Introduction

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Accessibility Services (formerly the Special Needs Office) has been providing services to students with disabilities at Laurentian since 1989. The department has grown substantially since then. Accessibility Services now has approximately 450 students registered each year with disabilities ranging from mobility disabilities, vision and hearing impairments, medical conditions, learning disabilities and psychological/emotional issues. The role of Accessibility Services to provide supports and to remove barriers to access is mandated by the Ontario Human Rights Code as it relates to people with disabilities. This is the statement which you will find on Laurentian University's website.[1] The website also defines disability and describes the legal duty to accommodate that Laurentian University is bound to uphold.

These are, of course, the fundamental issues and concerns of disability. They speak to a legally bound duty to accommodate and point to legally defined descriptions of disability. When we began to discuss disability as a larger and more elusive concept, it became apparent that at Laurentian University at least, we had, as many universities had, included disability in some of our disciplines, particularly in the Humanities and Arts. Disability as a collective issue had been taken up as a site of oppression, injustice and unfair labour practices. Disability as an individual experience had been explored from many

[1]Laurentian University Accessibility Services ‹www.laurentian.ca/content/accessibility›

different and sometimes opposing perspectives and through the lens of various models of disability. The small group of us who first began to discuss a conference on disability issues saw it as an opportunity to provide a forum to open up the growing dialogue on disability issues. Although not all of the people who presented at the conference are represented in this collection, we think that the journal represents fairly many of the intriguing and emerging theories and perspectives on disability that were discussed at the conference. Another issue that often comes up for us is that of inclusion. Each of us looks at the broad category of Disability Issues from a particular standpoint. Barriers to social inclusion, some of which are tangible and some of which are attitudinal affect people quite differently, and these issues, about wheelchair ramps, about sexuality, about social roles and functioning, about autonomy and reliance on services, and about the intricate dance around and within various systems, can be spoken about also from various standpoints. In short, as we see it, there are no experts on disability issues but often one gains a unique perspective from one's personal lived experience.

We provide here a brief history of what has come to be known as Accessibility Services and start with the rich history that surrounds the hard fought battle to have the basic human rights of people living with disabilities legally recognized and enforced, within an academic institution and in the larger community. When we began discussing disability issues at Laurentian University, one of us was the Manager of Accessibility Services at Laurentian University and one of us was a Ph.D. student working occasionally for Accessibility Services. Our first ideas, as we began to discuss what could happen to make things better for students and staff with disabilities, as well as those interested in theoretical perspectives on disability issues, were grand and expansive. We envisioned an entire Disability Studies Centre with a focus on the inclusion of community organizations such as Independent Living

Sudbury Manitoulin and the wider Northern Ontario remote and rural communities, where access to services for people with disabilities is known to be difficult and hampered by many barriers. In some ways, it seemed, the Disability Rights movement had come so far in twenty years and in other ways the groups that Disability Rights had started with during the rights movements of the nineteen seventies and eightiess "had passed us with flying colours".

These groups, LGBTQ groups, black people and women had organized, mobilized and had been recognized at least to some extent. Despite the progress that has been made, many students, and indeed staff and faculty, face humiliation, embarrassment, curiosity, and sometimes hostility when they 'come out' particularly when they disclose that they have a mental, emotional or cognitive disability. Somewhere in the historical trajectory from there to here, from being institutionalized to being at least allowed and sometimes accommodated, the fault still seemed to be found in the individual, not in the environment.

It was not that Disability Rights were not legally accounted for; they were. The problem was that the legislation outlined in the *Ontario Human Rights Code*[2] 'had no teeth.' By the time we realized that our original dream of an entire Disability Studies Centre was a bit ambitious,

[2]The Ontario *Human Rights Code* (the *Code*) provides for equal rights and opportunities, and freedom from discrimination. The *Code* recognizes the dignity and worth of every person in Ontario. It applies to the areas of employment, housing, facilities and services, contracts, and membership in unions, trade or professional associations. At work, employees with disabilities are entitled to the same opportunities and benefits as people without disabilities. In some cases, they may need special arrangements or "accommodations" so they can do their job duties. Customers, clients and tenants with disabilities also have the right to equal treatment and equal access to facilities and services. Examples of facilities and services are restaurants, shops, hotels and movie theatres, as well as apartment buildings, transit and other public places. Public and private education providers must also make sure their facilities and services are accessible, and that students with disabilities are accommodated.

the word was out. We were not the first to speak openly of disability, of course, but by now everyone did want to talk about it and the idea of a conference was brought to one of our colleagues, who passionately took up the idea and got the ball rolling. One of the practical issues we wanted to talk about was disability and the law. We now take a step back to explain the history involved in getting basic rights for people with disabilities implemented at Ontario institutions, including Laurentian University.

