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Navigating post-secondary institutions in Ontario with a learning disability:

The pursuit of accommodations

Cameron McKenzie (M.S.W), PhD student, Health Policy & Equity, York University

cam.s.mckenzie@gmail.com

Abstract

Students with learning disabilities (LDs) face numerous challenges as they navigate their way through post-secondary institutions in Ontario. Through an institutional ethnographic analysis, this paper contextualizes my lived experience of having an LD within the ruling relations in post-secondary institutions in the current neoliberal environment. Institutional ethnography is both a theory and a method of interpreting everyday social interactions through analysis of the texts (broadly defined) in modern society, such as policy documents, newspapers, and electronic media. As such, this method lends itself to understanding the medicalization of LDs because it demonstrates that expert knowledge is ideological. Using a social model of disability, I compared both the documentation on attaining accommodations and my lived experience at three universities that I attended and am attending. In evaluating how students negotiate the pathways within the power relations and social organization of these institutions, I am able to offer precise and constructive recommendations that would improve the experience and academic outcomes for students with LDs.

Keywords

learning disabilities, post-secondary institutions, ruling relations, accommodations

Navigating post-secondary institutions in Ontario with a learning disability:

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Cameron McKenzie (M.S.W), PhD student, Health Policy & Equity, York University

cam.s.mckenzie@gmail.com

Students with learning disabilities (LDs) face challenges as they navigate the educational system in Ontario. LD students constitute a significant minority in universities and colleges throughout Canada. According to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (2010), as many as 15% of university students and 16% of college students have learning disabilities (LDs)¹ that vary from moderate to severe. Of these students, nearly 48% are women and 37% are men. Among those students attending university, only 3% go on to post-graduate studies (HRSDC, 2010). The number of LD students who are successful in post-secondary education is low, and the gap continues to widen between disabled and non-disabled students, particularly at the graduate level (Getzel, 2008).

Through an institutional ethnographic analysis, this paper contextualizes my lived experience of having an LD within the ruling relations in post-secondary institutions in the current neoliberal environment. Dorothy Smith (1974a) defines “ruling relations” as the “total complex of activities differentiated into many spheres, by which our kind of society is ruled, managed, administrated” (p. 8). Canada’s turn to neoliberalism since the 1970s is reflected in most institutions, including post-secondary institutions, which allows for the colonization of wide aspects of the social order by a market and economic mentality (Brodie, 1999; Connell,

¹ The terms “disability” and “learning disability (LD)” will be used interchangeably because both experience oppression and may require accommodation in the post-secondary educational setting.

2010). This intensifies the commodification of education. Public universities are forced to charge increasing tuition fees to their students while struggling under the economic banner of the “free market” (Connell, 2010). The interests served emerge from a neoliberal market-driven economy, which does not truly have a vested interest in human health, safety, or well-being (Côté-Boucher, 2010). What this means is that these broader structures at play affect the larger social phenomena and interplays with the individual lived experiences—in this case, students with LDs (Barnes, 2007). Within this viewpoint, students come to be regarded as “customers”, as is evident at McMaster University’s Technical Services Department (University Technology Services, 2008). With regard to accommodations, this mentality can result in universities fulfilling their ‘minimal’ legal and moral obligations to provide reasonable disability accommodations, without actually doing so in a reliable and useful manner (Jung, 2003).

Institutional ethnography (IE) is both a theory and a method of interpreting everyday social interactions through analysis of the texts (broadly defined) in modern society, such as policy documents, newspapers, and electronic media (Campbell & Gregor 2002; Smith 1989). In particular, IE helps to identify “relations and apparatus of ruling” (Smith 1989, 41) as they reveal themselves in texts, with an emphasis on how texts mediate between people and ruling institutions and shape their lives (Campbell & Gregor, 2002). IE uses a close textual analysis to identify who is included and who is not, who has power and who does not, who is consulted and who is not, whose voices are valued or whose are not, and how the text might shape thinking and consciousness.

As such, IE offers a good method and theory for understanding the medicalization of LDs. A purely medical definition of LDs refers to a variety of impaired functioning that interferes with an individual’s ability to learn (Merriam Webster, 2012). An LD can affect a

student's verbal language, visual-spatial abilities, reasoning, and academic skills, such as reading, writing, or mathematics (Merriam Webster, 2012). Difficulties in processing and integrating information (Merriam Webster, 2012) are integral aspects of the difficulties in learning experienced by students with LDs.

