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Composition, Deafness and Access in the Mainstream: Rhetoric and One Student's Reality

For most students, participation in postsecondary education is not limited to being physically present in a lecture hall. It is the possibility to ask questions, to discuss ideas with classmates, to have a critical conversation with professors about papers, to reflect upon readings, to explore the library, to have access to information in accessible formats at the same time as their non-disabled classmates, to work on a research project, to have coffee with friends, to participate at campus social and cultural events, and really take part in the college experience. A quality education is about coming away from each campus experience having gained knowledge about, and insight into, a wide variety of human experiences and disciplines. Most critically, it is about being able to do these things without the kind of hardship that exceeds that of the typical student during the postsecondary educational year. —National Council on Disability

IN THE LAST LARGE SCALE ACCOUNTING, STATISTICS SUGGEST THAT there are over 468,000 deaf or hard of hearing students enrolled in US colleges or universities (Schrodel, Watson, and Ashmore 67). However, an average of only 30% typically graduates (Smith 23). Lack of adequate accommodations might be one reason for such a high rate of attrition. West et. al, (464) report that students with disabilities who attend mainstream institutions report problems finding out about and accessing support services. Social dimensions of disability and difference may also be a factor. Deaf students, in particular, may feel extraordinary pressure to fit in and appear "normal." In *Lend Me Your Ear: Rhetorical Constructions of Deafness,* Brenda Jo Brueggemann reveals stories of deaf students' efforts to "pass" as hearing:

> Most memorable for me were stories of the students at the state university in town who refused to use the "services" offered to them by the university's Office of Disability Services—primarily because those services, either an interpreter, or, more often, the use of an FM audio loop system, prevented them from "passing" one way (culturally) even as it jeopardized them passing (academically) in another. (38)

Then, there is the English issue. Many deaf individuals' first language is American Sign Language (ASL), not English. For these deaf students, English is a second language; they will likely struggle with grammar and the conventions of academic writing more than their hearing peers. Clearly, deaf and hard of hearing students new to mainstream colleges and universities are challenged in ways that hearing students are not.

In the fall semester of 2006, Michael[1] , a deaf first-year student, enrolled in Purdue's four-credit first- year composition course, English 106. Within the first week of school, his teacher informed him it was very unlikely that he would pass the course at his current level of English proficiency. Through a series of events I will explain later in detail, I became Michael's private, paid tutor. I was interested in learning about the Deaf community and thought tutoring a deaf student would be a good way to begin to understand it firsthand. Unexpectedly, tutoring Michael taught me more about the reality—and rhetoric—of the mainstream than that of the deaf community.

Before we started working together, I saw Michael as an opportunity to satisfy my curiosity, make some extra money, and perhaps do some research on a subject that was interesting . However, the nature of ongoing one-on-one tutoring made it impossible for me to think of him so abstractly and instrumentally. After long hours of discussing this or that grammar problem in an essay, Michael and I would drift into talking about other things. Michael liked to chat about his latest girlfriend, the party he went to last night, difficulties he was facing in his classes. I complained about my colleagues, my family, and my dissertation. The necessity of working so closely on skills and documents for which the stakes were very high produced a special kind of camaraderie between us. Michael was no longer just someone I wanted to study or educate; he was someone I knew.

As time went on, I became more aware of all Michael had to do in order to navigate everyday life at Purdue. During after-session chats, Michael talked about how he tried, and sometimes failed, to participate in university life. We talked about how he communicated with hearing people when an interpreter wasn't available, about the role school-provided auxiliary aids like interpreters and assistive technology played in his life. We talked about how (and how well) his teachers coped with having a deaf student in class. We talked about what was rewarding about living at Purdue and what was frustrating. Through Michael, I began to understand why so many deaf students choose to attend deaf institutions, and importantly, why Michael did not.

Through my association with Michael, I became interested in how composition teachers, tutors, and administrators can learn to make our courses and programs more acces-

1. Michael is a pseudonym. Some details about this student that are unrelated to the research have been changed to protect his identity.

sible to the deaf. I decided I wanted to try to write an article about the challenges deaf students face in mainstream universities and in composition specifically. When I presented my idea to Michael after a tutoring session one day, he agreed to become my informant and to share his account of being accommodated at Purdue. Though certainly not an archetype or generalizable case, I hope Michael's experiences give other compositionists insight into what constrains and empowers us to make our campuses, our classrooms, and the English language more accessible.

In order to serve all students with more compassion and justice, we must become more knowledgeable about how the rhetorics of disability law and our own goals as teachers, tutors, and administrators impact deaf students' realities. To that end, I first review the rhetoric of current civil rights legislation and discuss how it has conditioned those in mainstream higher education to think and act. Next, I relay information from my interviews with Michael and detail how he was accommodated in writing courses at Purdue. In this section, I include the perspectives of Purdue faculty and staff who are involved in composition and disability services. Finally, I discuss and problematize recent scholarship on instructional responses to deaf students in mainstream composition.

