



Navigating careers and employment for folks with disabilities - some provocations from the Student Experience Research Team (SERT)

Prepared by the 2018-2019
Student Experience Research Team (SERT)
Emkay Adjei-Manu, Vanessa Henry, Matthew Tulloch,
Ryan Mawdsley, Zinab Bakroun, Alicia Churilla,
Tesni Ellis, John Hannah

Special Projects & Storytelling
Student Affairs
Ryerson University, Toronto, Ontario

April 2019

**“knowledge . . .
never arrives . . .
it is always on the brink”**

~ Lorri Neilsen



Preamble

The Student Experience Research Team (SERT) is a project of Ryerson Student Affairs, Storytelling, generously funded by Ryerson's Registrar's Office. The purpose of this project was to provide a meaningful research experience for Ryerson undergraduate students in the context of Student Affairs and its concerns. While working on our main project, an additional opportunity came to our attention related to the job-search and career exploration experience for students with disabilities, work being done by the Public Garage Project. This group connected with various stakeholders in Student Affairs at Ryerson for input, and the connection to SERT and its student-led approach to inquiry became mutually interesting.

We met subsequently with Aryeh Gitterman and his team conducting this research and were given the background of the project and its goals. Although limited in what we were able to provide by way of deep research, we did agree that, through a simple process of productive conversation that is the hallmark of SERT, we would be able to add something interesting to the story. The following is a very brief and preliminary capturing of what emanated from those conversations in three sections: our process, the places we looked, and our insights.

The Process

Background of SERT

This project, the Student Experience Research Team (SERT), is driven by four commitments:

- Creating a meaningful, high-impact research opportunity for Ryerson undergraduate students that will enrich their understanding of their own and their fellow students' experience in higher education
- Supporting these students financially by paying them a good wage for this
- Activating non-traditional, multi-modal “ways of knowing” in our methodology
- Making a meaningful contribution to the field of Student Affairs through these research efforts

The findings are quite clear about the value of meaningful research experiences for undergraduate students (Wolf, 2018). These experiences are said to lead to the development of critical thinking skills and a huge range of other professional and academic competencies, increased student confidence, greater persistence and retention rates, stronger graduate school applications, deeper learning and cognitive growth, more focused career considerations, etc. The provision of these experiences inside academic units and departments is a growing practice but it is relatively unexplored territory in the context of Student Affairs in Canada.

Given the ongoing need for research and inquiry into the work of Student Affairs and the student experience, and our decided focus in Student Affairs on providing meaningful experiences for students, this seems an obvious gap. The SERT project is an attempt to address this gap by providing a research opportunity in our field, one in which the students will receive a working wage, rather than an academic credit.

The other gap to be filled by this project is an expansion of our modes of inquiry into Student Affairs questions about the student experience, often understood according to some pretty narrow and dominant narratives – transition theory, student development theory, student engagement. These foundations have added significantly to our understanding of things, and have shaped our approaches to the work, but, surely, they don't tell the whole story. In fact, it is likely that our preoccupation with these good but narrow perspectives has obscured from view other possibilities. Most research in Student Affairs focuses on either a very traditional quantitative analysis of some causal relationship between a program and an outcome, or a traditional qualitative account of student feedback about some aspect of their experience with a program. (Naturally, there is some range here).

This is, of course, natural and good, but it also shows a hesitancy to explore other forms of inquiry. So, in our pursuit of better understanding the varieties of student experience, including a meaningful inquiry about the job-search experience for student with disabilities, we declare, in this project, our greater attentiveness to and preference for the “context of discovery” over the context of certainty, causality and justification. We also commit here to incorporating more non-traditional ways of knowing, or modes of inquiry into our work as a way of making a meaningful contribution to this job-search issue. Finally, and most importantly, we do this in the firm belief that involving student researchers as integral and lead parts of the process can yield particularly salient insights.

