

Some reflections on improving accessibility and the classroom experience

Elizabeth Finnis, Jennifer Howell, and Richard Gorrie
University of Guelph

Authors' Contact Information

Elizabeth Finnis, Associate Professor
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
University of Guelph, Guelph, ON, N1G 2W1
Phone: 519 824 4120 ext. 53234
Email: efinnis@uoquelfh.ca

Jennifer Howell, Jennifer has graduated with her BA (Hons) in
Anthropology from the University of Guelph.
Email: howell@alumni.uoquelfh.ca

Richard Gorrie, Open Learning and Educational Support,
University of Guelph, Guelph, ON, N1G 2W1
Email: rgorrie@uoquelfh.ca

Abstract:

This paper offers reflections on experiences with accessibility, inclusivity and visual impairments in the classroom at the University of Guelph, in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. We draw on the example of improving the accessibility of an Anthropology poster conference assignment, incorporating the personal reflections of a disabled student and an abled professor. In doing so, we discuss how communication and creativity can improve classroom accessibility and inclusivity. Our experiences demonstrate that ensuring accessibility in university settings requires not just government and institutional mandates, but also the encouragement and support to think creatively about ways that individuals can work to make the classroom experience more inclusive.

Key Words:

Accessibility, visual impairments, universal instructional design

Introduction

In this paper, we reflect on our experiences with accessibility, inclusivity and visual impairments in the classroom at the University of Guelph, in Guelph, Ontario, Canada. Using the example of making a student poster conference assignment in a fourth-year Anthropology seminar accessible for visually impaired students, we merge personal reflection sections with a broader discussion of accessibility in higher education. Our experiences, the process of finding a way to make the assignment accessible, and the

solution itself show how communication, creativity and a willingness to take a closer look at the learning activity can lead to both inclusivity and pedagogical improvements that result in a better learning experience for all students. While we did not intentionally set out to apply principles of universal design, the result embodies these principles. Considering our experiences within the context of Universal Instructional Design (UID) provides a theoretical framework for situating the work within current discussions of accessibility and instructional design.

The decision to shape this paper around the personal reflections of a disabled student and an abled professor allows us to present a detailed picture of some of the everyday experiences of classroom accessibility. As Colley, Bilics & Lerch (2012) point out, reflection is key to critical thinking and ongoing learning. While Colley, Bilics & Lerch's (2012) focus on fostering critical thinking in part through reflection among undergraduate students, educators also benefit from reflecting on our approaches to teaching. In addition, some recent explorations of accessibility in post-secondary education have pointed to the importance of including disabled students¹ in the discussion, as they are in the best position to voice their needs (see for example Fuller, Healey, Bradley & Hall, 2004; Goode, 2007; Marquis, Jung, Fudge-Schormans, Vajoczki, Wilton, Baptiste, & Joshi, 2012). Marquis et al. (2012) stress that it is important to include the various stakeholders in the conversations around accessibility, including staff that support teaching and learning.

As an Anthropology professor, (Finnis) and an Anthropology undergraduate major (Howell), we shared classroom spaces for three different courses between Winter 2010 and Winter 2013, addressing various accessibility issues together. Our scholarly reflections on accessibility began in 2012 when we were asked, along with another faculty member and student, to speak at a round table discussion on creative accommodations in the classroom at the University of Guelph's annual Accessibility Conference (<http://accessconf.ca/>). We continue those reflections here by first briefly discussing some of the current literature on inclusivity and accessibility in the classroom, and offering background on the services available for disabled students at the University of Guelph. This is followed by personal reflections that address some of the practical issues associated with our learning collaboration, both generally and in terms of a specific assignment. In doing so, our experiences highlight some key elements related to accessible teaching: recognizing the problem of and avoiding making assumptions about abilities or options, the importance of communication in making a classroom inclusive, and the pedagogical value of inclusive design for all teachers and students. The professor and student partnership we discuss highlights the benefits of putting creative accommodation and universal design into action in the classroom.

