6-11-2015

Accessibility in Teaching Assistant Training: A Critical Review of Programming from Ontario's Teaching and Learning Centres

Marie Vander Kloet
marie.vander.kloet@gmail.com

Accessibility in Teaching Assistant Training: A Critical Review of Programming from Ontario's Teaching and Learning Centres

Abstract

It is increasingly understood that university education must be accessible to persons with disabilities. The responsibility to make the university accessible is arguably shared by all of us and yet, the extent to which it has become fully accessible is certainly suspect. By undertaking qualitative, discursive analysis of websites, online texts and other materials provided by Ontario's teaching and learning centres, this paper seeks to do two things. First, it provides a critical overview of the types of training currently available at Ontario universities for teaching assistants on accessibility and teaching. This review will outline initiatives directed towards compliance with Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) requirements, those focused on education and advocacy (as well as areas of overlap) and broader equity training which encompasses accessibility. Second, this paper, considering the content of the reviewed material and informed by critical disability studies, offers up an articulation of future directions for research, writing, advocacy, and training on teaching assistant development on accessible teaching.

Il est de plus en plus accepté que l'éducation universitaire doit être accessible aux personnes handicapées. Certes, la responsabilité de rendre l'université accessible est partagée par tous et pourtant, la mesure dans laquelle celle-ci est devenue totalement accessible est sans nul doute suspecte. Après avoir entrepris des analyses qualitatives et discursives de sites web, de textes en ligne et d'autres documents fournis par des centres d'enseignement et d'apprentissage de l'Ontario, on cherche dans cet article à accomplir deux choses. Tout d'abord, l'article présente un aperçu critique des types de formation disponibles à l'heure actuelle dans les universités de l'Ontario à l'intention des enseignants auxiliaires sur l'accessibilité et l'enseignement. Cet examen va décrire les initiatives mises en place en vue de répondre aux exigences de la Loi sur l'accessibilité pour les Ontariens handicapés, ainsi que celles qui se concentrent sur l'éducation et la promotion des intérêts (et sur des domaines qui se chevauchent) et celles qui se rapportent à une formation plus vaste sur l'équité qui englobe l'accessibilité. Ensuite, prenant en considération le contenu des documents examinés et des études critiques sur la situation des personnes handicapées, l'article offre des propositions de directions futures pour la recherche, la rédaction, la promotion des intérêts et la formation en vue du développement professionnel des enseignants auxiliaires en matière d'enseignement accessible.

At this moment, there are a number of popular phrases used at universities in Ontario and Canada broadly and in educational development specifically. In earnest, we discuss "learning and teaching" and "scholarly teaching." Hopefully, programs and practices are described as "innovative" and teaching and learning centres as sites for fostering teaching "excellence." Less frequently, words such as "accessible" and "equitable" are included in our vernacular for describing our work, practices or politics. And yet, in Ontario, universities and their teaching and learning centres are acutely aware of the need for their services to be accessible as a result of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act[1] (AODA, 2005). What I investigate in this paper is how and in what ways, teaching and learning centres foster accessibility through the training of teaching assistants, and subsequently, to what extent teaching and learning cultures can be described as accessible.

Presently, there are 21 public, degree-granting universities in Ontario, Canada. Nearly all institutions have teaching and learning centres. These centralized units are staffed by academic and professional staff and offer services which may include: educational development (for faculty, graduate students, teaching assistants, and other instructional staff); learning technology support and development; support for, or undertaking of, the scholarship of teaching and learning; blended/online/open learning support; professional development; quality assurance; and formal education (in the way of credit courses for graduate students).[2] Teaching and learning centres, although often discussed as marginalized on university campuses, frequently aspire to be leaders in scholarly teaching (for more detailed discussion of the history and roles of teaching and learning centres see Chiaramonte, 2012; Grabove et al., 2012). Given the growth in the number of teaching and learning centres, their frequently centralized role on university campuses and their goals of influencing teaching and learning on Ontario university campuses, these centres offer an interesting position through which to examine accessibility, as it relates to teaching development.

Accessibility/Disability/Normalcy

The Ontario Ministry of Community and Social Services (2012) defines accessibility as "giving people of all abilities opportunities to participate fully in everyday life" (para 4). This definition suggests that there is someone or something that is, perhaps generously, providing accessibility. Alternately, Hirji-Khalfan and Rossi (2012) frames accessibility as "a process. It is the proactive identification, removal and prevention of barriers that prohibit full access" (Slide 8). For Hirji-Khalfan and Rossi, it is necessary to work continuously towards accessibility. Their definition can be understood alongside how Titchkosky (2007) conceptualizes disability: she describes disability as "a process of meaning-making" (p. 12). Titchkosky (2007) is eager to

---

[1] The AODA is legislation passed in Ontario, Canada aimed at ensuring accessibility standards are met in five core areas by 2025. The five accessibility standards are: Customer Service Standard, Information and Communications Standard, Employment Standard, Transportation Standard and Built Environment Standard. More details about the accessibility standards can be found on the Ministry of Community and Social Services webpage (http://www.mcss.gov.on.ca/en/mcss/programs/accessibility/index.aspx#)