The medicalization of LDs also contributes to attitudinal barriers and labels that serve to exclude and marginalize disabled people from mainstream society (Chivers, 2009) because the medical response to disability is curative or ameliorative (Silvers, 1998). To be labeled, in this sense, carries a pejorative meaning because the disabled person is considered unable to fulfill standardized norms (Fook, 2000). This connects the person to the label, and its language, rather than delineating them as a unique, autonomous individual (Fook, 2000). Together, labels and attitudes create a sense of "otherness" that becomes a rationale for treating those with disabilities differently (Fook, 2000). This different treatment has been characterized as ableism, which refers to the pervasive existence in society of negative opinions and prejudice against people with disabilities (Chivers, 2009). Ableism serves as a persistent source of injustice, excluding people with disabilities from meaningful education, employment, and other opportunities (Chivers, 2009). The power imbalances and inequalities, or prevailing ruling relations, underscore these problems as wider social norms. For disabled persons who are constantly in the position of supplicant, they must seek recognition, help, and support at every step of the way when navigating the educational pathways (Goode, 2007).

Zola (1972) was one of the first to reflect on how medicine becomes ideology because "it is the repository of truth, the place where absolute and often final judgements are made by supposedly morally neutral and objective experts" (p. 487). Smith's approach challenges us to reconsider dominant discourses such as medicine as the "repository of truth" (Zola, 1972). Zola

(1972) further argued that medicine's influence on our daily lives was expanding and becoming entrenched. He reflected on how this expansion and entrenchment of medicine means that people are no longer experts about their own bodies, and how this affects our understanding of personal responsibility. On the one hand, we no longer think about our health in terms of our moral failings; instead we now believe it is determined by our compliance with medical systems. As my analysis will show, the issues of responsibility and compliance are interwoven into the experiences and opportunities for students with LDs.

In this vein, Smith (1987) also emphasizes the importance of the standpoint and the observer and the observed, especially when dealing with so-called expertise. She argues that researchers must start with their own knowledge and try to understand how that will shape what they considered to be a "problem" worthy of study so that they can start to question how their own positioning influences what they want to study. She argues that "our 'knowledge' is thus ideological in the sense that social organization preserves conceptions and often represents the world as it is for those who rule it, rather than as it is for those who are ruled" (Smith, 1974b, 267). Smith (1974a) further emphasizes that this not just the process of education or indoctrination that happens to marginalized groups, but also that we "participate in ruling" through these institutions when we do not question what is "normal". An individual's self-concept, self-esteem, and identity are interwoven in the tensions evident within oppressive structures. Elsewhere (McKenzie, 2014), I have called this internalization of roles and rules a form of "self-managed oppression", an important consideration in understanding the educational experiences of LD students. This can also be seen through the imposter phenomenon since individuals begin to believe that the only reason they were ever successful was due to external circumstances and influences (Harvey & Katz, 1984).

With advocacy, disability activists have moved the realm of LDs away from the purely medical, health care, and professional domain to an alternative framework for understanding disability (Barnes, 2007). LDs have increasingly become recognized as a social and political entity. This social model of disability challenges medical and pathological models, as well as other institutional ways of knowing and understanding disabilities (Barnes, 2007). This moves the focus of disability away from physical or intellectual limitations found within the individual towards understanding the ways in which social and physical environments create the limitations that people with impairments experience (Barnes, 2007). In this sense, disabilities are created by the social environment rather than the impairment, which oppresses those with disabilities. Thus, advocacy for disability rights becomes paramount (Goode, 2007).

Using a social model of disability, I conduct an institutional ethnographic evaluation of policy documentation for accommodating students with disabilities within the post-secondary institutions I attended and am attending. I analyze the institutions' stated mandates on disability; the information provided on the universities' web pages, particularly on disability services; and documentation on students' responsibilities and tasks for obtaining accommodations. Finally, I contextualize my analysis through documents from organizations that work with students with disabilities, as well as Ontario regulations such as the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (Service Ontario, 2011) and the Ontario Human Rights Code (Service Ontario, 2012).

By relating this analysis to my lived experience, I describe how the social organization of post-secondary institutions constructs students who learn differently as "disabled". This leads into a discussion of the power imbalances within the different social interactions in terms of how

LD students are managed or "ruled" and the issues of bias and "ableism" that emerge. Specifics of how the post-secondary institutions deal with students are reviewed in order to make recommendations for change and improvement.