¹ Although putting the person before the disability (that is, "person with disability") is advocated by government agencies as a means of providing dignity and respect to disabled people, person-first language can deny the possibility of a political understanding of disability and accessibility, presumes that disability is inherently negative, and dictates that disability must be separated from the person in order for disabled people to be respected. For these reasons and more, many disabled people themselves prefer to embrace disability as part of their identity and be recognized as disabled people, not people with disabilities. Accordingly, we avoid the use of person-first language throughout this paper. However, it is always best to defer to the referential choices of individual students. See Titchkosky (2008) for a more detailed explanation of the problems surrounding person-first language use in Canada.

Accessibility in higher education

Recent explorations of accessibility and inclusivity in post-secondary education offer a range of analyses, including considerations of barriers to learning, recommendations for institutional policy and practice (Holloway 2001; Fuller, Bradley & Healy, 2004; Fuller et al., 2004; Hanafin, Shevlin, Kenny & McNeela, 2007; O'Rourke, 2011; Marquis et al., 2012; Redpath, Kearney, Nicholl, Mulvenna, Wallace & Martin, 2013), explorations of the principles of universal design in teaching (Carter, Leslie & Moore, 2010), and more personal reflections on classroom experiences (Michalko, 2001; Pfau, 2007; Harpur, 2010). These analyses highlight that "disabilities may affect one's senses or one's mobility; they may be static or progressive, congenital or acquired, formal or functional, visible or invisible " (Couser 2005, p.125), and, "..since disabled people do not share a single condition, they cannot be—nor should they be—represented as a monolithic community" (Couser 2005, p.124). Given the diversity of disability experiences, the needs of disabled students are highly varied. As Ginsberg and Schulte note, "in some learning scenarios, [disabled students] may be as successful as or more successful than other classroom learners. They are not a deficient learner at all times, rather their abilities, performance and learning will change with alterations in tasks, environments, and teachers" (2008, p.85). We should clarify that in this paper, our use of the term classroom accessibility does not refer to physical access to the classroom. Although physical access is essential, and physical barriers to education persist (Holloway, 2001), we understand that it is often beyond the power of individual instructors to affect change in the built environment, beyond reporting specific problems to the appropriate university authorities; it is the responsibility of the University as an institution to remove physical barriers. We focus on alterations that instructors can institute within their own classroom teaching practices for the benefit of all students. Thus, we discuss accessibility in terms of access and inclusion within classroom dynamics, which may include elements such as knowledge transfer, participation in class activities, designing learning objectives, and assessment practices.

Thinking about disability – and hence, the development and implementation of related support services and classroom practices – can be encapsulated by two primary, distinct approaches: the medical and the social models of disability. The medical model presents disability as a matter of individual impairment. Conversely, the social model, which recognizes disability as a social construct, argues that barriers to accessibility arise from disabling environments. The social model permits a more political understanding of disability, through which change in attitudes and a reduction of barriers is not only possible, but paramount (Holloway, 2001; Seelman, 2004; Ginsberg & Schulte, 2008; Redpath et al., 2013). Some suggest using a more blended approach, which recognizes disabilities as physical impairments grounded in sociopolitical systems that create barriers (Williams, 2001, cited in Goode, 2007, p.35; see also Seelman, 2004).

Some recent research on inclusion of disabled students in post-secondary education has explored how medical and social models of disability impact instructor approaches to accessibility (Holloway, 2001; Ginsberg & Schulte, 2008). Ginsberg and Schulte (2008), for instance, note that educators holding the individualized, medical model of disability tend to view disability as the root cause of students' successes or failures. This

attitude creates additional stigmatization barriers for disabled students. Conversely, educators advancing the social model of disability are likely to recognize how the learning environment does not “sufficiently support the learner in such a way as to facilitate successful learning” for disabled students (Ginsberg & Schulte, 2008, p.85; see also Marquis et al., 2012 for examples of diverse attitudes towards disability, accommodation, and accessibility at one Ontario university). This view suggests that the needs and abilities of disabled students are different, not inferior (Fuller et al., 2004; Ginsberg & Schulte, 2008). Disabled students report barriers in lectures, forms of assessment, technology, and library and reading access (Fuller et al., 2004). In addition, some academic staff may be unwilling to accommodate different needs, fearing that accommodation is too much effort, cost, or grants an “unfair” advantage to disabled students—a harmful attitude which contributes to the barriers to full classroom inclusion experienced by disabled learners (Marquis et al., 2012). The social model of disability recognizes that these barriers are not the fault of disabled students or their disabilities, but of structures and systems that are not designed as inclusive. The move towards inclusivity is aided by the principles of universal design applied to course delivery: approaches that reduce barriers for disabled students can benefit the learning experience for all students (Burgstahler & Cory, 2008).