[2] The exception is the Royal Military College of Canada (RMCC), located in Kingston, Ontario. The RMCC is a degree granting institution for military officers in the Canadian Armed Forces; it does not have a teaching and learning centre although faculty occasionally access the services of neighbouring Kingston institution Queen's University (A. Chapnick, personal correspondence, April 8, 2013). Additionally, there are a small number of privately funded and operated, religious, degree-granting universities in Ontario; these institutions were not included in this research. (See Appendix)

abandon the desire to simplify disability into "a definable objectified *thing*" (p. 12). For both Titchkosky (2007) and Hirji-Khalfan and Rossi (2012), what disability and accessibility mean and how they are enacted is constantly in flux – they will be negotiated, challenged, (re)written and shift with time and place.

Both accessibility and disability discursively invoke the presumption of normalcy. Critical disability studies scholars challenge the presumption that there is a "normal" student, citizen or teacher – insisting that "normal" is a code for non-disabled, white, male, heterosexual, and middle class (Withers, 2012). Advocates posit that accessibility initiatives in higher education are not solely for students with disabilities but that, in large part, this shift toward accessibility benefits all students (and perhaps to some extent faculty and staff). This challenge to the idea of "normal" teaching and learning in higher education and "normal" students shares similarities with feminist, anti-racist and queer theory and activism that have worked to unseat the illusion that white, heterosexual, male, middle class, and non-disabled are normal and that queer, female, poor and working class, disabled, and racialized are unusual, rare or "special interest" (Davies, 2000; Dyer, 1997; Fellows & Razack, 1998; Mohanram, 1999; Razack, 1998). The challenge to normalcy is important – it signals that work towards accessibility in higher education is both a pedagogical and political project.

Investigating "Accessibility"

This paper is assembled into two sections. First, I provide an overview of the types of programming or resources currently available at Ontario universities through teaching and learning centres for teaching assistants[3] on accessibility and teaching. This review outlines initiatives directed towards compliance with the AODA and those focused on education and advocacy (as well as areas of overlap). This overview highlights the scope and scale of available training for teaching assistants. Importantly, this paper does not provide comparative analysis of programming suggesting that some centres are excelling where others are failing. I have deliberately avoided providing a line-by-line description of what each institution does and/or a ranking of methods – the rationale for this is two-fold. Universities, depending on their size and relative wealth, have fundamentally different operating budgets. Similarly, teaching and learning centres are not equivalently funded – thus the opportunity to develop particular resources will be uneven. Moreover, I wish to avoid generating a list of "best practices" which will rely on definitions of accessibility and disability staying fixed in place – a practice which disability studies scholars challenge and critique (Titchkosky, 2007; Withers, 2012).

Second, I endeavour to read teaching and learning centres programming alongside scholarship from critical disability studies, broader equity studies scholarship and critical pedagogy in order to consider the consequences – both pragmatic and epistemological – of our work on accessibility in teaching assistant training. Critical disability studies, long concerned with how disability is constructed, the impacts of ableism and advocating for accessibility,[4]

---

[3] Use of the term "teaching assistants" can be tricky; teaching assistants undertake a wide variety of types of work including but not limited to marking, leading labs and tutorials, supervising field trips, lecturing, facilitating online discussions, and proctoring exams. Teaching assistants are often, but not exclusively, students at universities. Teaching assistants who are students may be graduate or undergraduate students. I use the term teaching assistant to encompass this broad and varied population of education workers.

[4] For a succinct overview of disability movements and models that have shaped disability studies in Canada, consult Withers' (2012) *Disability Politics and Theory*.

informs my review of teaching assistant programming. This approach offers an opportunity to bring together critical disability studies with the scholarship of teaching and learning – opening up avenues for theoretical and pragmatic consideration.

To gain an understanding of teaching assistant programming focused on accessibility, I reviewed teaching and learning centre websites from Ontario universities. Specifically, I looked for supports directed to teaching assistants and supports where teaching assistants are specifically identified as being able to access particular programmes or resources. For example, a workshop series open to faculty and teaching assistants would be included, as would online tip sheets that are not directed towards specific teachers. Within this programming, I noted supports that explicitly focus on accessibility, universal instructional design and accommodations for persons with disabilities. Finally, I reviewed programming which addresses equity, diversity and inclusion with specific reference to relations of difference (gender, race, class, sexuality, dis/ability). Programming which referenced learning styles, general classroom management, etiquette or civility was not included.

As websites often neglect to effectively detail all of a centre's programming, I contacted staff members at each teaching and learning centre to seek clarification about the accuracy of online representation of their programming. More than half of the institutions responded with follow up information. After gathering this information, I closely reviewed this programming to better understand how and in what ways teaching and learning centres frame accessibility and disability noting patterns and unique examples.