Transitioning into a post-secondary institution is a multi-layered struggle: personally, socially, and academically. Interactions with others and transitions into post-secondary institutions can make the experiences of students with LDs profoundly negative. In any educational setting, "disabled" students experience more exclusion, marginalization, and barriers (Hiranandani, 2005). These vary depending on demographic characteristics, such as gender, sexual orientation, age, educational level, nationality and race, socio-economic status, and marital status (Tervo et al., 2002). Disabled students find themselves caught up in particular social or cultural discourses that dismiss, disregard, or devalue them (Goffman, 1963) at several stages or intersections of identification. Additionally, disabled students encounter awkwardness or nervousness as well as a loss of status from systemic discrimination (Green, 2007). This occurs when disabled persons are not able to participate fully in their community due to an institutional impulse to segregate them from the "norm" (Green, 2007; Linton, 1998). Such ruling relations continue to delineate the powerful from the powerless by segregating students with LDs from mainstream education and allowing them partial rather than full accommodations in post-secondary institutions (Harry & Klinger, 2006). Competition in post-secondary institutions makes it difficult for many students with LDs to keep up with the pace of non-disabled students (Getzel, 2008). As a result, very few Canadian students with LDs pursue a post-graduate education or even post-secondary education (HRSDC, 2010). I attended a specialized secondary school for students with LDs, where we were allowed to take only "applied" courses and told that we would never be capable of attending university.

Consequently, I attended Humber College's social service worker program, which gave me the option to apply to universities.

Post-secondary institutions are stressful environments for most students, but students with LDs are at a higher risk of developing stress and stress-related symptoms (Roer-Strier, 2002). These students report feelings of anger, frustration and increased stress levels, low self-esteem, and depression as a result of social isolation and rejection within educational environments (Roer-Strier, 2002). As a result, many students with LDs may experience an exacerbation of their disability, leading to additional disabilities, such as the development of depression, causing these students to shut down and give up (Roer-Strier, 2002). Interestingly, LD students can adopt behaviour patterns similar to other socially excluded groups when confronting post-secondary institutions (Roer-Strier, 2002). Students with LDs are less likely to form affiliations with social groups and do not readily identify with others due to the frequent barriers they encounter (Roer-Strier, 2002). These students do not view themselves as being members of a community, particularly within the post-secondary institution, and experience low self-esteem due to a fragility and insecurity in their identities (Roer-Strier, 2002).

There is a correlation between academic success and the availability of necessary supports and accommodations within the school environment, which are relative to the individual student's unique circumstances (Vaughn & Fuchs, 2003). At every level, however, LD students are made to feel as though they do not belong in advanced degree programs based on their need for specific supports and services (Getzel, 2008). Although academic and workplace accommodations are a legal duty (OHRC, 2012), they can serve to label and exclude. For example, a student with an LD may need to take on a reduced course load when a full-time status may be too much to manage. These students are forced to progress at someone else's unrealistic

expectations rather than their own. This is not always easy because policies (e.g., Ontario Student Assistance Program or post-secondary institution policies) prevent students with LDs from accessing funding when they have a reduced course load. What this shows is that LD students suffer from institutional power imbalances, embedded in the established ruling relations within the institution. LD students will either develop skills to succeed and adapt to the post-secondary institution, or they will fail due to the stressors and roadblocks they continually face.

It is essential to analyze the social organization of the LD student's interactions within post-secondary institution disability centres at the individual and institutional levels. The social organization is intrinsic to the process of requesting services from the post-secondary institution bureaucracy and government mandates, that is, applying for disability supports (Campbell & Gregor, 2008). Disclosing a disability changes the power dynamics and the ruling relations with others throughout the post-secondary institution (Olney & Brockleman, 2003). Many students may be reluctant to seek support services they need to succeed due to fear of being stigmatized or judged, their inability to be assertive or advocate for themselves, low self-esteem and determination, and identity crises (Olney & Brockleman, 2003). Power imbalances are also inevitable within this setting because, even if the counsellor at the disability centre is acting in the best interests of each student with an LD, they are bound by the larger institutional culture (Pare, 2004). Activation of this ruling relation occurs at the moment of provision of concrete and specific data about a student's LD and becomes part of the decision-making template that is used to legitimize the student's need for support, access to services, resources, and accommodations (Campbell & Gregor, 2008). This creates not only an oral but also a text-based ruling relation that moves away from the personal interaction between counsellors and students to an

organizationally driven set of standards, which makes the individual subject to pre-determined criteria if they wish to obtain the help they need (Pare, 2004).

