturers, the extra tutors, extra time to complete assignments, the counselling service. Also the funding that the college could apply on the student's behalf in order to continue with all the extra support, we were sure that nothing could go wrong in the third level education of our son.

Firstly my son was overjoyed with his achievement, as we told him that he was a winner as he completed his secondary education and had guaranteed a place in third level. He was now where we always dreamed to see him at. He started his college experience as a very happy young man, full of confidence and hopes for his future.

However, sooner than we expected my son started to show that he was having a very hard time on campus. He was feeling very lonely, yet could not handle the situation of walking in the overcrowded campus. He was isolated on a campus that had over two thousand students, he described it as being in a place that was like a jail sentence that is suffocating as you cannot get out.

As described by the Viennese paediatrician, Hans Asperger (1944) the "autistic psychopathy" that he used to describe what he considered a form of personality disorder. Hans Asperger described children and adults with poverty of social interaction, failure of communication and development of special interests. While Leo Kanner described children with a more severe expression of Autism, Hans Asperger described more able children,

which can have a remarkable long-term memory, exceptional concentration when engaged in their special interest and have an original method of problem solving.

On the other hand, Lorna Wing (Burgoine and Wing, 1983), described the main clinical features of Asperger's Syndrome as:

- Lack of empathy
- Naïve, inappropriate, one-sided interaction
- Little of no ability to form friendships
- Pedantic, repetitive speech
- Poor non-verbal communication
- Intense absorption in certain subjects
- Clumsy and ill-coordinated movements and odd postures.

With all these limitations, it was clear for all involved with my son that he was struggling into his third level education. While the access officers had done all they could, to support his learning experience, they could not, however, support the social interaction between him and his college peers.

My son was then diagnosed with depression, on top of having an intellectual disorder, he was now suffering with his mental health. The college did provide him with professional counselling, but he started to fail to achieve his academic work.

He then had to spend the summer, getting extra tutoring to re-sit his exams in order to pass to second year. With the support of LIT's access office, he was able to re-sit his exams and proceed to second year. However during second year, his mental health became worse, his concentration was poor, he wasn't completing his college work-load and life on campus was becoming unbearable for him.

As our concerns grew, we decided to get in contact with his college. We had our first meeting with the Head of the IT department, we explained to her about Asperger's Syndrome and how they interact and how they have difficulties in understanding people's way of communication. We got a valuable response from the Head of the IT department that was my son's area of study. She compromised to discuss with her team, on how to interact with our son in order to facilitate his transition into the academic life.

During the academic year, there was always a reason for why it was a struggle for my son to continue on with his education but once asked if he wanted to leave college, his response was that he was a winner not a quitter, therefore no way he was going to give up even though he was not coping, neither physically nor psychologically.

It took over a period of three years, for my son to complete the second year as he failed over and over again. He then was completing his second year by subjects, it was costing loads of money plus his whole energy. His mental health deteriorated, and he started to self-harm, at the stage that he was then suicidal.

As he re-sat his exams once more in an attempt to pass to third year, he knew after doing his exams that he did not do well enough to pass. He decided to finish his suffering, he then

left our house and stayed out for few hours. We could not contact him as his phone was off, a few hours later he came home. He then disclosed to me, that he was going to throw himself in front of a running bus.

There are no words to describe, how hard it is to know that your beloved child wants to end their life. In order to escape the struggles from what may be a simple thing for some students attending third level education. Nobody wants to lose anyone by suicide, nonetheless a parent to lose a child.

My response to my son, was not to judge him but indeed show him how much I loved him and appreciated his trust for telling me. On the other hand, I thanked him for not taking his life, also reassuring him that I was going to get help for him from the college.

After talking with LIT's Chaplain, I was advised by him to consult the Head of the IT department. In talking with the Head of IT, she listened actively to my concerns about my son's mental health, she then decided to contact the course Director.

The intervention, from the Head of the IT department brought all the authorities of LIT together to an emergency exam board meeting. This resulted in an intervention, which has changed my son's life forever. He was given some extra work, in order for him to reach the three points that he missed to pass his exam. On the completion of this task, he was then given the opportunity to have an exit award.

On October thirty first of two thousand and thirteen, my family had the happiness of instead of attending a young man's funeral, to attend a young man's third level education conferring. This had only been possible due to the continuous support from The Limerick Institute of Technology, which has interacted with us as parents in order to facilitate to an autistic young man suffering with his mental health, to survive the college experience.