All analysis undertaken is qualitative and informed by discursive analytical methods. Specifically, I draw from poststructural, feminist and cultural studies methods and techniques that attend to how particular truths are told or how discourses come to be understood as true. Drawing on scholars such as Foucault (1990, 1994, 2003), Hall (1997), and Davies (2000) and considering the work of methodologists such as Kendall and Wickham (1999) and Rose (2001), I read these texts as sites where meaning is produced. The purpose is not to understand the intention of the authors and the experiences of readers – this would be best undertaken through interviews or other methods. Rather, like Titchkosky (2007), Hall (1997), Berger (1972), and Foucault (1990, 1994, 2003), I approach texts as important sites of meaning making – sites through which we can see a partial view into how the meaning of accessibility is produced in teaching and learning centres. Excitingly, critical research employing diverse methods, including interviews, around questions of accessibility in universities in Ontario is being generated (Marquis et al., 2013); my intention is to complement and contribute to a growing, and theoretically and methodologically varied scholarship of teaching and learning on accessibility, equity, and inclusion.

Undertaking this research is very much connected to my work in educational development and teaching assistant training in Ontario teaching and learning centres. I wrestle with many of the questions and challenges that arise in this research – noting gaps in my own practice and struggling with the complex process of creating accessible teaching and learning cultures. I am not able or interested in being a distant investigator in this research project. Specifically, I conceive of this analysis on accessibility in teaching assistant programming as intermeshed with my teaching and educational philosophies and commitments which include more inclusive and accessible university education and challenging the normalization and entrenchment of neoliberal discourses in higher education (Davies & Bansel, 2010; Giroux, 2012; Saunders, 2010).

Our Work on Accessibility: How Different Are We?

Teaching and learning centres across Ontario bear remarkable similarities to one another in terms of teaching assistant programming – while there is variance, reviewing this material revealed much more its uniformity than its differences. Centres commonly offer workshop series, graduate courses (credit and/or with transcript notation), certificates in teaching, dossier review, training days, teaching conferences, online resources, teaching observations, and peer networks or mentoring. Less common are programs for international teaching assistants and opportunities for pedagogical research.

Workshops

Workshops are a staple of teaching and learning centres; it is unsurprising that this is the most commonly offered type of teaching assistant programming focused on accessibility. Workshops typically take three forms. First, an in-person workshop is offered by the teaching and learning centre but is most often facilitated by staff from a "human rights / equity office" and/or through an "accessibility for students centre." These workshops typically outline features of the AODA (history, accessibility standards, university requirements), clarify terminology (accessibility, accommodations, persons with disabilities), describe common barriers for students with disabilities (typically disabilities related to mobility, hearing or vision, learning disabilities, and mental health/psychiatric disabilities), outline accommodation procedures used, and, occasionally, discussion of removal of barriers (perhaps through universal instructional design) and fostering of accessibility.

A second type of workshop that is offered at some institutions is focused on inclusion, equity, power or diversity – frequently in reference to "the classroom." For example, workshops might be entitled "Creating an Inclusive Classroom" or "Diversity in the Classroom." These workshops are also often facilitated by a "human rights / equity office" staff member and occasionally by a faculty member whose own teaching is informed in critical pedagogy. There exists a range of foci with regard to these workshops – some explicitly address homophobia, racism, sexism or ableism in education while others are focused on creating "safe" spaces for students in classrooms. Rare but notable are more extensive, day long events/sets of workshops focused on equity in education from a wide variety of perspectives and involving staff from teaching and learning centres, faculty members, teaching assistants, students and community members (see Mighty, Irwin, & Sparling, 2005).

Finally, there are online workshops or modules focused on AODA compliance. These are typically intended for many types of staff at universities, including teaching assistants, and focus on compliance with the customer service accessibility standard of the AODA. These workshops typically include limited reference to broader relations of difference or to power and typically include only cursory reference to teaching practices for either faculty or teaching assistants. Online workshops may include informative slides or videos, following by multiple choice questions or quizzes.

Links and Online Resources

Teaching and learning centres regularly gather information for their audiences including teaching assistants. Resources are typically organized thematically (e.g., student engagement, assessment, learning outcomes, accessibility) and include links to institution specific resources, scholarly or professional publications, resources from other universities or materials developed by centre staff. Usually, although not uniformly, midsize and larger universities' teaching and learning centres tend to have larger, more detailed online resources assembled for teaching assistant and faculty use.

Links to accessibility and teaching resources, even amongst large collections of online resources, tend to be focused on a few specific areas. Most commonly, links were provided to campus services for students with disabilities and to AODA legislation; these are typically not teaching resources but either general information or information directed towards students.[5] Some institutions include resources such as tip sheets on accessibility with suggestions on how to improve the accessibility of teaching practices (e.g., designing assessments, classroom instruction, communication with students); tip sheets like this were typically coupled with links to resources on universal instructional design or universal design. Many institutions also regularly include links to both publications and instructional guides on universal instructional design. The Council of Ontario Universities (2013) has generated a toolkit for faculty members designed to help improve accessibility for students – this is a commonly linked resource.[6]

One area of note is the extent to which links to materials from the United States of America and the United Kingdom are included. These resources, as they are published in English and may be from well-known institutions, may be perceived as useful or credible to Anglophone faculty and teaching assistants. However, disability politics and legislation differs between Canada, the USA, and the UK. While some materials may be helpful – how and in what ways they can be used to respond to place-specific needs, such as accessibility requirements for online materials are limited. Further, their inclusion can risk flattening out the divergent understandings of disability and accessibility that exists between Canada more broadly, and Ontario specifically, and other nations.