Rhetoric: Civil Rights Legislation, "Immediate Communication," and Literacy

Two laws are relevant to deaf and disabled students in post-secondary education, Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Titles II and III of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. Section 504 indicates that in programs that receive federal funding, people with disabilities who are "otherwise qualified" cannot be discriminated against. When the program is a course in a college or university and the person protected by the law is a student, "otherwise qualified" means that the student is "one who meets the academic and technical standards requisite for enrollment in the course" (Bergstahler 23). They must not be denied any benefits of programs that others receive (Thomas 249). Title II of the ADA, more recent legislation, echoes Section 504 in specifying that no public entity, including colleges and universities, may bar the participation of, refuse benefits to, or otherwise discriminate against to otherwise qualified individuals because of a disability (42 USC 12182).

Discrimination comes in many forms. Denying a student who meets admission standards enrollment because of a disability is an obvious form of discrimination. A more subtle form is refusing to make reasonable alterations to the environment to make it accessible. For deaf students, altering the environment may mean providing services or auxiliary aids that are specifically tailored to their individual disabilities. A Department of Justice regulation to Title III of the ADA (28 CFR Sec.36.303 1994) includes recommendations that help protect

deaf students' right to "appropriate auxiliary aids and services where necessary to ensure effective communication." Aids in the regulation for deaf and hard of hearing individuals can include:

> [q]ualified interpreters, notetakers, computer-aided transcription services, written materials, telephone handset amplifiers, assistive listening systems, telephones compatible with hearing aids, closed caption decoders, open and closed captioning, telecommunication devices for deaf persons [TTYs], videotext displays, or other effective methods of making aurally delivered materials available to individuals with hearing impairments. (28 CFR 36.303)

While these protections make minimal participation in classroom life possible for deaf college students, the ADA and its regulations apply only to those accommodations that enable immediate communication. This means that deaf or hard-of- hearing students have the option of receiving sound amplification, so they can hear English words; transcriptions of speech, so they can read English words; or a sign language interpreter, so that they can receive and deliver content in their native language. While undoubtedly necessary, these services are information delivery systems; they are not meant to foster literacy in English, the language of the mainstream. Tutoring and other academic support services that improve English literacy for deaf people over the long term are considered personal study aids, not accommodations or auxiliary aids and are thus not covered under the law.

Though the ADA protects certain rights of deaf and disabled people in schools and workplaces, it is not "an entitlement program" that requisitions funds for academic support services (Gordon and Keiser 4). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) of 1974 does guarantee academic support for children with certain kinds of disabilities from elementary through secondary school. This may lead some deaf students to expect the same kinds of services when they get to college. However, ADA does not protect adults' rights to academic support services. Gordon and Keiser explain that the ADA was not designed primarily as educational reform. They indicate that it is civil rights legislation generally aimed at protecting people from discrimination in the workplace and in other public spaces. Thus, it is not aimed at helping them "succeed" (5):

> . . . accommodations should not give a person an advantage over other employees for long-term hiring, promotions, or other job-related benefits. The intent of the [ADA] law . . . was to level the playing field, not tilt it. And, without a doubt, it was not designed to guarantee that the disabled individual find success on the job or during educational training. It is an outcome-neutral law that simply ensures that an individual with a disability will not be prevented from competing with others as long as he or she meets the same qualifications. (5)

While Gordon and Keiser are not alone in their interpretation of the law, there is considerable controversy over the notion of the "level playing field" among those involved in rhetoric and composition and disability studies.

Kimber Barber-Fendley and Chris Hamel critique the idea of the level playing field in their article "A New Visibility: An Argument for Alternative Assistance Writing Programs for Students with Learning Disabilities." Using the legal definitions provided by criminal law professor H. Richard Uviller, they argue that there are actually two notions of fairness inherent in the idea of the level playing field. The first ". . . emerges from the free interaction of the competing interests of the parties in a neutral arena" (Uviller qtd. in Fendley and Hamel 517). The second, less traditional idea can be understood as "the conscious judgment of immersed and thoughtful people as to how the interests of both parties are [best] served" (Uviller qtd. in Fendley and Hamel 517). Uvller uses the example of speeding ambulances and fire trucks to illustrate the second definition. We tolerate transgressions of ordinary law or practice because it is ultimately beneficial to everyone. In the same vein, we allow disabled students to have services that are denied to others because it ultimately benefits everyone for students with disabilities to participate meaningfully in education and, later, as working, productive members of society.