The SERT Approach

SERT began its inquiry with a blank slate, making our first priority the formation of community in our research group, one grounded in a spirit of risk-taking, tolerance for ambiguity, and the notion of interconnectedness. It was critical that we articulated our biases, our non-neutrality, and the connection between the researchers and the researched, a principle well-expressed by some Indigenous research frameworks that root inquiry in the formation of community (Lavalee, 2009). And we have done this with a kind of unfolding intention towards art as a way of seeing things, of jarring ourselves, of vexing us, of helping us notice, and notice our noticing. Considerable time was spent on this community-formation, facilitated through regular meetings in which we engaged in arts-based learning exercises informed by the work of Lynda Barry (2014) and Ivan Brunetti (2011). These in-person meetings were augmented by various field trips to art galleries, and other installations of art-as-research, and the building of our SERT blog in which we further engaged the students in required readings, visual literature reviews, and various other “homework” assignments.

In this way, SERT became a kind of seminar on research methods in student affairs, focusing especially on non-traditional arts-based approaches. The team used this foundation, and their own personal experience as students, to then begin a more focused exploration of the relevant literature to become better attuned to the important and complex story about students with disabilities and their experiences with the job search.

HOMEWORK



Guiding Principles

Go Slow. A central and underlying feature of our approach was deliberate slowness - to meet regularly, make room for shifting direction, for reading, for writing, for reflecting, for endless, free-style discussion, for getting to know and support each other, for team-building. This is contrary to most work in higher education which is generally characterized by speediness. We could have easily lapsed into the more common, full-tilt rhythm of a project. And it would have also produced, no doubt, something worthwhile. But I suspect that, in the pursuit of speed, we would have been propelled onto old tried and true paths, the most direct routes between A and B. And we would have deprived ourselves of savoring what was in the moment as we went, noticing more, gaining insight through a deliberate and leisurely pace. What that slowness did, above all, is give us time to better know each other, to trust each other, to support each other, to understand each other's particular strengths, and to make space for all of it. It's not revolutionary. It's just a choice. Go slow.

Research with, not upon. Students have found themselves to be the objects of much study, not often being invited to actively participate in the inquiry and knowledge production process. This project, led as it was by undergraduate student researchers, was committed to an approach that disrupted this inherent power imbalance between the researcher and the researched, and sought a more participatory approach. We subscribe to the idea, articulated by Karen Ross (2017, para. 2), that "... methodological choices at various moments across the research process hold potential for creating empowering dynamics within a given research context." SERT was attentive and attuned to this idea of collapsing power dynamics at all stages of the research design and its execution, inviting student participants in the research to be active in the process as it unfolded.

Make conspicuous our biases. We are generally inclined towards the critical side of educational thinking, our ilk being folks like John Dewey, bell hooks, Maxine Green, Elliot Eisner, Paulo Friere, Sara Ahmed, Linda Darling-Hammond, James Baldwin, Henry Giroux – you know, smart, lefty shit-disturbers. And we're inclined by the prospect, not of certainty or objectivity, but by ambiguity, and exploration, and the emotional aspects of social life. This is mostly in keeping with our Student Affairs colleagues who seem generally to swim in that pool, driven by a desire to understand the peculiarities of students' lives. And we're inclined, not by the strictly scientific, but by the artistic as the form of expression that moves us most deeply. And so these inclinations present themselves as we contemplate "doing research" in Student Affairs. How to be productive, thoughtful shit-disturbers in this endeavour? Now, this is not at all a rejection of traditional, positivist, quantitative approaches to research. As we say, we are hospitable to all forms of inquiry that serve us well and ethically. We see no need for hostility here and believe that the method should simply be chosen according to its fitness for purpose, and that the researcher should offer some open acknowledgement of their inclinations and biases, as we do here. This can go a long way towards loosening some of the oppressiveness that can be inherent to methods dogmatically conceived. We believe, not in the righteousness of only one true method, but in a research continuum, that the contours of the human experience are most usefully illuminated by seeing them from a variety of perspectives. So, towards our goal of better understanding the varieties of student experience, arts-based research approaches are suitably fit.

1. where is the light coming from?
2. what time of day is it?
3. Season and weather?
4. what is the temperature like?
5. what is the sound like?
6. where are you?
7. what are you doing?
8. who else is there?
9. why are you there?
10. what sounds can you hear?
11. what are some of the objects around you?
12. what's directly in front of you?
13. to your right? 14. Left?
15. Behind you? 16. Below?
17. Above? 18. There is something you haven't noticed yet. What is it?

1 picture should be colored any way you like as long as you spend time on it.