The support services that can help address some of these barriers vary depending on specific university policies and government regulations. At the University of Guelph, Student Accessibility Services (SAS), located in the Student Centre building, provides support and a framework for academic accommodations for students registered with the service. Students register with SAS, provide documentation, and discuss their academic needs with staff. The University's Policy on Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities (reviewed every 5 years and most recently revised in 2011) states that the University will provide reasonable accommodations, will promote full participation of disabled students in their academic program, and that accountability and responsibility for the provision of academic accommodations is shared by university and student. SAS is empowered to directly approve some forms of accommodation, including note taking, test taking in the SAS Exam Centre, and classroom seating arrangements. Upon student request, SAS will notify faculty about students who have specific needs, and faculty may be asked to make class requests for note takers. Alternatively, students registered with SAS may remain anonymous in the class, or individually inform professors that they are registered with SAS; students are not required to disclose the specific nature of their disability. Individual SAS staff will contact faculty to discuss other accommodations that staff cannot directly approve themselves. Assistive technology support available in the SAS Exam Centre and Library Accessibility Services for visually impaired learners include screen reading and screen magnification software, print scanning and reading software, alternate format tests and textbooks in Braille, large print, audio (DAISY), or electronic formats, the creation of tactile diagrams, and CCTVs.

The University also provides faculty and staff with resources for developing accessible instruction and syllabi, and in the 2013/2014 academic year, the university provided mandatory online training modules on accessibility for all faculty as part of the institution's obligation to meet the standards of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) (Government of Ontario, 2005a). This provincial act requires, as part of its Information and Communications section (Government of Ontario, 2005b), the

provision of educational materials in accessible formats upon request, and that educational institutions provide accessibility training awareness for employees.

To meet the requirements of the latest AODA standard, the University of Guelph is encouraging instructors to take a holistic approach to accessibility and adopt the principles of Universal Instructional Design (UID; Yuval, Proctor, Korabik & Palmer, 2004). UID recognizes that an accommodation for a student with a disability can be of benefit to all students. For example, the transcription of a video soundtrack for a hearing impaired student can provide all students with searchable review material. While UID involves all aspects of teaching, from course design, to implementation and evaluation, it may be difficult for faculty to see beyond making materials accessible, especially in the online environments often associated with a course. While making accessible formats readily available to meet the needs of a diverse student population is also a necessity, resistance to universal accessibility in other regards arises from concerns about academic rigour (Carter, Leslie & Moore, 2010, p.147). While our experiences with the redesigned poster assignment took place before and independent of the University's accessibility initiative, it provides a valuable example of how working to make education accessible can maintain academic rigour and improve teaching.

While the policy structures discussed above are broad ranging and offer a number of supports for students, they are primarily concerned with offering additional or alternative options for students outside of the classroom environment. The University of Guelph is moving towards encouraging course material design that is universally accessible, in order to make accessible formats readily available to meet the needs of a diverse student population; however, this alone is insufficient to address accessibility and barriers to inclusive education in the classroom. In the following sections, we offer individual reflections on accessibility barriers within the classroom. Our experiences suggest that the avoidance of assumptions, and clear communication, can go a long way to ensuring that students are actively included, not simply accommodated.

Practical experiences with accessibility

1) An instructor's perspective

My active thinking about accessibility in the classroom began 2007, during my first semester working at the University of Guelph. A fourth-year student in one of my seminars came to me after our first class meeting and told me that she had a visual impairment that affected her ability to view charts and images on overheads or slides. She asked me if I could put visuals into .pdf format and email them to her a couple of days before each class; she would be able to view the images beforehand on her laptop, at a larger size. I was happy to do this, and since I planned to use a number of short video clips with non-English subtitles, I also typed up transcripts. At the end of the semester, the student wrote that I was the first instructor to consider her visual needs to such an extent, and that this had enhanced her experience and feeling of inclusion in the classroom.