The conservative position, on the other hand, is predicated on the notion that a "neutral arena" exists, or that by judicious action, we can bring it into existence. This position assumes that bodily and cultural differences can be ameliorated, reduced, erased, by granting people with disabilities just enough and just the right kind of services or alterations to normal practice, and no more. In the case of deaf and hard-of-hearing students, the law recognizes the need for interpreters only for immediate communication. In Chapter 2 of *Lend Me You Ear: Rhetorical Constructions of Deafness*, Brenda Jo Brueggemann proposes that for Deaf students in mainstream colleges and universities whose native language is ASL, much more than immediate basic communication is necessary for active, embodied participation in university life.

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Brueggemann argues that there are two types of literacy, "literacy for communication" and "literacy for language." Literacy for communication represents "the 'product' of literacy," which in classical rhetorical language includes "style, delivery, memory,

pronunciation, tone, gestures, diction, etc." and which we now understand as "punctuation, paragraphing, spelling, and penmanship." According to Brueggemann, the goal of literacy for communication is "the appearance of the product itself, and [the] ability to convey information 'accurately'" (120). Literacy for language, on the other hand, allows a person to communicate more than just "accurately"; he or she is able to engage with others about his or her "thoughts, morals, and ethics, both his own and those of the community, nation or culture at large. Here literacy is a process, a means of exchange and change, a way of belonging to a place and a people—a language" (120). While Brueggemann recognizes both literacy for communication and language as "worthy goals," she asserts that literacy for communication has been so emphasized in the field of deaf education that it obscures the need for, or even the existence of, literacy for language. I agree with that sentiment and add that it is true also of mainstream education. Literacy for communication, what we in composition now call "lower order concerns" or the "mechanics" of English, is equated with the basic requirements for intellectual life. Deaf students who arrive on campus without literacy for communication—or language—are at a competitive disadvantage on the "level playing field" espoused in the ADA.

The field of mainstream higher education is not level for students who are deaf, particularly those who are not comfortable or proficient with using English. Like other English as Second Language (ESL) students, deaf students who enroll in mainstream institutions usually have the necessary grades and intelligence to accomplish whatever academic goals they may be pursuing; yet in order to be "otherwise qualified" for programs within colleges and universities and on the job, they must quickly develop literacy for communication and language. Deaf students must engage individually with teachers, tutors, and administrators to devise plans for English language learning on their own and usually, because these services are not protected under the ADA, without legal, school, or financial support. In effect, deaf ESL students in mainstream institutions are forced into the position of having to ask for and rely on the charity of individuals because the ADA does not recognize English literacy training as necessary for active, engaged participation in university life.

In the next section, I will return to Michael and his reality. I will attempt to describe how Michael is learning to write in English at Purdue University. To contextualize his experience, I also present information from interviews I conducted with administrators, faculty, and staff involved with composition and disability services about their opinions and general practices at Purdue. As I indicated earlier, my goal is not to provide a generalizable case, but to represent one occasion where the rubber of legal and institutional rhetoric met the road of instructional reality for a deaf student.

Reality: Michael's Experience at Purdue

Michael describes himself as a typical Purdue undergraduate. He works hard to stay ahead in his classes, but somehow finds time to date, socialize, and party on the weekend. He wants to be a lawyer and is currently taking courses in sociology and criminology. In an interview, I asked whether or not he sees himself as disabled[2] :

> Disability is a harsh word to me because the term defines the meaning that can be misjudged by people. Unfortunately, some people can be easily ignorant believing kinds of people who fit into that category of disability are unable to function in the community. For me, I prefer to be called deaf because I do not want to assign into a category that defines all different issues with people such as blind, wheelchair, etc. Yes, I am like other deaf and hard of hearing students need to have special access such as interpreters, Typewells[3] , etc in mainstream college. I wish everyone could look at the definition of disability differently rather than just helpless people in their world. Since I was a kid, I convinced myself that I am different (such as something's wrong with me) than them, but then I realized that we are all different. It is just a labeling that affects how we perceive and judge and treat others. I see myself as a student with a lot of potentials at Purdue University. Purdue is the place I can get a better opportunity for my future than I can find in other place. On the other hand, I do still struggle with accomplish my goals while I have some people labeling me as disability because that's all what they can understand.

> Clearly, Michael does not see himself as disabled, but being at Purdue sometimes makes it hard for him to feel that way. "I love it at Purdue, no doubt about that," Michael said, "but Purdue sometimes makes me feel like I'm disability in their eyes . . . I don't get same access as everyone does at here."

> Michael indicated that he sometimes feels as though people feel sorry for him or don't know how to behave around him at Purdue. During an interview, he indicated that he knows and socializes with a few deaf or hard-of-hearing students on campus, but that most of his friends and his girlfriend are hearing. At some point early in his life, Michael learned to speak very few words in English, but he does not use oral speech to communicate. He said he has some ability to read lips, but it isn't very reliable. During our tutorials and the inter-

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2.   I have used Michael's words and have not corrected his grammar, but at his request I have corrected spelling. Michael and all the other individuals quoted in this article have had an opportunity to review the sections where they are quoted and to make corrections or amendments.