On concluding this paper, my recommendation to all third level organisations is to put in place, an intervention to support students with Autism and mental health to conclude their third level education. Also despite the students with a disability being, of an adult age, the communication between the college and parents are paramount to establish where the student really is on their experience of the college life. As on the case of Autistic people, who has lack of communication, they might only be able to communicate about their feelings and struggles with their parents. Therefore the importance of constant contact between the college and parents on facilitating the survival of students with Autism and mental health to the college experiences.

On the other hand, my family and I would like to express on this paper our forever gratitude to all staff from Limerick Institute of Technology, for all their continuous support towards my son's education. Also my thank you to my beloved son, for allowing me to use his case to bring awareness of the reality of surviving the college experience into the real world. Sincere thank you to AHEAD for selecting my proposal for the 2014 conference; "into the real world: what does the best higher education experience for a student with a disability look like?"

Hopefully my son's case, will bring awareness to the higher education authorities and lecturers on how to support students with Autism and mental health to survive the college experience.

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Fostering an Inclusive Culture: A Practitioner's View By Michael McMahon and Nuala Harding, Athlone Institute of Technology

Background

Diversity within the classroom is now the norm in Higher Education. Typically a diverse classroom may include students with disabilities, students of different ages and socio economic backgrounds, students who are culturally diverse, students with varying degrees of fluency in English and those with varying life situations and issues. This diversity is further added to by the inclusion of what is referred to as the gifted and talented student in the classroom (Friend, 2007).

This diversity is reflected in the makeup of the student population of Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT). Currently out of a student cohort of 5547 fulltime students there are a total of 1160 non Irish nationals from 71 different nationalities comprising 21% of the total student population (Source: Athlone Institute of Technology International Office). In the 2012/13 academic year there were 213 students registered with disabilities in AIT making up 4% of the total student population (AHEAD, 2013). The number of new entrant mature students to full time education in Institutes of Technology has risen significantly in recent years to 20% of the total new entrants in 2011. Many of these mature new entrants have registered disabilities and are from different socio economic backgrounds and nationalities. Their ages vary from 23 up to their sixties (Carrol & Patterson, 2011). This paper will discuss initiatives undertaken by Athlone Institute of Technology particularly focusing on their impact on the practice of participants and the student experience. It will examine classroom based projects such as the Certificate in Inclusive Practice and the Certificate in Learning and Teaching and Assessment as well as others such as the development of inclusive policies and guidelines.

Developing an Inclusive culture in AIT

Within an educational Institute the development of an inclusive culture necessitates a twin pronged strategic approach. The elements of this dual approach consist of initiatives within the classroom and those outside the classroom. There is some element of overlap between both elements but in the main the elements within the classroom consisted of the provision of professional development opportunities for staff formally through the development and implementation of special purpose awards in addition to awareness training and training related to specific issues such as Technology Enhanced Learning. Outside of the classroom elements include the development of inclusive policies and guidelines and the provision of appropriate support structures.

Within the classroom

"The power of inclusion lies in how educators respond to differences" (Voltz, Sims, & Nelson, 2010, p. xii). Therefore in order to fully unleash this power it is essential for the educator to be able to firstly identify the differences and secondly formulate an appropriate response.

Certificate in Inclusive Practice.

As part of the process of developing an Inclusive culture within the classroom, the Certificate in Inclusive Practice (15 ECTS at level 9) is offered in AIT by the Learning & Teaching Unit. The certificate has been developed in AIT in conjunction with experts from the DIT Learning, Teaching and Technology Centre and the Association for Higher Education Disability and Access - AHEAD. It forms part of the flexible pathway to the Postgraduate Diploma in Learning, Teaching and Assessment. The curriculum design process was undertaken with the support of the Learning Innovation Network (LIN).

The aim of the programme is to provide educators with the pre-requisite skills and knowledge to be able to enhance the learning experience for a diverse student population through the creation and support of an inclusive curriculum that is underpinned by the Principles of Universal Design (CAST, 2013).

The certificate comprises of two modules, 'Creating an Inclusive Curriculum' (10 credits) and 'Supporting an Inclusive Curriculum' (5 credits), delivered through a blend of classes/workshops, webinars and independent learning.