While I was pleased to have made such a difference to the student's experience, her feedback also made me realize that these kinds of actions may not be as widespread as I assumed they were. Making and sending those image and subtitle files did not take

long, and I considered them to be about ensuring a standard level of accessibility, similar the university's standard of test-taking accommodations for visually impaired students. I was therefore dismayed that in her four years she had not previously experienced this level of classroom accessibility. Her feedback reinforced for me that there are steps we can take beyond things like test-taking accommodations. The experience encouraged me to think more actively and reflexively about how, as an instructor, I could continue to work to ensure experiential inclusion for visually impaired students. I also work to avoid making assumptions about student abilities and course material.

For example, I regularly teach a qualitative research methods course which is a required course for all Sociology and Anthropology majors. One topic we cover is content analysis of visual images. I use very detailed photographs to generate class discussion about the benefits and limitations of using visual representations in our research. I felt it would be inappropriate to assume that this method would be irrelevant to visually impaired students; it is not my role to make decisions about a student's capabilities. Moreover, even if a student was not able to use content analysis of visual images, he or she should still understand the ways this method can be used, and its strengths and weakness. Finally, assuming a student could not use this method would by default exclude them from class discussions. Consequently, I write very detailed descriptions of what is taking place in the images, and make them available to visually impaired students a few days before class. This means that they are not excluded from the theoretical and practical discussions taking place in the classroom. Typing up these detailed image descriptions also pushes me to think about the images in even more depth – which in turn makes my ability to lead class discussions more effective.

2) A student's perspective

“So, does someone drive you to school?” The question from my new professor catches me off-guard. I had not expected to have a social encounter before class, let alone one in which I must explain my means of transportation. I stutter and hasten to explain in my hesitant, halted, speech that, no, I walk and take the bus to school. It is winter and some days, trudging through unshovelled sidewalks and icy paths, getting to school is a challenge. I live alone, and I work hard to get to campus independently.

Encapsulated in this question – and the assumption that I am unable to get to campus without assistance – is all of the condescending attitudes I have grown accustomed to over the years, all the assumptions others make about me, based upon particular, stereotyped constructions of blindness. Although there is nothing wrong with requiring assistance traveling to campus, this is not something I require, and the closed-ended question makes presumptions about my capabilities.

I am a blind, autistic Anthropology student. Being autistic has impacted my ability to communicate my needs as a blind student throughout my undergraduate career. These challenges to self-advocacy have been further negatively impacted by professors' assumptions about my capabilities. For example, in my first and second years, I took courses where, when we watched documentaries with non-English dialogue and English subtitles that took up an entire lecture, the professor indicated that perhaps it would be best if I did not attend class that day. The professor's intent was well meaning,

hoping to prevent me having to sit through the hour or more lecture with no idea what was being said. Yet this strategy failed to consider whether there might be an alternate way for me to obtain the information presented in the film, and whether I wanted full inclusion in the course. I was denied access to necessary course materials, and automatically excluded from an integral part of the class. This exclusion extended to course discussions that followed the film's presentation, further alienating me from my peers and from classroom learning. Although I was not pleased with the solution of not attending lecture, I went along with it because the suggestion came from a perceived authority figure. It did not occur to me that I could – and should – advocate for something else.

Ashworth, Bloxham & Pearce (2010) have discussed concerns that there may be tensions between academic standards and inclusion (see also Marquis et al., 2012). Faculty worry that inclusive education that meets the diverse needs of disabled students will involve lowering their academic standards. Disabled students may share similar fears about professors lowering standards. Pfau (2007), for example, expresses concern that professors will believe any work she completes is good "in spite of" her disability. I can relate to Pfau's concerns. Going back to the example cited at the beginning of this section: if a professor assumes I cannot navigate to campus independently, what assumptions might he or she be making about my ability to complete assignments? When professors congratulate me on doing well on assignments, there often seems to be a note of surprise in how they approach me. Early in my university career, in classes with hundreds of students, I attempted to avoid direct contact with professors, in part because I had feared throughout high school that my teachers were lenient with me. It was important for me to know that at university, my work was being judged for its own merit. Yet, my practice of avoidance was a detriment to receiving accommodations I required.