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3. TypeWell is a transcription service that employs a trained stenographer who uses specialized computer software to produce transcripts of classroom lectures and discussions. TypeWell transcripts are detailed but not verbatim; they are edited by a trained specialist before being sent electronically to the student.

views conducted for this article, Michael and I used computers and a combination of Microsoft Word and AOL Instant Messenger to converse.

Michael indicates that his girlfriend sometimes translates for him at parties and other social events where a university-appointed translator is not available. However, Michael must get around without his girlfriend, a computer, or a translator for a significant part of the day. In these cases, he relies on texting on his cell phone, a Sidekick™, to help him communicate. But as he indicates below, that method of communication is not perfect either:

> In my freshman year at Purdue University, I had no problem talking with everyone by typing down in my phone to communicate. After one year being here, I feel like I am a robot because I do not look directly at people's face, but at my phone or their phone. I appreciate their trying to communicate with me, but I have noticed that they are easily getting frustrated to communicate with me through our phones. They are sometimes lazy to inform me of everything or trying to learn more sign language to communicate better with me. My girlfriend is an amazing signer, but I sometimes wish I could not look at her as my interpreter when we are hangout with the crowd. I am getting sick of using my phone all the time with people.

Though Michael describes himself as very social, he says the language barrier gets in the way of forming deep friendships with hearing people. "I do have a lot of friends but I'm not that close to them because they kinda get lazy after first time or a few times they meet me. When I'm at partying–easier communicate is playing beer pong or playing cards."

Michael said life in the classroom can also make him feel disabled. It is occasionally difficult for him to participate in classes because the auxiliary aids the university provides are not always reliable. Interpreters, notetakers and TypeWell stenographers are human beings, and sometimes they are late or absent. When this happens, Michael is unable to participate by speaking or receiving audio content, and he misses out on class discussion. Even when things go well and his auxiliary aids are in place, Michael explained that ASL interpretation is an inexact science. Michael stated that:

> In classes, I do not want to ask a question or comment because my interpreter sometimes do not understand me that well because they are not familiar with topics in classes. Another problem occurred; I have a lot of different interpreters popped in and out of my classes. With this method confused interpreters and they tend to ask me all about material in the class before it starts so they have an idea what it is going to be about. I also had to study a lot more time than most people would normally do for exams.

This is especially true in courses that require writing. As I indicated at the start of the article, Michael began attending Purdue in the fall semester of 2006 and, like most other

freshmen, enrolled in Purdue's four-credit introductory composition course, English 106. Purdue also offers English 108, a three credit accelerated option for those who wish to enroll in a faster-paced, more challenging class. As is the case at most other universities, one of the two composition courses offered is required for graduation. In an interview, Rick Johnson-Sheehan, director of (ICaP) from 2005-2008 described the goals of Purdue's composition courses for undergraduates:

> . . . to teach [students] to write better than they did when they got here and write in ways that are especially suitable for college purposes, but then also write in ways that that are transferable to a future career in some way [. . .] there are also a lot of issues of how to do research, how to write clearly, how to work in multimedia environments. I'd like to think that students are getting a particular genre set that's transferable across classes [. . .] I'd like to think they're gaining a critical awareness of culture and how culture influences how they think and how they behave in this world in some sense. If I could wrap it all up, I've always believed that we're training students for excellence in some way, to be excellent people, or high quality people and so I believe it starts here at the university level.

As a former instructor in the program, I can say that Johnson-Sheehan's description of it feels right. Excellence at Purdue is expected, especially academically. The program expects that students will already have basic proficiency in English and will have some experience writing essays. Currently, no basic writing course is available in Purdue's composition program.

When Michael first enrolled in English 106 as a freshman, he was informed by his teacher that he was not meeting the course's standard for English proficiency. Michael says he didn't realize how much he needed to work on his English skills. He had attended a high school for the deaf, where he indicates he did not learn much about English or composition:

> I took literature classes in my high school with normal required such as required essay and reading. I used sparknotes.com to understand better what I read. No teacher had sat down with me and informed me that my English was poorly. All I heard was how excellent student I am. I received all A's in my literature classes. No one told me if I wanted to be in reality (being in mainstream college, getting a job that wasn't teacher career in deaf school) that I had to improve my English language to be prepared for it. I had no information to be prepared for real world because the school I attended primarily used American Sign Language as their main language.

English 106 was a reality check for Michael. He indicated his composition instructor "pointed out how my English skills was that bad and I have to improve on it at first if I am planning to be a lawyer." He and his teacher, in conjunction with the program's WPA and Janie Fischbach, Auxiliary Services Coordinator at Purdue's Disability Resource Center,

decided that he should take the course once as "practice" (i.e. for no credit) and repeat it the following summer for a grade.