The design of the modules was based on applying the philosophy of inclusiveness in the broadest sense possible. A deliberate decision was made not to limit the scope of the modules to specific groups but to include all types of students. Arising from this it was deemed appropriate to embed the principles of Universal Design in Learning (UDL) in the curriculum. UDL is based on the guiding principle of providing equal opportunities to learn to all students. It also provides an outline for the creation of the elements of an inclusive curriculum which allows flexibility and can be customised for individual needs rather than the rigid one size fits all approach (CAST, 2013).

As previously stated inclusion in learning consists of two steps;

Identifying the differences.

Formulating the correct response.

On commencement of the programme participants expressed that their perception of accessibility focused on specific groups particularly the disabled. In particular, the emphasis on disabilities was on those who were physically disabled or who had a Specific Learning Disability. The challenge therefore was to broaden this view from one centring on the provision of individual accommodations for specific disabilities to one which embraces the different abilities of all students. One of the means used in the programme was to invite guest lecturers from stakeholder organisations such as AHEAD and ICOS (The Irish Council for International Students). These lectures and the resulting discussions contributed significantly the broadening the awareness of issues related to accessibility.

As part of the programme participants were required to complete the AHEADSTART Online Inclusive Practice Training course. This course was developed by AHEAD in partnership with ICEP Europe and is a fully online course with tutor support provided by AHEAD.

AHEADSTART provided participants with the legislative and social background to disabilities in Ireland, fostering independent learning through the use of accessible online resources. The AHEADSTART training course also included a section on needs assessment which required a mock needs assessment of a virtual student as part of its assessment. Participants found this exercise very useful and concluded that the experience of conducting the needs analysis provided them with knowledge and skills which could be applied to other groups of students with accessibility issues such as international or mature students.

The formal programme also focused on strategies to promote inclusiveness in the classroom. The focus in this area was on the incorporation of the Principles of Universal Design in Learning into the design and delivery of the curriculum. The programme utilised the components of curriculum design which are, aims, objectives, learning outcomes, academic and competence standards, syllabus, teaching methods, learning activities, assessment and feedback and teaching and learning materials (Morgan & Houghton, 2011).

"Inclusion necessitates the teacher to critically evaluate his/her role as that of facilitator to the mixed ability group and appreciator of all her individual pupils and their achievements" (Gibson & Haynes, 2009, p. 25).

Reflection is a methodology which a practitioner can utilise to evaluate such a role. Reflective teaching is an inquiry based approach that emphasises an ethic of care, a constructivist approach to teaching, and creative problem solving (Henderson, 2011). Both modules within the programme have an embedded reflective element .The purpose of this is to encourage the participants in the programme to use the reflection process to ultimately enhance the inclusiveness of their practice.

Certificate in Learning and Teaching and Assessment

The purpose of this programme which leads to a special purpose award (20 ECTS, Level 6), is to prepare participants who are currently completing undergraduate studies in AIT, to teach on their specific Associate Degree programmes level or the equivalent of level 6 when they return to their institutes in Saudi Arabia. All of the participants were Saudi natives. The principles of universal design were included in the curriculum as well as being utilised in the design and delivery of the programme. The challenges which faced both lecturers and students included making allowance for different cultures, languages and approaches to learning.

Outside the classroom

Support structure

AIT has a well-established support structure catering for disabled, international, mature and other students. The Disability support service provides support for example in the areas of Assistive Technology, Learning Support, Examination Arrangements, Tutorial Support and assessment among others while the International Office provides information and support to international students prior to their arrival as well as an induction for registered students when they do arrive. Assistance is also provided in the areas of accommodation, welfare and academic and social life.

Policies & Guidelines

The Learning and Teaching Unit in AIT has in conjunction with the Disability Support Service commenced a shared initiative leading to the development of accessibility guidelines. The first of these "Guidelines for accessible examination papers" have recently gained approval through the Institutes quality assurance process. Sample papers have been produced and are available. It is hoped that as well as providing accessible documentation for students this will also increase awareness of accessibility among staff within the Institute. The provision of these guidelines is the first step with further guidelines expected to be produced in the areas of presentations, documentation and assessment.

Conclusion

The route towards the development of a fully inclusive culture is not a short straight flat highway. Rather it is a long hilly path with many potholes and obstacles. However there are many milestones along the way and each milestone reached allows more students greater participation in the educational experience. The experience to date has indicated the importance of taking a holistic and multi-faceted approach incorporating collaboration between all of the stakeholders both internally and externally.

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