AND I'd like you to practice looking at the TOPS of things. Remind yourself to lift your eyes and see what's there -

IT CAN BE VERY SMALL

Arts-Based Inquiry

So, what is an arts-based approach to research? And why do it?

We are guided especially by the thinking of Elliot Eisner and Tom Barone who articulate as clear a vision for arts-based research (ABR) as we know. They define ABR as a “... process that uses the expressive qualities of form to convey meaning” (Eisner & Barone, 2012, p. xii). This is an emphasis, not on objective truths, or definitive answers, or causal relationships between variables. An inquiry driven by those things would lead to more traditional research methodologies as the appropriate choice. But inquiry can be led by other concerns, other interests – things like the provision of new perspectives, a deepened understanding of social phenomenon, the disruption of dominant narratives, the productive advancement of conversation, the vexing of others. And, animated by those legitimate motivations, the researcher can fruitfully turn to more “non-traditional” forms of research like ABR. ABR uses expressive forms – film, photography, collage, poetry, fiction, drawing, music, dance, sculpture – as devices of inquiry, as data, as objects of scrutiny, as forms of reporting – all with the purpose of revealing something new, poking into what is often hidden behind dominant views, to “make vivid what one had not noticed” (Eisner & Barone, 2012, p. 156).

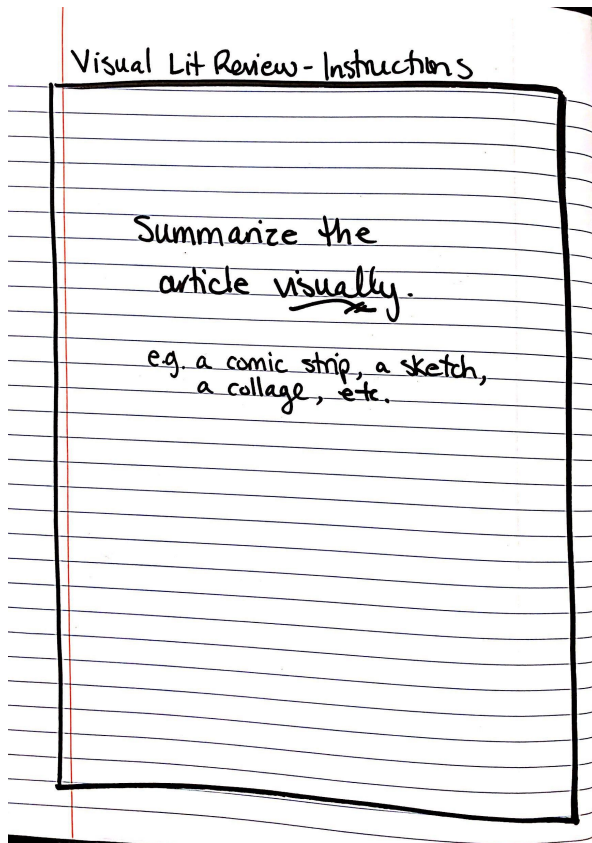
We feel that this project of unearthing, or illuminating things that go un-noticed, is a valuable thing to do in Student Affairs research. As mentioned, the “student experience” as the primary focus of Student Affairs work, is understood according to a narrow range of dominant narratives and it is worthwhile exploring alternative approaches. ABR finds its purpose here, as a way to do what James Baldwin asserts is the purpose of all art, to “lay bare the questions that have been hidden by the answers” (as cited in Eisner & Barone, 2012, p. 17). We use ABR to “...extend beyond the limiting constraints of discursive communication in order to express meanings that otherwise would be ineffable” (Eisner & Barone, 2012, p. 1) and to “...expand the possibilities of diverse realities...counter the hegemonic and linear thinking often associated with traditional research...increase voice and reflexivity in the research process...and create more embodied and accessible research results” (Butler-Kisber & Polma, 2010, p. 2), and finally, to engage in a process of co-construction of knowledge with our participants, where the research becomes shared with the community for the purpose of “empowerment, participation, and engagement” (Eglinton, Gubrium & Wexler, 2017, p. 18). All of this is what might be described by friends and enemies of this approach as lefty shit-disturber stuff.