Embedded Accessibility Resources / Accessibility as Organizing Principle

In reviewing programming, I examined materials which may not have explicitly signaled their focus on accessibility or equity/inclusion. It was not uncommon for broader resources, such as guidebooks for teaching assistants, courses for graduate students on university teaching and teaching certificate programs to include reference to accessibility. This typically takes the form of explaining the role of accessibility services for students on campus including the process to follow for accommodations, providing links to this type of student service or including accessibility statements (in course outlines). Less common were explicit expectations of teaching assistants to become aware of and work to ensure accessibility in their class or in their teaching

---

[5] It should be noted that some campus service units for students with disabilities also provide pamphlets for faculty; these are typically oriented towards explaining accommodations procedures and broadly outlining how students with particular disabilities may experience barriers (i.e., related to mobility, learning disabilities)

[6] Council of Ontario Universities (2013) Accessibility Toolkit (http://www.cou.on.ca/policy-advocacy/accessibility/educators--accessibility-resource-kit/pdfs-(1)/general-tools,-educators--accessibility-resource-k)

practices. For example, in a teaching certificate offered through a teaching and learning centre, one area of competence was "inclusion/equity"; participants had to identify how specifically they had developed this competency.[7]

Consideration of what it means to teach accessibly, for some centres, is conceived as an orienting practice or politic wherein accessibility must be central to all aspects of their programming. This is less common, but encouraging. This is typically manifest in having accessibility factor into many components of programming, including workshops or guides aimed at compliance with the AODA, but which spills into guidebooks, course design, workshops, and materials. Reference to universal instructional design is frequent and its implementation is expected of teaching assistants and faculty alike. Later on in this paper, I develop a series of suggestions on how to foster accessibility through teaching and learning centres – some of the examples I provide are drawn from centres with this orienting vision and approach.

A challenge with reviewing online materials is that it can be difficult to ascertain how facilitators/instructors frame accessibility aloud in workshops/classes and while accessibility may not be addressed in texts it may be taken up in other ways. This is a limitation of textual research. While I have worked to redress this by explicitly asking staff members about whether or not their online materials effectively represent training for teaching assistants on accessibility, this interaction can only provide partial additional insight. While this limitation is noted, texts are integral in shaping the meanings of accessibility (and disability) (Titchkosky, 2007). Moreover, the purpose of this paper is not to conclusively argue what precisely this training or lack thereof does or to argue what the authors of these materials intend. Rather, my intention is review the textual representation of the scope and scale of existing programming. From this overview, I bring forward three questions about the programming to begin to unpack and explore what possible impacts teaching and learning centres have in shaping accessibility in higher education.

1. Who is the subject of teaching assistant programming?
2. What is the impact of the AODA on how teaching and learning centres approach training teaching assistants on accessibility?
3. Are we making accommodations for accessibility in our programming or are we building accessible teaching and learning cultures?

The Non-disabled Teaching Assistant[8]

Texts do important work in shaping how we can come to understand particular subjects (Mills, 2004; Rose, 1999; Titchkosky, 2007). Texts produce particular subjects and shape our understandings of what and who is presumed to be normal and desirable (see, for example, Rose, 1999 on citizen subjects). Teaching and learning centres' texts produce a teaching assistant

---

[7] Instructional Development Centre, Lakehead University: As a component of the Graduate Student Teaching Practicum, participants must demonstrate knowledge in set core areas including "Human Rights and Equity Issues in Teaching."

[8] I use the term non-disabled here deliberately rather than able-bodied for two reasons. Able-bodied highlights physical disability linguistically blotting out disabilities tied to 'the mind' (a Cartesian distinction that begs for examination). Moreover, disability and ability are understood as binary oppositions with disabled and non-disabled people positioned as separate groups; while the demarcation is contested (Withers & Shildrick as cited in Withers, 2012, p. 7), the language connects with how we think about disability and thus I employ it here.

subject – that is, the subject we imagine, both consciously and unconsciously, to the user of our services.

One of the omissions of teaching assistant programming is the possibility that teaching assistants may identify as persons with disabilities and may face barriers in how they will teach and learn. The presumption of nearly all programming and resources is that accessibility refers to access to university by students.[9] Likewise, accommodations are made for students to overcome barriers to learning. Little attention is paid to the extent to which teaching assistants are also students and that they may face barriers to access to education and to finding and undertaking paid work. Teaching assistants' ability to access work is an important point of consideration. In meeting AODA accessibility standards, teaching and learning centres' resources tend to focus on meeting the 'customer service standard' with less attention paid to other standards, including employment.