Michael feels that his experiences taking English 106 benefitted him in terms of learning what we would call the higher order concerns, including how to do research, use sources honestly, and organize an argument. However, Michael said he thinks there wasn't enough discussion of grammar in his English 106 courses. "ENGL 106 isn't really helping me that much although I learned a lot from it. I just really need to study more on its grammar structure and preposition. I do get everything in simple, basic language, but not in advanced writing." For help learning grammar and mechanics, Michael has relied on me, his tutor, since his first run at English 106.

As I discussed in the section on the law and accommodation in universities, tutoring is considered a personal study aid and is, therefore, not covered under the ADA. Under typical circumstances, Michael would have had to recruit, vet, and pay for his own tutor. But through a series of unusual, though by no means accidental, events, Michael's tutoring was provided at no cost to him. As at most large public universities, Purdue has an office whose sole responsibility is to ensure that students who have disabilities are protected from discrimination. The office arranges to provide the accommodations that ensure equal access to the campus environment. At Purdue, this office is called the Disability Resource Center (DRC). It is staffed by experts in disability law, service coordinators, assistive technology specialists, as well as professionals specializing in specific disabilities. The DRC is where students with disabilities make arrangements for classroom accommodations and auxiliary aids. To do so, they must provide the office with professional documentation of their disability. Once the DRC has received and processed a student's documentation, a program specialist meets with each student to determine which classroom accommodations and/or auxiliary aids are appropriate.

Michael has kept in contact with Fischbach, his Auxilliary Services Coordinator at the DRC, letting her know about his progress in courses. When Michael's instructor told him he was failing his first attempt at English 106, he spoke to Fischbach. Together, they decided he would need intensive help learning to write in English and came to the conclusion that private tutoring was the appropriate choice. According to Fischbach, private tutoring is the best option for some students:

> I'm a firm believer in individual tutors. Since writing is required in most college classes and in most job situations, it's a skill that students must cultivate in order to be successful. If a student has a disability that interferes with his/her learning to write effectively, then I think the student should have access to a writing center or an individual tutor. Unfortunately, the University does not fund individual tutors for

any student, and the Writing Lab does not have the personnel or resources to provide consistent one-on-one service over an extended period of time.

The Writing Lab, where I also work as a tutor, provides individual tutoring sessions, a world-famous online writing lab, conversation groups for ESL students, workshops for students and instructors, a grammar hotline, and general help available via email. According to Tammy Conard-Salvo, Acting Director of the Purdue Writing Lab, the "underlying purpose [of the Lab] has always been to help any writer at any stage of the writing process with any writing project." This does not mean the lab can offer unlimited help to students. Currently, Lab policy is that a student may receive two half-hour tutoring sessions per week. The reasoning, according to Conard-Salvo, is that

> . . . restricting students to two appointments per week ensures that some students don't monopolize appointments and that we allow as many students as possible to have access to the Writing Lab. This policy has been in place since before I started in 2003. Personally, I'm inclined to continue this practice because, pedagogically speaking, students need time to revise. Simply coming in for as many sessions for as long as possible doesn't encourage students to make changes, reflect, go back, etc.

From my experience working as a tutor in the Lab, I can also say that the policy helps to discourage students from coming in simply to have their papers edited. As Condard-Salvo implies, limiting the time tutors spend with each client encourages them to listen, participate, and ask questions during the tutorial and to apply their new knowledge on their own. Ideally, during their first session, students will come with a paper, discover through working with a tutor one or two things they can work on by themselves and return a few days later to review their progress with a tutor. However, some students will return the second time having attempted nothing on their own, and wanting the tutor to edit the paper line-by-line. The policy is meant to prevent this kind of behavior and encourage independence.

However, some students, particularly those who are learning English as a second language, may benefit from more frequent or longer tutoring sessions. A tutor can support the acquisition of language more robustly if he or she is frequently available to communicate with beginning ESL students about problems or questions they may have. Longer tutoring sessions allow for more in-depth explanations of difficult grammar concepts, both using drills and in the context of students' own writing. Also, depending on where beginning students are in their acquisition of English, it may take a long time for tutors to

" it may take a long time for tutors to discover what students are trying to express"

discover what students are trying to express and to help them learn how to clarify and reorganize sentences. Thus, for some students, working with an individual tutor who can spend several hours a week with them makes the most sense.

I don't want to give the impression that the Writing Lab is unfriendly to ESL students or students with disabilities. In fact, the Lab's staff has worked hard to make the Purdue Online Writing Lab compliant with current screen reading technology for blind and low-vision visitors. The staff is also currently working on a guide to tutoring students with writing-related learning disabilities. The Lab does offer longer tutorials to students who ask for it as an accommodation. There does, however, seem to be some confusion on how the Lab should handle such accommodations. As Conard-Salvo pointed out to me in an interview, the Lab does not require students to disclose a disability in order to receive accommodations like longer appointments. Instead, all potential clients are asked during their first visit whether they want to request accommodations. Using the word "accommodations," Conard-Salvo indicated, is a strategic move. Students who have worked with the DRC are likely to be familiar with the term while others are not. According to Conard-Salvo, this method is meant to protect disabled students' privacy, while preventing those who "shouldn't be receiving accommodations from somehow getting around our strict system of half an hour appointments."