Later, I worked with professors who actively encouraged me to share my needs, who approached me in an open, respectful manner and treated me as an equal without being condescending or making assumptions about my capabilities, while still recognizing the additional challenges that come with being a disabled student. In essence, I was treated as a person, and I realized some of my assumptions about what I could and could not expect from my professors were not the case, and that I had more agency. For example, receiving a typed transcript of subtitles in advance made me realize that I could request these from other faculty members, even if they did not initially offer them. In this regard, the provision of appropriate accommodation requires communication between professors and students, and openness free of assumptions on the part of both parties to explore new, creative solutions to accessibility barriers.

Rethinking the accessibility of an assignment

As mentioned in the introduction, at the heart of this paper is the reworking of a specific assignment in a fourth-year seminar course, *Topics in the Anthropology of Health*, in the Fall of 2011. The impetus to make this class accessible came from many directions, but at its heart it is a matter of human rights, recognizing the diverse nature of our student body, and meeting the needs of all learners in a fair and equitable manner. Often this is done through accommodation; however, by taking a universal

design approach, embracing diversity, and considering learning outcomes, it is possible to meet the needs of specific individuals with solutions that are both inclusive and beneficial to all learners.

A key part of this course is a final poster conference showcasing student research that brings anthropological perspectives to analyses of health issues. This conference has a number of pedagogical goals. It gives students the opportunity to think beyond essay writing when it comes to academic dissemination and skills building, it challenges them to think about and enact diverse ways to present a research argument, and it gives them the opportunity to learn from and teach one another. Peer evaluations of the posters are also central to the assignment. The poster conferences are always high-energy and dynamic, and students are typically excited to share their work. Reworking this assignment to enhance classroom inclusivity and accessibility highlighted for both of us the importance of flexibility, avoiding assumptions, and clear communication. We briefly discuss this process from our individual perspectives.

1) *The instructor's perspective on rethinking the assignment*

Classroom participation and inclusion was at the centre of my plan to make a student poster conference inclusive. How could I make such a visual project accessible to visually impaired students? The issues with this included the composition of the poster in terms of things like poster organization, colour choices, and font-size; in addition, how would a visually impaired student evaluate his or her peers' posters? I asked myself these questions in part because I knew that Jen was registered for the course; again, I did not want to make assumptions about a student's capacity to participate in the assignment. While the possibility of alternative arrangements for assessment can be useful (Hanafin, et al., 2007; see also Madriaga, Hanson, Heaton, Kay, Newitt & Walker, 2010), I wanted to do what I could to make the assignment inclusive, in order to ensure that all students had the opportunity to access the same assignment and the same pedagogical goals, while learning from everyone in the class.

Marquis et al. (2012, p.8) have noted that, "even if faculty and staff are informed about disabilities, they often do not have a good idea of how to translate this knowledge into inclusive teaching and learning experiences." In the case of this assignment, I knew that it would be useful to draw on the expertise of colleagues at the university. Consequently, about a month before the course began, I met and brainstormed options with Athol Gow, a colleague at the University of Guelph's Library Accessibility Services. Together, we came up with ways to alter the assignment to make it more accessible. First, we realized that a visually impaired student could work with a scribe. The student would remain responsible for decisions for the content of the poster – the argument, the structure, and the balance of text to non-text elements. The scribe would help physically translate the poster's argument and organization onto the poster, and offer feedback on things like colour choices and font size readability. Second, I tweaked the peer evaluation component so that instead of evaluating each other on the poster itself, students evaluated each other on the verbal communication of their ideas and main arguments, and their abilities to answer questions and expand on their arguments. This required adding another evaluation component to the poster, as in previous years, students had been evaluated on visual elements and the quality of the written argument,

but not on their abilities to present and expand on the content of the poster. I knew that I could not assume that Athol and I had covered all of the potential elements of accessibility, and thus, Jen and I arranged to meet and talk about the assignment. She will discuss this in her reflection.