Reviewing the programming for teaching assistants, I wondered what, if any, steps are being taken to improve accessibility for teachers in higher education or what examples exist of accommodations provided for teachers. It is curious that teaching and learning centres do not include, in resource lists, information about workplace accommodations that teaching assistants can seek as employees of the university. I anticipate that this is likely due to the very limited resources available for both teaching assistants and faculty to overcome barriers to teaching. Moreover, ableism[10] shapes whether teaching assistants and faculty will feel welcome to pursue needed accommodations and will impact the extent to which improved accessibility to higher education, for students, teaching assistants and faculty members is perceived as either necessary or desirable.

There are some instances in teaching assistant programming when the production of teaching assistants as non-disabled is disrupted. For example, course syllabi for graduate courses on teaching occasionally include statements on accessibility. These statements may be included to follow institutional guidelines and to model "good teaching." They also introduce the possibility that those in the class, current teaching assistants and future faculty, may require accommodations. Similarly, a reference from one institution in a teaching assistant guidebook to accessibility services as a resource that is available to teaching assistants themselves (if they are students) dismantles the fantasy of the non-disabled teaching assistant.[11]

If we presume the teaching assistant to be non-disabled, this will shape how we frame our programming. This practice obscures who will easily be able to take up the role of the organized, creative, approachable, dynamic and scholarly teacher (see Vander Kloet & Chugh, 2012). Our programming suggests that there is a "normal" teaching assistant – this risks flattening out differences between teaching assistants and limits the extent to which teaching and learning centres can effectively support teaching assistants in their professional and pedagogical development. What is at stake here is whether teaching and learning centres and the culture of

---

[9] Many, but not all, teaching assistants are also graduate and undergraduate students. However, in materials from teaching and learning centres, teaching assistants are sometimes framed as a distinct group from students. This representation is likely tied to labour relations between unions (representing teaching assistants) and universities; wherein teaching assistants are often artificially framed as workers rather than students. Although not all teaching assistants at Ontario universities are unionized – the framing of teaching assistants as employees, rather than students, of the university persists.

[10] Withers (2012) describes ableism as "oppression because of disability" (p. 8).

[11] See. Fox, J. P. (2012). This orientation package discusses how teaching assistants might seek accommodations themselves for their work.

scholarly teaching in which they are embedded can be described as accessible. It is challenging to begin to consider the extent to which our own services are accessible even as we work to provide more resources, programming, and support for teaching assistants to strengthen accessibility in Ontario universities for students (other than themselves).

Accessibility Workshops or Accessible Teaching and Learning Cultures[12]

Reviewing teaching assistant programming illustrates what could be framed as a division in approaches to accessibility. For some centres, accessibility and universal instructional design are embedded across various types of programming (in guidebooks, workshops, courses, conferences, etc.). It is woven into text – and possibly by extension practice and culture. Contrastingly, many centres offer single workshops on accessibility, or more accurately on accommodations for students with disabilities. These contrasting approaches may reflect differing perspectives on how accessibility figures into educational development more broadly and/or disparate amounts of funding available to teaching and learning centres.

Stand alone workshops risk producing accessibility as something that is added to normal teaching assistant training. In this vein, accessibility becomes an addition tacked onto the edges of what is considered core to educational development. In the stand-alone workshop approach, accessibility then becomes a complement or add-on to existing programming without raising any fundamental questions about how broader teaching assistant training is conceptualized. In contrast, teaching assistant training that presumes and values difference amongst students, and amongst teaching assistants can shift what is understood to be normal in higher education.

Consideration of how teaching and learning centres approach teaching assistant development prompts a complex question – What barriers exist to teaching and learning centre cultures? On one hand, it is possible to read accessibility workshops as necessary accommodations for potentially inaccessible teaching and learning cultures – but this seems too simplistic or at least not uniformly applicable given that some centres are working towards integrating accessibility as an organizing vision or politic. There remain questions we may need to consider in terms of the extent to which teaching assistant programming and educational development are accessible. Reviewing the material spurred me to consider what accessible teaching and learning cultures would take into consideration. First, does our programming set out inaccessible definitions of strong, good or scholarly teaching? Who will be able to take up and embody our vision of "good teaching"? Second, are we cognizant of barriers faced regularly by students and faculty to accessing education and work in higher education? What steps are we taking to eradicate barriers through our work? Third, are teaching and learning centres accessible workplaces? Are persons with disabilities well represented amongst staff and faculty who work within them? For temporary positions in teaching and learning centres frequently taken up by students and teaching assistants, is it probable that persons with disabilities will be hired for these positions? Fourth, what literature do we draw on when we discuss accessibility? What theoretical and pragmatic contributions have we made to the scholarship of teaching and learning in terms of accessibility and ableism? And finally, how do we assess the extent to which we have created accessible teaching and learning cultures? What outcomes do we envision?

---

[12] Accessible teaching and learning cultures refers to the extent to which teaching and learning centre cultures – that is the norms, values, practices, spaces, texts, experiences, discourses and participants that comprise teaching and learning centres – are accessible.