Clearly, there are problems associated with this way of providing accommodations. Some clients who have disabilities might miss the subtle cue or be unfamiliar with the term "accommodation." Others might be unaware that requesting a longer tutorial is an accommodation the Lab offers. Further, students who don't have a documented disability, like ESL students, might also benefit from longer tutorials. I believe what the Lab is striving for is a policy on tutorial length that is fair to everyone and workable for the staff. Currently, the Lab is surveying staff and clients to determine how well the half-hour tutorial policy is working in practice. My guess is that, though the staff believes in its goal of fostering independence through shorter tutorials, it isn't working particularly well for everyone, especially ESL students in the early stages of acquiring English.

In most cases at Purdue, if students with disabilities decide that the Writing Lab does not offer enough support, they are on their own to find and pay for private tutors. However, according to Fischbach, some students with disabilities are clients of Vocational Rehabilitation (VR), a federal agency "whose mission is to enable students with disabilities to become employed in their chosen fields." Fischbach explained that if students choose colleges or universities within their home states, the VR offices in those states may choose to pick up the cost of private tutoring. In these cases, it is usually up to the students to recruit their own tutors and arrange for payment through VR. Michael's case is different from that of the average deaf student at Purdue. First, he received funds for private tutoring from his home state's

VR office, in spite of the fact that he decided to attend an out-of-state school. According to Fischbach, this is very unusual and was the result of negotiations between herself and Michael's VR counselor. Second, Fischbach decided to take it upon herself to recruit and vet a private tutor for him, a job I later found out she was not required nor paid to do. She took on this extra responsibility because she feels that some deaf students learn English more successfully when they are matched with an English tutor with whom they can form a long-term working relationship. Thus, it was through Fischbach's extra efforts that I was employed as his private tutor.

I was not sure where to begin with helping Michael make sense of English when I became his tutor in 2006. His sentences were not only jumbled, they often lacked both a subject and a verb. He rarely used prepositions or articles. He also had a tough time deciding where adjectives and adverbs should go. As he explains below, Michael was struggling with the disconnect between ASL and English:

> . . . Sign language is body language and it has different grammar structure. It is very simple language without any important details such as article, preposition, etc. I grew up in mainstream school–I read a lot and it helped, but then I moved to deaf school where English is not used often. Not a lot of people encouraged deaf students to learn English—in my mainstream [elementary] school, they put me in special education and then at deaf school, they cherished deaf culture and American Sign Language. No one tells us that we have to study more on English skills or that our English skills were that bad. I thought my English skills was fine until I came to Purdue. I realized how bad my English is.

When I met Michael in 2006, I was a novice at tutoring students who were not native speakers of English. I was not a linguist or a grammarian. I did not know how (or how much) to comment on his essays. The result was that at first I often supplied him with whole sentences instead of helping him make his own. I knew from the training I was receiving as a Writing Lab tutor that this was not good practice and that we would have to address grammar more directly.

We started by reading *Grammar for Dummies* together. I explained to Michael that he was not the dummy, I was. I knew many of the "rules," or "how" of grammar, but I had a hard time answering Michael's "why" questions. Reading *Dummies* gave Michael the language of grammar and me strategies for answering his questions. We also spent time looking at and completing grammar exercises on a number of ESL websites, including the Purdue Online Writing Lab (*http://owl.english.purdue.edu*), World English (www.world-english.org), and Gallaudet's English Works Website (*http://depts.gallaudet.edu/englishworks*). Completing these exercises helped us both to understand more about syntax. We worked first on subject and

verb and then moved on to objects. Once Michael understood that these elements made up a sentence, he started looking for the subject-verb-object (S-V-O) pattern in his everyday life. He would often bring snippets of text, usually from ads, and we would discuss why they were (or were not) grammatical. Soon the S-V-O pattern started showing up in his own sentences without too much effort. At that point, his writing improved dramatically, and our tutorials became much more fruitful. We were able to tackle Michael's tendency to add multiple strings of prepositional phrases, adjectives and adverbs to sentences that were already complete. Michael explained to me that in sign language, it's easy to add many descriptors, actors, and actions in a single thought, and that the grammar for combining them is significantly different to that of English. Once he had the basic pattern for English sentences down, we could talk about what grammatical elements of his sentences were "extra." Now we're concentrating on sussing out adjectives. Adjectives can be difficult to identify because they can look just like nouns. It's hard for Michael to decide which noun-like thing is a real noun and which one just describes. Vocabulary is also a challenge. Michael admits he needs to "read a lot more carefully," with a dictionary to expand his vocabulary and continue to get a feel for English syntax.