Overall, these were straightforward changes that did not take much time to implement. Instead of developing an entirely different alternative assignment for visually impaired students – an assignment that would exclude them from key elements of skills building, learning, and participation – these simple changes maintained inclusivity. To me this emphasizes the difference between accommodations and accessibility (cf. Seelman, 2004). Assignment accommodations are designed to offer alternatives to students – this may include things like additional time and alternative formats for tests and exams. Of course, these accommodations are both necessary and important. Yet, relying on alternative assignments as accommodations can result in making assumptions. These sorts of accommodations may actually contribute to the exclusion of some students when it comes to certain types of assignments and activities. The poster conference was one case when developing an alternative assignment – i.e., making an accommodation – would have been fundamentally exclusionary.

2) *The student's perspective on rethinking the assignment*

Being contacted about the poster assignment prior to the beginning of the course was extremely helpful. Elizabeth explained the project and the potential ways to approach it, so that I could decide whether I would like to work on the poster assignment with a scribe, or take an alternative assignment such as a more traditional final research essay. Rather than making assumptions as to my capabilities, this recognized my agency and my ability to make an informed decision about what would be best for my needs and my learning experiences.

In the previous section, Elizabeth noted the value of what she defines as accommodations: the offering of alternative assessment options. I was grateful that one of the choices I had was to choose an alternative assignment. In other classes with Elizabeth, I have seen the value of offering a variety of assessment options as a way of making learning inclusive to diverse student needs. For example, participation marks for her seminar classes are based both on written responses to each week's readings, and verbal class discussion. As someone who struggles with verbal communication and social anxiety, I was able to demonstrate my understanding of course materials through writing, the means of communication I excel at and am most comfortable with. It was okay if there were days I could not speak in class. For other disabled students, the reverse may be the case. Others still may require a different strategy altogether. Regardless, the strategy of offering a diverse range of assessment options does not lower standards. Rather, it allows all students, disabled or abled, to demonstrate their understanding of the material in the manner that is best for them, while not penalizing them for their weaknesses. By including an alternative assignment as an option for my participation in the Anthropology of Health course, Elizabeth was continuing to engage in an inclusive teaching style that allows students with diverse strengths and weaknesses to work in the manner best suited to their needs. If I had decided that I could not work with a scribe on the poster, I would have been able to demonstrate my

learning in alternative manner that both worked for me and ensured rigour in assessment.

I initially had reservations about working on the poster assignment with a scribe. I was concerned about whether I would be able to effectively work with the scribe, and if I would be able to sufficiently articulate my needs and ideas about the ways I wanted to organize the poster. Nevertheless, I chose to take on the challenge of building a poster with a scribe. Choosing an alternative assessment would have been no less valid a choice, but having considered the pros and cons of the assignment options, I felt the poster was the best way to be fully included in the class. I understood that for all students in the class, developing a professional research poster meant challenging ourselves in new and unique ways. However, as a visually impaired student, I experienced challenges that my sighted peers did not.

Despite the challenges, the assignment was highly rewarding. In addition, I quickly forgot that the peer review being based on how students explained their posters was an alteration of the original assignment, as it was presented to the class not as a change for me, but as an inherent and integral part of the assignment, designed to challenge and benefit the entire class. As a result, I was fully included in all aspects of the assignment, able to participate to the same level as my peers by asking them questions about their posters and explaining my own work and arguments. Importantly, by making inclusive design a priority, all of this was accomplished without drawing attention to the visibly disabled woman in the room. Ultimately, the poster assignment and poster conference were a rewarding challenge, and one of the works I am most proud of from my undergraduate career, precisely because my needs were accommodated in a manner that put me on equal footing with my peers.

Maintaining and building on notions of academic rigour

As Ashworth, Bloxham & Pearce (2010) have discussed, tensions may emerge in discussions about how to ensure inclusive assessment while maintaining academic standards. In their study on attitudes to accessibility at McMaster University (Hamilton, Ontario, Canada), Marquis et al. (2012) noted that some instructors felt that making assignments accessible could 'water down' a learning experience; others in the same study argued that more inclusive teaching would benefit all students. In the example we have presented, all students were held to the same standards of rigour and originality. Working with a scribe on the poster assignment had the expectation that the writing and content came entirely from the student, just as it would with an academic research essay.