The AODA: Audit Culture and Accessibility

Curiously, this research has brought up the anxieties and performances typical of audit culture. Scholars, concerned with the reach of neoliberal imperatives into higher education, have documented the impact of audit culture on faculty and staff – noting intensified workloads, the requirement to carefully manage oneself as a responsible worker, concern with demonstrating productivity and the erosion of broader critical questioning of the purpose and meaning of higher education (Bansel, 2007; Bansel & Davies, 2005; Davies & Bansel, 2010; Giroux, 2012; Saunders, 2010). In contacting staff at teaching and learning centres, I believe I have inadvertently tripped an "audit culture" wire – wherein staff quickly came to perform the part of AODA compliant workers. Interestingly, although in my emails to staff I made no mention of AODA compliance – one of the first responses I typically heard from my colleagues was with regard to how and in what ways their particular centre or institution was addressing AODA requirements. Resoundingly, our voices appear to chime "we are compliant!"

Our focus on adherence with the AODA is not to be chided as unessential but it does raise questions about the impact of this approach to accessibility work. Allan (2012), in her work on teacher education, argues that:

> [t]he role of the teacher educator, and the academic within universities more generally, has become increasingly constrained by the 'audit culture'...[w]hat they write, and for whom, is more closely circumscribed than ever before, and the pressure to demonstrate 'impact', whatever that may be, limits their capacity to have any real influence on communities and on their values (p. 13).

Her point is noteworthy for educational developers working with teaching assistants. If our attention is squared on compliance with AODA requirements, what do we foreclose? What questions do we neglect to ask? What opportunities do we forgo? Moreover, how compelling is our pedagogical programming on accessibility if the rationale is only that it is required.

The AODA accessibility standard that most teaching and learning centre programming is directed towards is the "customer service standard."[13] Slotting education into customer service is congruent with neoliberal framings of the student as consumer of education. In this line of thinking, teaching assistants are the customers of our services, students are consumers of education and we are customer service representatives at teaching and learning centres – and we have an obligation to meet customer needs. In our desire to be compliant with AODA regulations – a desire that may emerge from the goal of challenging ableism and transforming higher education – our work can serve to entrench the belief that our primary identifications are as consumers, a central tenet of the logic of neoliberalism (Miller & Rose, 1997; Rose, 1999). Although beyond the scope of this paper, the insertion of consumerist logic into education has serious influence on the lives of students and teachers alike both within and beyond the confines of their time with the academy (for critical work on capitalism, consumption and higher education see Giroux, 2012; Saunders, 2010).

The goal of compliance is limited and limiting – can we assemble more expansive visionary outcomes for our programming with regard to accessibility and equity? To settle for compliance feels lacklustre. And yet, working towards compliance is entirely congruent with the

---

[13] To a lesser extent, Informations and Communications, is also addressed by a small number of centres – and typically focused primarily on producing accessible documents (PDFs, Word, and PowerPoint).

audit culture within which we are embedded. It does force us to ask – do we work to prove we are compliant with accessibility standards set out in the AODA for fear that we will be inaccessible or for fear that we will be chastised for failing to be accessible? Does the greatest area of concern lie with the creation of inaccessible teaching assistant programming and cultures of ableism in higher education or with being named as unproductive, unworthy educational developers who have failed in that which we suspect we ought to have succeeded?

Collections and Suggestions: Fostering Accessibility

Educational developers are frequently asked to funnel research into "best practices" – a process that can be rewarding, challenging and frustrating simultaneously. I am reluctant to suggest "best practices" and yet, I know that they are frequently sought. Here, I offer instead collections of practices and ideas drawn from various institutions and suggestions for ways to move accessibility into our purview.

Be Explicit

Teaching and learning centres frequently structure their programming on the basis of their identified mission statements, goals or, increasingly, intended outcomes. To foster accessibility it could emerge in statements about the purpose of teaching and learning centres – it might be identified as an orienting belief or practice. Its absence in these texts will impact the extent to which programming will shift and in what ways staff and faculty working within centres will be challenged to and rewarded for take up of accessibility work.

Work from Within

A central barrier to accessibility in higher education is the attitudes or ableist beliefs held by students, staff and faculty about persons with disabilities. It is, at best, inaccurate to presume that teaching and learning centre staff are not participants in ableism. Explicit training and opportunities for discussion for staff at teaching and learning centres on accessibility (and barriers to access), accommodations, and ableism is key to bringing about cultural change. Addressing our own prejudices and misconceptions is a core process for shifting institutional thinking; it will help to provide staff with language, practices and information to understand and identify barriers to accessibility more readily. Moreover, staff need time and support to learn to build accessible materials (online content, workshop materials), to read about and understand universal instructional design and to revise established resources and programming. Support is vital to making change in practice and materials possible.

Build Connections

Already, many centres have clearly begun to foster relationships with other services on campus which work to improve accessibility on campuses (e.g., human rights offices, student accessibility services). It is commonplace for workshops for teaching assistants to be led, entirely or in part, by staff from these centres. Contributing to shifts in thinking about accessibility in higher education is challenging work – and often workers in these areas experience considerable resistance across campuses. Teaching and learning centres can be important institutional allies by

offering support to colleagues working on accessibility and learning from their work. Teaching and learning centres, human rights/equity offices, and accessibility services share the complex task of shifting the attitudes and practices of teaching assistants, faculty, staff and students – and, when it comes to combating ableism in the academy, they undertake an important shared project. Importantly, these various centres often experience fatigue with the slowness of institutional change and frustration with entrenched beliefs and practices. Finding and lending support is imperative for continued work to foster social change.