Group Process

An important part of the design and methodology of this project involved the ways in which we operated as a collective, with an emphasis on community over curriculum. The approach was decidedly non-hierarchical, non-managerial so that design and methodological considerations were emergent rather than proclaimed. This was primarily a teaching and learning principle, a pedagogical approach that provided a particular kind of learning experience for the undergraduate researchers of SERT - learning through immersion, discovery, problem-solving, not restricted by any particular curricular requirements that might be present in a for-credit research seminar. The path of learning was very much built as we walked it. So, while these considerations do not normally make their way into a final report such as this, we felt it important to include because it was such an integral part of the evolving process of decision-making about research and its design here. And there are dual outcomes here - ones related to the research itself, the experience of the research participants, and others related to the researchers and their experience of researching.

So, our group process was itself a form of inquiry and we employed emergent, arts-based approaches to that inquiry to ground our weekly meetings together. We used these sessions, guided only by loose agendas, to articulate our purpose, consider possible lines of inquiry, what or whom could be the subjects of an inquiry, what methodology could be employed, what kind of data could be necessary, how it would be gathered, how its validity could be assessed, etc. So, we dug in. Reading. Lots of reading. Writing, and reflection. Lots of it. And we started really exploring and using and understanding arts-based methods of inquiry to ground our SERT sessions, to facilitate our conversations and insights. We practiced this. And, through these processes, gnarly, and complex, and meandering, applied as it was to our primary research project, that we considered this new additional question about students with disabilities and the job search. Without engaging in a full blown research project, we did apply the same principles inherent to our group process to grapple with the issues. So, what follows is a kind of rendering of those discussions - not to draw any conclusions, but simply to provoke further thinking and suggest promising areas for further study. Most of our discussions began with the stark finding that the greatest predictor of meaningful employment for folks with disabilities is part-time work as a student. If this is true, we thought, it behoves us all to identify and remove barriers to part-time work for students with disabilities.

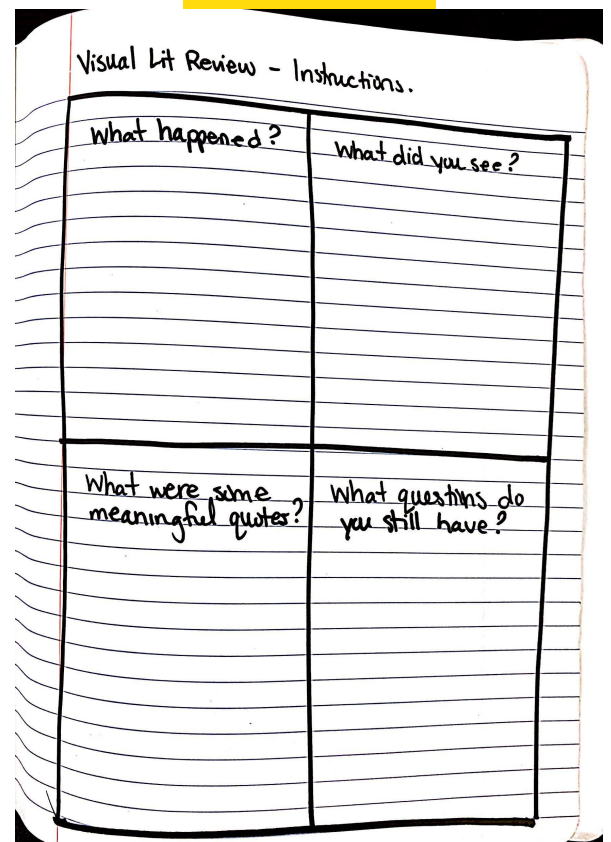
Visual Literature Reviews



The symbolism and visual metaphors also help enhance memory recall for what we learned from specific authors surrounding our research questions.

With that as a kind of methodology for generating ideas and insights, we considered the sources of information that could begin to deepen our understanding on the topic and help us find fruitful lines of inquiry.

One of the tools we used as a team was creating visual literature reviews - an exercise whereby a summary of the article is created using any visual modality, such as drawing, and point form notes answer questions like "What happened?", "While reading, what did you see in your mind's eye?" and "What questions do you still have?" This exercise is adapted from Lynda Barry's (2014) "Daily Diary Activity." Visual lit reviews provide the reader a different lens through which to engage with the article and when we met to discuss the relevant literature we'd read, we found unique insights emerged that might not have had we stuck to a traditional literature review.