The specific policies that are set out by each post-secondary institution will have an impact on the way LD students are labelled and the attitudes people have towards them. The categories and terms in these institutions force each student to uniformly present themselves in the right configuration in order to meet the “established” criteria for assistance (Jung, 2003). The application process is extensive, complex, and onerous, and must be completed by the individual student, even though there are intake meetings or interviews aimed at ‘helping the student’ (Campbell & Gregor, 2008). During these meetings, a particular language discourse is used to contextualize “appropriate” accommodations. This transforms the relationship between the LD student and the counsellor into one that is controlling and governing (Campbell & Gregor, 2008). The individual’s needs are then translated onto paper to comply with the particular social organization of the institution rather than the needs of the student (Campbell & Gregor, 2008). All of these factors contribute to the marginalization, attitudes, and labels assigned to people with disabilities that are caused by restrictive policies and laws that continue to oppress the disabled population (Pinto, 2010). As a result, institutions and their structures facilitate labels and attitudes that centre on ableist discourses and maintain ruling relations.

The language used in post-secondary institution policy documents— both in terms of what they say and what they do not say— shows how policies are embedded with ableism. Subtle, but real, differences can be discerned when simply reviewing the language used in the grey literature found at Ontario post-secondary institution disability centres. A comparison between Carleton and McMaster University’s disability services serves to demonstrate the social organization of disability and ableist discourses. At Carleton University, for example, the Paul

Mention Centre (their disability services named after a disability advocate) was rated the "gold standard" for undergraduate and graduate students by University Affairs Magazine (University Affairs, 2005). Their approach to accommodation is explicit in their statement of Shared Responsibility: "Accommodating students with disabilities at Carleton University is a responsibility shared among the various partners in the accommodating process; the students themselves, the Paul Menton Centre course instructors, Scheduling and Examination and Carleton University Online ..." (Carleton University, 2012). Conversely, McMaster University's Student Accessibility Services repeatedly states that the onus is on the individual student to provide documentation and set up accommodations (McMaster University, n.d.). The new guide to registering with McMaster's Student Accessibility Services has slightly improved wording, stating that students "have a large part to play in the implementation of their accommodations and supports" (McMaster University, 2013, p. 10), rather than being "most responsible" (McMaster University, 2011, p. 8). The difference between these two universities points to disparate institutional milieus, in which one institution embraces individualistic neo-liberalism and oppresses students with its ableist focus.

The task of negotiating supports proves to be a complex process as LD students often lack the ability to advocate for themselves or fail to be assertive enough in their pursuit. The fact that these students have a disability already places them at a disadvantage and exposes them to situations where they experience judgmental reactions or discrimination from others (Olney & Brockleman, 2003). These experiences make LD students reluctant to seek the help they need in order to avoid negative reactions (Olney & Brockleman, 2003). Students may choose to conceal their disabilities, "pass" as non-disabled if they can, and develop strategies to avoid seeking formal help within the post-secondary institutions. One student, for example, "disguised her

memory problem, calling this behaviour ‘tap dancing’”, while other students circumvented rules by befriending the professor or Teaching Assistant to make use of non-traditional means of support, such as getting extra time for an assignment (Olney & Brockleman, 2003, p. 45). These students try these approaches so that they can remain competitive and successful in these restrictive academic realms (Olney & Brockleman, 2003).

At the post-secondary level, the challenges of ruling relations may be as basic as unequal standards of accommodation for students from one post-secondary institution to the next, even within the same province. My experience changed going from Carleton to McMaster University. It was through my struggles at McMaster University that I began to question the numerous struggles faced by people with LDs. At Carleton, I was able to get all the accommodations I needed and was encouraged to seek additional supports, even from Professors and Teaching Assistants. These ruling relations between LD students, Professors, and Teaching Assistants can also create tensions within post-secondary institutions. Not all professors know of the various types of LDs or how to accommodate these students’ needs (Getzel & McManus, 2005; Scott, 1996 as cited in Getzel, 2008). In stark contrast, at McMaster, I found it next to impossible to attain any of these services. When I went to the disability office at McMaster in the spring of 2011, I was prepared with my past accommodations and psycho-evaluation, and yet I left without any of the accommodations I required. While this may have been due to the competitive nature of my graduate level status, I was discouraged from using accommodations, as they posited that I should have already developed the skills. I was even told that my disability should be less severe given the readily available access to resources I had at Carleton. This will never be the case, as my disability is permanent and will not “just disappear”.