Officially, all institutions in the public sector have a duty to be accessible to the public. Historically, 'the public' has not included people with disabilities. Institutions had been built to house, and by house we of course mean store people with mental, physical, and cognitive disabilities. With deinstitutionalization, people with disabilities were moved from institutions to communities. Some of the group homes and special homes had been built to accommodate people with disabilities, but now that people with disabilities were out in the public, malls, banks and movie theatres soon proved to be beyond the access of some people. With the implementation of the Ontarians with Disabilities Act every publicly funded institution had a responsibility to identify and remove barriers.

What was needed was real legislation to ensure and enforce compliance and this wasn't clear so groups lobbied the government to get the Ontarians with Disabilities Act (O.D.A.) turned into the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (A.O.D.A.). This is the big task of Laurentian University in the present moment of Disability Rights. Laurentian University's First International Conference on Disability Issues brought together many issues from many perspectives. Our colleagues from Ryerson spoke of Disability Rights history, and disabled people as people *in* their bodies, as sexual and social beings. Our colleagues from Laurentian spoke of educational and cognitive

issues and of society as a confining barrier, obsessed often with classifying human behaviour around a problem-solution or normal-deviant model. Our appearance in the Great Hall this February was hard won. The issues we are working with began to gain attention and some recognition 20 years ago, but people with disabilities have been cultivating this voice for a couple of centuries.

What we are working with now, the A.O.D.A. which was the O.D.A. came about after disability rights activists began lobbying the government at every event beginning about 16 years ago. They could no longer ignore the legal obligation to change the structure and the mindset of the environment; not an easy task. At the end of the day, people want to belong, and we don't mean in some simplistic or metaphorical sense, we mean they have to get there. There was lots of talk about the built environment but it was taking too long. The Human Rights Code, a precursor to both the O.D.A. and the A.O.D.A. was what activists and lobbyists fell back on. The Human Rights Code specified our rights but time and again, they were ignored. The conference provided at least a forum to begin to discuss these very real issues. We can't just keep talking about inclusion and then stalling on actual implications. The participants in the Disability Conference made it clear that it is time for Disability Issues to be taken seriously in our environment, in our attitudes and in our curriculum.

Summary of Chapters

In "The Normalizing Society and Disabilities," Martin Boucher studies the work of Ann Waldschmidt in relation to Foucault's normalizing society. He places the normalizing society within its historical context, describes what norms are and how they function in the normalizing society, and reflects on Waldschmidt's work regarding biopolitics, genetic counselling, and disabilities.

Moira Ferguson, in the second chapter entitled "Managed Detours: The Strategic Organization of Social Problems," adopts a phenomenological perspective to present the experiences of people with mental disorders. This brings her to discuss the survivor movement as well as the way chemical substance abusers and mental health consumers have come to be related in contemporary societies.

In "Classification Systems in Special Education: Social Justice or Just Social?," Sean Cousins explores the history of special education discourses situated within the concern of classification, and he critically examines those normative practices that are employed in the service of implementing such classification systems.

Jana Duncan's paper, "The Models of Disability and the Effect of a Child with Autism on the Family," presents a review of literature on autism and families. The author discusses the medical and social models of disability as well as recent arguments for combining or moving beyond these models in order to provide a better understanding of autism.

In the final chapter, "Raising a question mark: Disability and Textual Recalibration in Contemporary Canadian Writing," Angelo Muredda surveys a series of cultural representations of disability in Canadian literature. He uses these texts as points of departure into a discussion on how disability intersects with both aesthetic matters of form and more thematic explorations of filial responsibility in Canadian literature.