The Places We Looked

Readings

We started with a general scan of articles, including:

- Ontario Human Rights Commission. (March 2018). *Accessible education for students with disabilities*. Provincial policy published at www.ohrc.on.ca.
- [“College students with disabilities are too often excluded”](#) article in [“The Conversation”](#) by Christa Bialka, November 5, 2018.
- [A smart city is an accessible city](#) in The Atlantic by Aimi Hamraie, Nov. 6, 2018.
- [Why all jobs aren’t equal for people with disabilities](#) by Dr. Allison Milner & Stefanie Dimov, University of Melbourne “Pursuit” publication.
- [Americans with disabilities still can’t land jobs](#) by Aimee Picchi July 26, 2017 on CBS news
- [Why Employers Don’t Hire People With Disabilities: A Survey of the Literature](#) by Mark L. Lengnick-Hall, Philip M. Gaunt, Adrienne A. R. Brooks. CPRF.org
- [People with disabilities are disproportionately among the out-of-work](#) by Martha Ross, June 30, 2017 Brookings.edu
- [Disability and the job churn](#) by Katie Raso, July 1, 2018 CCPA Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives
- [Inclusive employment for Canadians with disabilities: Toward a new policy framework and agenda](#). by Michael J. Prince, 2016 No. 60 IRPP study
- [Disability and employment Fact Sheet from United Nations - Department of Economic and Social Affairs](#)
- [Persons with disabilities and employment](#). Martin Turcotte. Stats Canada.

From here we found a theme emerging and started searching for articles that might describe studies into how persons with disabilities perceive their job prospects and opportunities. And the team engaged in a deeper visual literature review process.

Some visual literature reviews

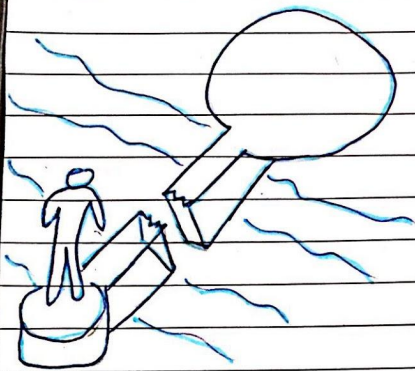
In Chen's (2015) "Effect of acceptance expectations on the employment development of individuals with disabilities: The self-fulfilling prophecy applied", the author describes a study conducted with the hopes of better understanding how both personal and psychological factors impact the job prospects of individuals with disabilities. Chen (2015) looked at participants' perceived acceptance by society and the employment market (what they called "ASEM"), and found a correlation between higher employment rates and higher perceived ASEM. As Zinab describes in her drawing and write-up, "Another interesting finding was that individuals with higher perceived ASEM expected society to accept them despite their disability. These individuals were often more confident, empowered and attempted to develop personal connections with others, and strived for a higher quality of life no matter what their disability was. The self-fulfilling prophecy plays a significant role and could be used to explain this interesting phenomenon. Researchers described that persons with disabilities who felt accepted by society as well as the employment market would in return perform based on the belief that they are important contributors to society despite their disability. In contrast, those who did not feel accepted responded by thinking that they are wasting both time and effort in attempting to find a suitable job."

What happened?	What did you see?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → low employment is prevalent of individuals with disability → does the self-fulfilling prophecy play a role? → There are 2 dimensions that are commonly mentioned about factors that lead to poor employment amount IWD: ① personal/physiological disability or hearing impairments of disability ② social factors: social unwelcoming → IWD encounter unfair employment conditions discrimination → IWD deal w/ this → no need to make an effort if they're unsuccessful every time 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → This paper decided to investigate the self-fulfilling prophecy → found that no matter what the disability was IWD who felt accepted by society had much higher confidence about their future while at school → take ④ actions → pursued a higher quality of life → on the other hand those who did not feel accepted by society tend to give up on working hard in order to achieve more meaningful survival b/c their perceived reality that no matter how much work they put in, they will not be successful.
Quote	Questions...
<p>"Self-fulfilling prophecy → the key to success. This magical power can greatly enhance one to have intelligence, willpower and success. The secret is to accept"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> → What can be done to increase social acceptance among individuals with disability. (currently 20.8%) → Paper talked about experience w/ teachers at a young age can have a sig impact on IWD. so unpleasant learning experience can have long term ④ effects. Is there anything that can be done at schools to try and prevent that from happening at early stages?