Indeed, within the three universities I have attended, I have observed that all of them mandate that psycho-educational testing must be current: within three to five years, irrespective of whether or not the LD is diagnosed as permanent (Carleton University, n.d.-a; McMaster University, n.d.; York University, n.d.). This stipulation does not follow the current medical guidelines that a student's learning disability diagnosis is valid for life after the age of 18 (Tsagris & Muirhead, 2012). Moreover, some university policies explicitly state that "accommodations will be phased out if the new assessment fails to document needs at the current time that may have been required in the past" (Carleton University, n.d.-b). This policy leaves students vulnerable to subjective readings of LDs that are known to be stable and consistent in adulthood.

Power ultimately lies within the hands of these authority figures that can either make it easier or harder for the student with a disability. This experience left me feeling disempowered and questioning my abilities and capabilities in completing graduate level studies. As Fook (2000) stated, I felt like I did not belong, and I started to take on a victim's identity, which conferred a sense of powerlessness and inferiority and led to a state of depression. I was fortunate to have the support of the social work department, but sadly, the rest of the university was unsupportive.

Disability diagnosis or testing can be quite expensive, as was the case when I paid \$2100 to be re-tested and to re-confirm my original diagnosis from secondary school. It is only through a medical diagnosis that one is provided with opportunities to access services and resources. However, this costly test is not covered by government funding if the student does not qualify for an Ontario Student Assistance Program loan, and can become especially problematic as students continue on to graduate school, as testing can take many hours and even span several sessions.

Re-affirmation of a diagnosis is time-consuming and can feel demoralizing. In this situation, identification of an LD is essential to gain access to coveted post-secondary institution support services as the documentation is necessary to prove that the student is "worthy" of receiving such supports and accommodations (Carrier, 1986; Reid & Knight, 2006).

Furthermore, the likelihood of an LD diagnosis depends on social class and ruling relations, since middle and upper class students with an LD have a greater likelihood of attaining a post-secondary education (Reid & Knight, 2006).

Recommendations

As a student and as a social worker with an LD, I have encountered many positive experiences in dealing with post-secondary institutions. I also have first-hand experience of their limitations. I have discussed these views with friends and colleagues who have shared similar experiences. What I have learnt is that there needs to be greater collaboration among post-secondary institution disability centres across institutions. This would promote consistency and uniformity among disability services, resources, and accommodations and ensure an educational environment of inclusivity and universality. Post-secondary institution offices and departments could co-ordinate services and resources with one another to ensure they are consistent (National Educational Association of Disabled Students, 2012). Additionally, post-secondary institutions need to be open to modifying or repealing rules, regulations, and policies that are not working for their students (NEADS, 2012). This can be accomplished in Ontario through the Inter-University Disability Issues Association (NEADS, 2012), established as an online medium to promote "accessible education at universities in Ontario" (Inter-University Disability Issues Association, 2014, para. 1). Their mission also includes supporting members "in providing innovative

services for students with disabilities in a manner that respects individual student needs and academic integrity" (Inter-University Disability Issues Association, 2014, para. 1). Each post-secondary institution needs to be willing to set aside their differences and have a greater openness to work together to create changes that fulfill local and international commitments. This is particularly the case in Ontario with the Ontario Human Rights Code and the Accessibility for Ontarians Disability Act. Canada has also committed itself to the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Foreign Affairs and International Trade Centre, 2010; Service Ontario, 2011). Ideally, the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and University should provide clear guidelines to post-secondary institutions and funding agencies about the nature of LDs and accommodations.

The counsellor needs to be aware of the power relations that evolve between themselves and their clients. In addressing the inherent power imbalance in this relationship, the counsellor must then keep in mind their role as an advocate for the student, while remaining ever cognizant of the tensions derived from taking on an advocacy role that tends to pit the worker against institutional guidelines. An awareness of these tensions helps to illuminate the flaws in the post-secondary educational system and provide the counsellor a means to plan or improve the equity of support services and resources. The counsellor also needs to challenge the dominant discourse of disability with a critical social theory of disability so that meaningful relationships can be forged between disability organizations and people with disabilities (Hiranandani, 2005).