One thing I think both of us still struggle with is time. Michael is stretched incredibly thin in terms of his time and his energy. Yet, he feels he doesn't do enough to stay ahead. "I know that I have to work harder on my own. The problem I'm too busy with studying and writing the papers and hangout with my girlfriend. [. . .] The result, I haven't accomplish anything that much." Having known Michael for almost three years, I can say that he is by no means lazy, and that he has in fact accomplished a lot. When he writes for class, he starts weeks ahead of time to ensure that his essays meet the instructor's guidelines and communicate exactly what he means to say. One thing I have noticed in these latter days is that Michael's conversational English is so much improved that I hardly ever need to ask for clarification. Yet when he writes papers for courses, he feels pressured and inadequate, like his own way of saying something isn't enough. Michael says that he has the "ability to understand the textbooks and readings, but when to write it down–I have the picture in my head, not words by words." He often tries to paraphrase the words of people he regards as experts, but the result is usually very confusing, both for him and for me. The old errors crop up, and it can be difficult for me to understand what he is trying to say. These days I feel more like a coach and, admittedly, sometimes an editor, rather than a tutor. I encourage him not to rely on the words of others, but to try to say it his own way. But it's hard for Michael to relax and just say what he means because he is aware that academic English exists and that he does not have access to it yet. Using the words of others seems safer.

Revising our Rhetoric, Redesigning Reality

Michael's story is important not because it enacts truisms about deafness or disability, but because it shows how the rhetoric of the level playing field conditioned what happened at Purdue and what we continue to allow to happen, in our classrooms, our tutoring sessions, and our writing programs. Many of Michael's experiences at Purdue are demonstrations of what Jay Dolmage refers to as "retrofit" responses to disability: "To retrofit is to add a component or accessory to something that has already been manufactured or built. This retrofit does not necessarily make the product function, does not necessarily fix a faulty product, but acts as a sort of correction" (20). A pedagogical retrofit is an attempt to make up for or work around an educational setting designed for the "average" white, middle-class American student. Dolmage argues that the retrofit is a "level-playing-field response to disability," a way to preserve the notion that everyone "otherwise qualified" can aspire to compete in the mainstream. In short, the retrofit implies that the mainstream can (and should) remain unchanged and unchanging.

While I agree with Dolmage in principle, I argue that the retrofit can sometimes be the only response available to educators. Examples include the reactions of Michael's teacher, DRC specialist, and the ICaP WPA to Michael's first attempt at English 106. If the instructor had wanted to, she could have allowed Michael to continue through the course without consulting him or the WPA. He would undoubtedly have failed. The WPA and the DRC specialist could have supported the instructor's decision. That outcome would have been "fair" according to the principles of the level playing field. After all, Purdue abided by the recommendations of the ADA and provided Michael with an interpreter and other auxiliary aids that help to "ensure effective communication." His failure might have been interpreted by all concerned as the result of a deficiency in "skills," a deficiency for which other "basic writers" in English 106 do not receive extra consideration. Instead of capitulating to the rhetoric of the level playing field, the individuals involved made another choice. They decided that a retrofit, allowing Michael to take the English for no credit and then repeat it, was more "fair" because it allowed him to gain needed practice composing in English before he was required to perform for a grade. Michael's tutoring might also be regarded as a retrofit. His home VR office easily could have refused to give him funds for tutoring because he decided to go to a university outside his home state. Fischbach was not required to help Michael find and vet his tutor. Yet, an individual tutor was clearly what he needed.

Dolmage argues that retrofitting is a reaction to diversity that becomes necessary when an institution has not planned adequately for the arrival of students with disabilities (20). I would argue that this is especially the case when, as at Purdue, an institution superficially espouses diversity by recruiting and admitting diverse students and then does little to

educate the university community or provide services beyond those specifically recommended by the ADA. The main problem with instructional retrofits such as the one I just described is that they rely on individual educators, administrators, and disability specialists' individual commitments to diversity, sometimes in the face of an institutional culture that works in the other direction. The retrofit is an individual or small-group decision affecting only one or a few students. In Michael's case, some of the acts of retrofitting I observed seemed shrouded in secrecy, as though those involved wanted to protect him, and perhaps themselves, from accusations that he received academic charity. As Dolmage points out, acts of retrofitting are seen as charity in academia (22); I argue that this is especially true in a university culture that accepts nothing but the most conservative notion of fairness on the level playing field.