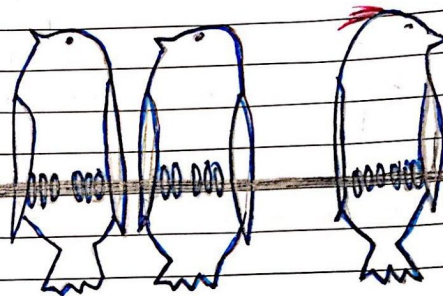
Chen, L. J. (2015). "Effect of acceptance expectations on the employment development of individuals with disabilities: The self-fulfilling prophecy applied." *Journal of employment counseling*, 52(3). DOI: 10.1002/joec.12008

Visual Lit Review by Zinab Bakroun

Visual Lit Review: Effect of acceptance expectations on the employment development of individuals w/ disabilities: the self fulfilling prophecy applied



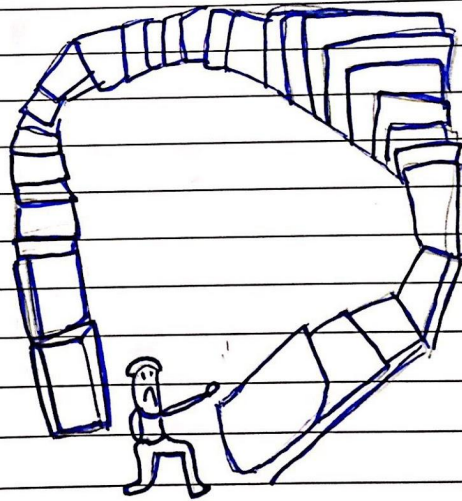
Personal barriers



Social Unwelcoming



Self-fulfilling Prophecy



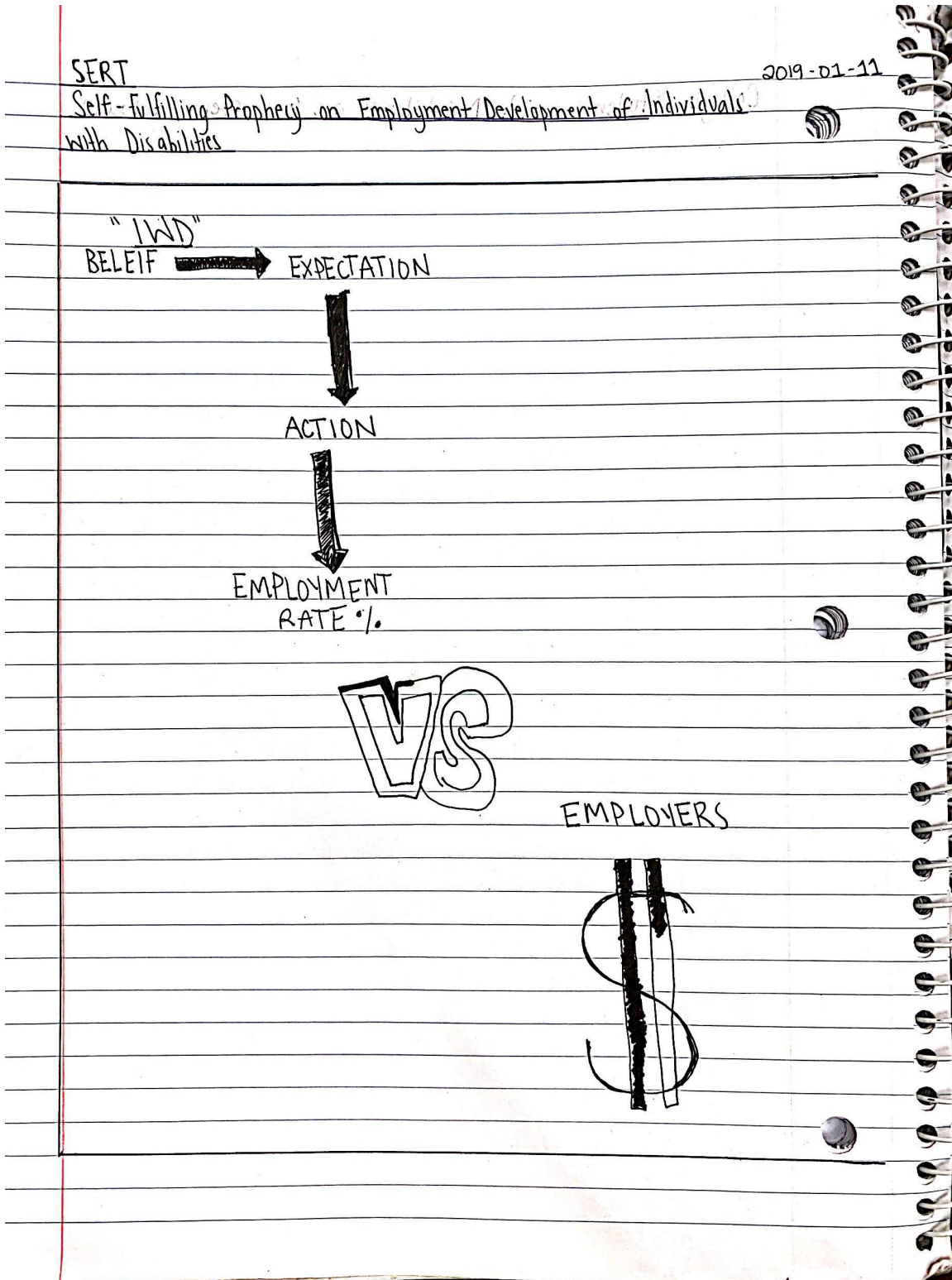
negative Consequences

Chen, L. J. (2015). "Effect of acceptance expectations on the employment development of individuals with disabilities: The self-fulfilling prophecy applied." *Journal of employment counseling*, 52(3). DOI: 10.1002/joec.12008

Visual Lit Review by Zinab Bakroun

Emkay read the same article and was left with certain questions, as you see in their visual summary and notes:

"Does the self-fulfilling prophecy absolve society of its responsibility to create equal opportunity? Does self-fulfilling prophecy minimize the barriers that are associated with living with disabilities? Do non-disabled employees fulfill their own prophecies of their own notions around people with disabilities?"



presented as a "solution" → influences → "self-efficacy"