Universalized training of disability counsellors across all post-secondary institutions would be helpful to raise awareness of the ruling relations, inequalities, and power struggles that continue to exist between LD students and those in positions of power. Certain disability counsellors are very helpful while others remain ineffective. This could be due to the limited

number of counsellors available, the heavy caseloads assigned to each counsellor, the high burnout rates, and limited funding to hire additional counsellors. There needs to be better training of staff in order to deal with the different challenges experienced by students with disabilities and address educational gaps among counsellors and social workers in their respective fields. Eliciting input and feedback from disabled students will provide experiential as well as statistical data necessary to improve services to this population. This flow of information will allow post-secondary institutions to understand how they can best serve students with disabilities.

An important strategy to help LD students into the post-secondary educational system is to provide a collaborative learning environment that addresses the students' approaches to teaching and learning (Kantanis, 2000). This would entail developing a community of learners who work in small groups with students with and without LDs, encouraging peer groups and peer support, providing a venue for discussing ideas and sharing coping strategies, and promoting ways of enhancing as well as celebrating academic achievements (Roer-Strier, 2002). Students learn lateral thinking techniques and become more independent as their confidence, sense of self-worth, and personal control all increase (Kantanis, 2000; Roer-Strier, 2002). It is also important to set up long-term support networks that carry LD students forward in their academic careers. These serve to develop students' advocacy and competency skills required for future successful employment (Roer-Strier, 2002). Post-secondary institutions can provide the infrastructure for these programs and encourage institution-wide education; however, this can never be achieved unless linguistic changes occur and systemic discrimination and barriers are addressed. Such modifications will not only increase awareness, but also diminish anxieties people have about students or educators with a disability (Roer-Strier, 2002).

Indeed, self-determination skills can help students feel empowered to be advocates for themselves and gain an understanding of how their disability affects their learning processes (e.g., limitations to working memory, a stronger ability to learn visually, the use of repetition, etc.). Intrinsic to this understanding is an acceptance of the disability and an ability to describe, in clear terms, the disability and the individual's specific needs (Getzel, 2008). The student must also develop the interpersonal skills to self-advocate through an awareness of their rights and have the determination and belief in themselves to overcome the obstacles that may arise along the way. It is also important for students to develop decision-making abilities and act independently so these academic goals can be revised if and when it is necessary (Getzel, 2008).

A template for the social organization of a disability centre or relevant counselling and disability services should be the Paul Menton Centre at Carleton University. Their philosophy reflects a commitment to facilitate integration of students with disabilities into all aspects of post-secondary institution life (Carleton University, 2012). The goals of providing individualized services and encouraging independence can be accomplished by empathic, knowledgeable advisors and mentors who can assist incoming or current students with disabilities, along with their parents, faculty, and staff (Carleton University, 2012). According to the National Educational Association of Disabled Students (NEADS, 2012), there are certain criteria that should be in place to effectively provide the accommodations and supports needed by disabled students. Formal disability policies, taking into consideration federal and provincial legislation and holding authoritative bodies accountable to these policies and practices, will help not only to promote but also to ensure barrier-free access to post-secondary education. Including knowledgeable disability service providers, professionals, social workers, health care providers, students, and other relevant representatives such as technical services, library, student

organizations, unions, and so on, can allow for more participatory and collaborative action between these groups. This will empower students with disabilities and allow them to be a part of any forums or discussions about disability on campus. Ultimately, the promotion of disability awareness and communication of disability related issues would help to accomplish these goals. Furthermore, holding mandatory workshops at post-secondary institutions for incoming and future students, faculty, administrative bodies, and support staff is a good starting point in breaking down educational barriers for students with disabilities.

In short, respectful and effective strategies for graduate students with learning disabilities are available and waiting to be developed. There are, however, financial costs associated with the implementation and development of these strategies, which is why understanding the ruling relations within post-secondary institutions during an era of neoliberalism is essential in the struggle to improve the experience and academic outcomes of disabled students.

It is important to note that what I have presented here is merely my personal story, which I offer as a contribution to a larger discussion about how disability services can evolve and learn from one another. Even though my experiences have been challenging, I am more fortunate than others due to the colour of my skin and my family's socio-economic status. Equally important in my continued success is the good fortune I have had in accessing effective advocacy early in my life and in my post-secondary academic career. More specifically, because I had a positive experience as an undergraduate, I knew that my negative experience in graduate school was not "normal".

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