Be Specific

One of the challenges for teaching and learning centres is to provide resources for an extensive number of teaching areas with limited human and material resources. Frequently, links and online resources are drawn on to meet this gap. What accessibility means is and how disability is understood is hugely varied. Time and place specific resources and research are valuable and can be most relevant. A central task for teaching and learning centres is decoding for scholars and students from outside Ontario both what accessibility is and why we work towards it (from legal, socio-political or pedagogical perspectives).

Representation

How might we frame our training for teaching assistants on accessibility in ways to envision a scope beyond accommodations for students? This will entail textual as well as ideological or political shifts. Texts will need to write teaching assistants in as diverse subjects actively seeking to disrupt the presumption of white, male, non-disabled, middle class and straight as normative. Moreover, it is pertinent to consider if diverse representation amongst teaching and learning centre staff is key to fostering accessible teaching and learning cultures. If we were to presume yes, we must further consider what barriers exist to working in teaching and learning centres and how we might foster inclusion in our workplaces.

Take a Position

One of the most dangerous and potentially destructive approaches teaching and learning centres might take with regard to accessibility is to attempt or pursue neutrality. Claiming neutrality is a common, yet troubling approach for educational development; scholars have rightly called for alternate ideological imagining of our work (Holmes, Manathunga, Potter, & Wuetherick, 2012; Land, 2004; Manathunga, 2006; Wuetherick & Ewert-Bauer, 2012). With regard to accessibility – the consequences of claiming neutrality in our work are frightening. If we do not refute a teaching assistant's assumption that accommodations are unnecessary for students with disabilities, or if we fail to plan for accessibility in our programming (resting on the the assumption that if needed, accommodations will be asked for), we erode the work others have undertaken to improve accessibility in higher education. We fracture relationships with groups on campus. We corrode the spirit of the AODA.

For teaching and learning centres, leadership must entail having principles (which will be varied, perhaps even seemingly contradictory at times). If we make no assertions or claims about our politics and practices, unquestionably, there are others who will mark up the terrain of higher

education. To do nothing is to guarantee ableism a place in the academy. We must, with earnest and with principle, work for accessibility.

References

Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act/AODA (2005). *Revised statutes of Canada* (c. 33). Retrieved from http://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/05a11

Allan, J. (2012). The inclusive teacher educator: Space for civic engagement. In. A. Hickey-Moody & V. Crowley (Eds.), *Disability matters: Pedagogy, media, and affect* (pp. 12-23). New York: Routledge.

Bansel, P. (2007). Subjects of choice and lifelong learning. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 20*(3), 283-300. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09518390701281884

Bansel, P., & Davies, B. (2005). The time of their lives? Academic workers in neoliberal times(s). *Health Sociology Review, 12*(1), 47-58.

Berger, J. (1972). *Ways of seeing*. London: Penguin.

Chiaramonte, P. (2012). *The institutional demarginalization of educational development centres in Ontario universities: Historical and theoretical antecedents for organizational leadership.* Unpublished manuscript, Adler School of Professional Studies, Toronto, Ontario.

Council of Ontario Universities. (2013). *Accessibility toolkit.* Retrieved from http://www.cou.on.ca/policy-advocacy/accessibility/educators--accessibility-resource-kit/pdfs-(1)/general-tools,-educators--accessibility-resource-k

Davies, B. (2000). *A body of writing 1990-1999*. Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira Press.

Davies, B., & Bansel, P. (2010). Governmentality and academic work: Shaping the hearts and minds of academic workers. *Journal of Curriculum Theorizing, 26*(3), 5-20.

Dyer, R. (1997). *White: Essays on race and culture*. London & New York: Routledge.

Fellows, M. L., & Razack, S. (1998). The race to innocence: Confronting hierarchical relations among women. *The Journal of Gender, Race and Justice, 1*, 335-352.

Foucault, M. (1990). *The history of sexuality. Volume 2: The use of pleasure.* New York: Vintage Books.

Foucault, M. (1994). Questions of method. In P. Rabinow & N. Rose (Eds.), *The essential Foucault: Selections from essential works of Foucault, 1954-1984* (pp. 246-258). New York: The New Press.

Foucault, M. (2003). On the genealogy of ethics: An overview of a work in progress. In P. Rabinow & N. Rose (Eds.), *The essential Foucault: Selections from essential works of Foucault, 1954-1984* (pp. 102-125). New York: The New Press.

Fox, J. P. (2012). *TA/GA orientation, getting started! September 2012 information package.* The Learning and Teaching Office, Ryerson University. Toronto, Ontario. Retrieved from http://www.ryerson.ca/content/dam/lt/taga/resources/Info_Package_TAGA_Orientation.pdf

Giroux, H. (2012). *Education and the crisis of public values: Challenging the assault on teachers, students, and public education*. New York: Peter Lang.