Furthermore, changing the poster assignment guidelines to make it inclusive resulted in making it more rigorous because students had to demonstrate mastery of three complementary components that make an effective academic poster – the quality of the argument and research, the visual appeal and clarity of the poster, and the ability to speak about and expand on the argument they were making. We would suggest that when instructors challenge themselves to make assignments inclusive and take into account the diverse makeup of their classes, they may find the end result is more academically rigorous for all students. As Fuller et al. (2004), Hanafin et al. (2007) and Madiaga et al. (2010) among others have pointed out, inclusiveness can benefit all

students in a classroom, and inclusive design has the potential to encompass both equity and quality (Hanafin et al., 2007). Rather than assuming that accessibility means compromise, instructors can view the rethinking of assignments in terms of an opportunity to challenge all students in new ways.

Concluding thoughts

We have reflected on some of the practical challenges involving accessibility and inclusivity in university classroom settings. In considering the institutional context, Marquis et al. (2012, p.16) point out that there "are no simple solutions for obstacles to accessibility, and assuming that there are denies the complexity of the situation and will lead to momentary, surface level change in apparent structures at best." These complexities include the range of disciplines and skills taught at a university, the diversity of disabilities that are present on campus, and the diversity of experiences with these disabilities. Accessibility requires a strong institutional mandate and commitment throughout all levels of the university, resulting in what amounts to a cultural change and the embracing of diversity. As Holloway (2001, p.608) notes, ad hoc responses, while sometimes useful to the individual student, can result in "variable experiences for students including frustration, exclusion and stress," although in some cases, when faculty do pursue individual solutions, these solutions may be relatively simple and easily communicated with university accessibility service departments (see, for example, Harpur, 2010). Yet, when universities do have specific processes and staff to accommodate various disabilities, students may not be fully aware of these services, and some accommodations may be inadequate or inconsistently enacted (Fuller et al., 2004; Madriaga et al., 2010; Redpath et al., 2013).

At the same time, inclusive education needs to go beyond the removal of institutional barriers or the enacting of legally mandated accommodation requirements. Inclusive education requires instructors to think creatively about whether there are ways that the classroom experience – including assignments, discussions, activities, and knowledge transmission elements – can be made more inclusive. While institutional practices and training are important, instructors cannot rely solely on these, especially if institutional practices tend to focus on basics such as the physical accessibility of classrooms, or accommodations in test taking. We are not suggesting that accommodations and institutional services, including some of the things we outlined in discussing SAS at the University of Guelph, are not important or necessary. Rather, we suggest that there are also opportunities for faculty to creatively reflect on and evaluate the ways they shape classroom activities and assignments, to communicate with students and experts in accessibility and inclusive educational strategies, and to therefore build on and complement the structures that may already be available to disabled students. This echoes Redpath et al.'s (2013, p.1334) suggestion about moving away from what they refer to as "reasonable adjustments" for individual students, and moving towards universal inclusivity for all students (see also Fuller et al., 2004). Moreover, this kind of approach benefits instructors by providing them opportunity to reflect upon the intended learning outcomes of classroom activities and build on teaching skills. In the case of the poster assignment, this actually resulted in a more rigorous pedagogical approach. It can also help instructors to consider what they really mean by academic rigour on the part of students and faculty.

We do not suggest that our experiences encompass all issues of inclusivity and accessibility, or the diversity of disabilities on campuses. As Fuller et al. (2004, p.316-317) point out, flexibility is key when considering diverse abilities. Our particular experiences are shaped by the contexts of specific visual impairment needs, by the University of Guelph's policies, and by current Ontario provincial legislation. Despite these specific contexts, we hope that our reflections will encourage faculty to question assumptions about abilities and to challenge themselves to consider whether there are meaningful changes they can make to enhance inclusivity in the classroom experience. We also hope that our reflections serve as a reminder to disabled students that they have agency when it comes to classroom experiences, and we encourage them to communicate with their instructors about their classroom needs and abilities.

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