> "creating educational environments that are maximally accessible to a widely diverse population of students"

While it is perhaps difficult for instructors, tutors, and WPAs to quickly and directly influence university culture, they can affect the culture of their own classrooms, writing centers, and programs by adopting and popularizing principles of universal design for instruction. According to the Center for Universal Design at North Carolina State University, universal design is an outgrowth of the barrier-free and disability rights movements of the 1950s and 1960s. Initially, the goal of universal designers was to ensure that products and physical spaces were maximally useable by a widely diverse population. Since the turn of the millennium, however, universal design has made its way into pedagogy. Universal design in instructional contexts means creating educational environments that are maximally accessible to a widely diverse population of students.

A good place to go to begin learning about universal design for instruction is Sheryl E. Burgstahler and Rebecca C. Cory's edited collection, Universal Design for Higher Education. Some approaches that reoccur throughout that resource and which are defined in the first two chapters that are specifically relevant to deaf and hard of hearing students include delivering course content visually in a digital format, providing closed captioned video (5), allowing multiple means of participation in group work (e.g. in-person or internet communication) (31), allowing students to show competence in multiple ways (30), giving all students adequate time to complete work for class (31), and including course content that reflects a diverse population of students (16). Burgstahler also advises instructors to publicize early on what the content of courses will be and to stick to the syllabus (34). This helps all students know what is happening in class, especially those who have to arrange for interpreters or

other services ahead of time. Being transparent about grading and specific requirements for the course also makes it easier for students to select the courses that work best for them and to talk to instructors about accommodations if needed. Finally, Burgstahler urges instructors to familiarize themselves with how to arrange for accommodations at their institution (34).

All of these suggestions are relatively easy for instructors in composition to apply, but it is unlikely that they will become widely adopted and persistent in a writing program unless the WPA makes it an initiative. WPAs should think about how they can encourage instructors and tutors to implement universal design approaches in instruction. One way to increase awareness of how courses and tutorials can be designed more universally is to invite speakers from an institution's disability resource center to speak at departmental meetings or instructor or tutor training sessions. Once per year or semester may not be enough. These disability professionals often have helpful tips for instructors and tutors about how they can make the "mainstream" educational environment more equitable, accessible, and comfortable for all students.

Although the language of universal design is that it is supposed to "benefit people of all . . . abilities," it important to understand that even the most perceptive, committed instructor or tutor is incapable of foreseeing every need. Likewise, every need is not necessarily satisfied through universal design. For example, though universal design principles ask us to anticipate that some students, including those who use ASL as a first language, may have difficulty using English, we cannot prescribe a single method of helping those students gain literacy for language. A student's specific issues with language must be addressed with targeted, individualized approaches. Instructors encountering deaf students should understand that they will have different experiences using written English; not all students will require the same kind of instruction Michael received. Opening a dialogue with individual students on how and what they were taught about English and writing in the past is a good starting point in determining what learning approaches will be most effective.

WPAs should anticipate that they will need to provide support to instructors or tutors who are working with deaf or hard-of-hearing students for the first time. First, instructors and tutors should know how to communicate appropriately with deaf students. Many instructors don't know that they should speak to and make eye contact with deaf students, not their interpreters. Second, instructors might benefit from individual consultations with disability resource specialists on how they can make their classrooms more deaf friendly. WPAs can be an important link between such offices and instructors and tutors. Third, an inexperienced teacher or tutor can be overwhelmed by the writing of some deaf or hard-of-hearing students, leading them (like me) to edit or take on too much responsibility for their texts. It makes sense to schedule several ESL training sessions throughout the semester and to offer individ-

ual consultations with those instructors or tutors who feel they need more preparation. Finally, WPAs should keep copies of recent scholarship on deaf students in mainstream composition on hand for instructors and tutors. Rebecca Day Babcock's "Tutoring Deaf Students in the Writing Center" and Brenda Jo Brueggemann's *Lend Me Your Ear: Rhetorical Constructions of Deafness* are useful resources on this subject.

It is not possible for compositionists to solve all of the problems or address all of the injustices inherent in the current rhetoric of disability law or its interpretation on college campuses. It is also impossible to bestow literacy, for language or communication, on the deaf students who choose to enter the mainstream. It should not be our responsibility to devise retrofits, but our belief in social justice will call upon us to do so. Universal design holds some promise, though as I indicated, it, too, cannot level the field so that things like English literacy in academia no longer matter. In order for things to change, really change, colleges and universities as whole entities must enact diversity, not just espouse it. Compositionists can participate in this change by being open about the challenges intrinsic to learning English as a second language, about the retrofits they have made for ESL and/or deaf students, and their attempts to design courses and programs using universal design. We should be vocal about such issues when we participate in student and faculty senate meetings. Our programs, courses, and tutorials should demonstrate to our colleagues around the university what the liberal interpretation of fairness can mean in practice. Finally, and most importantly, we can participate in this change most meaningfully when we listen to students. The act of listening to, though not necessarily hearing, what students have to say allows us to make the changes that matter, not as an act of charity, but as a political enactment of the liberal ideal of fairness.

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