Grabove, V., Kustra, E., Lopes, V., Potter, M. K., Wiggers, R., & Woodhouse, R. (2012). *Teaching and learning centres: Their evolving role within Ontario colleges and universities*. Toronto, ON: Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario.

Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural representations and signifying practices*. London: Sage.

Hirji-Khalfan, R., & Rossi, V. (2012, October 31). *Accessibility 101*. Presentation in the Human Rights, Equity, Accessibility, Respect Toolkit workshop series at McMaster University. Hamilton, Ontario.

Holmes, T., Manathunga, C., Potter, M., & Wuetherick, B. (2012). The impossibilities of neutrality: Other political metaphors for academic development units. *International Journal for Academic Development, 17*(3), 197-202. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2012.701087

Kendall, G., & Wickham, G. (1999). *Using Foucault's methods*. London: Sage. http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9780857020239

Land, R. (2004). *Educational development: Discourse, identity and practice*. Berkshire: Open University Press.

Manathunga, C. (2006). Doing educational development ambivalently: Applying post-colonial metaphors to educational development? *International Journal for Academic Development, 11*(1), 19-29. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13601440600578771

Marquis, E., Jung, B., Fudge-Schormans, A., Vajoczki, S., Wilton, R., Baptiste, S., & Joshi, A. (2012). Creating, resisting or neglecting change: Exploring the complexities of accessible education for students with disabilities. *The Canadian Journal for the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, 3*(2), 1-18. http://dx.doi.org/10.5206/cjsotl-rcacea.2012.2.2

Mighty, J., Irwin, R., & Sparling, H. (2005). *As if equity mattered: The difference difference makes: Highlights from the 16th annual cross-faculty teaching forum.* Centre for Teaching and Learning, Queen's University. Kingston, Ontario. Retrieved from http://www.queensu.ca/ctl/resources/publications/equitymatter.html

Miller, P., & Rose, N. (1997). Mobilizing the consumer: Assembling the subject of consumption. *Theory, Culture and Society, 14*(1), 1-36. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/026327697014001001

Mills, S. (2004). *Discourse*. New York: Routledge.

Ministry of Community and Social Services. (2012). *Understanding accessibility*. Retrieved from http://www.mcss.gov.on.ca/en/mcss/programs/accessibility/understanding_accessibility/index.aspx

Mohanram, R. (1999). *Black body: Women, colonialism and space.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Razack, S. (1998). *Looking white people in the eye: Gender, race and culture in courtrooms and classrooms.* Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Rose, G. (2001). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to the interpretation of visual materials*. London: Sage.

Rose, N. (1999). *Governing the soul: The shaping of the private self* (2nd ed.). London: Free Association Books.

Saunders, D. N. (2010). Neoliberal ideology and public higher education in the United States. *Journal for Critical Education Policy, 8*(1), 42-77.

Titchkosky, T. (2007). *Reading and writing disability differently: The textures life of embodiment*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.

Vander Kloet, M. A., & Chugh, B. P. (2012). An interdisciplinary analysis of microteaching evaluation forms: How peer feedback forms shape what constitutes "good teaching". *Educational Research and Evaluation*, *18*(6), 597-612. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13803611.2012.704171

Withers, A. J. (2012). *Disability politics and theory*. Halifax, NS: Fernwood.

Wuetherick, B., & Ewert-Bauer, T. (2012). Perceptions of neutrality through a post-colonial lens: Institutional positioning in Canadian academic development. *International Journal for Academic Development*, *17*(3), 217-229. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/1360144X.2012.700896

Appendix

Ontario Universities and Teaching and Learning Centres

Algoma University, Sault St. Marie
Centre for Pedagogical Innovation, Brock University, St. Catharines
Educational Development Centre, Carleton University, Ottawa
Centre for Open Learning and Educational Support, University of Guelph, Guelph
Instructional Development Centre, Lakehead University, Thunder Bay
Laurentian University, Sudbury (Lougheed Teaching and Learning Centre of Excellence: Huntington University)
McMaster Institute for Innovation and Excellence in Teaching and Learning / Centre for Leadership in Learning, McMaster University, Hamilton
Centre for Flexible Teaching and Learning, Nipissing University, North Bay
Faculty and Curriculum Development Centre, OCAD University, Toronto
Centre for University Teaching, University of Ottawa, Ottawa
Centre for Teaching and Learning, Queen's University, Kingston
Royal Military College of Canada, Kingston
The Learning and Teaching Office, Ryerson University, Toronto
Centre for Teaching Support and Innovation, University of Toronto, Toronto
Instructional Development Centre, Trent University, Peterborough
Teaching and Learning Centre, University of Ontario Institute of Technology, Oshawa
Centre for Teaching Excellence, University of Waterloo, Waterloo
Teaching Support Centre, Western University, London
Office of Educational Development, Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo
Centre for Teaching and Learning, University of Windsor, Windsor
Teaching Commons, York University, Toronto