WHAT HAPPENED?

• Two dimension to UNEMP. for IWD.

1. Personal physiological conditions
2. Social Ostracism

• Welfare policies = best + only solution

VS

Self-fulfilling prophecy = what a person expects in advance, is what they realize to be true.

WHAT DID YOU SEE?



QUOTES?

"Madon et al (1997) when teachers teach for students with low academic achievement with much unpleasant learning experiences over a long time, these students will have low self-affirmation."

"If an IWD thinks the labor market accepts them, he or she will be confident that the opportunity exists to obtain the same result as a person w/ disabilities"

reagent

aggressively undertaking activities to develop job skills and get ahead in finding keeping employment"

QUESTIONS?

1. "Self-fulfilling Prophecy" absolve society of ~~the~~ its responsibility to creating equal opportunity?

2. Does "SFP" minimize the ^{external} barriers ^{experiences} that are associated with living w/ a disability?

3. What is the point of intervention b/w social beliefs ^{be} and personal beliefs?

4. "SFP" is the of employee "IWD" not on the is the focus?

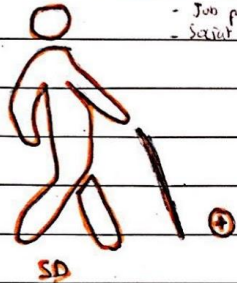
What about "SFP" of the employer?

"Virunga"

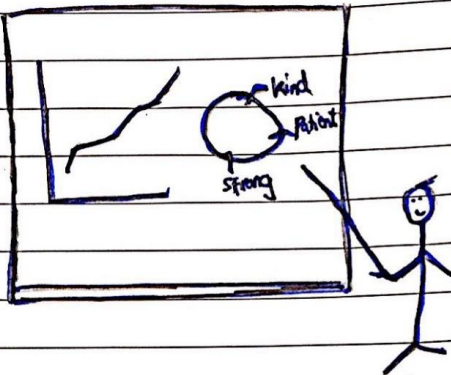
"Blackstone"

Employer Attitudes Towards the Work Inclusion of people with disability?

Characteristics of Person w/ disability :



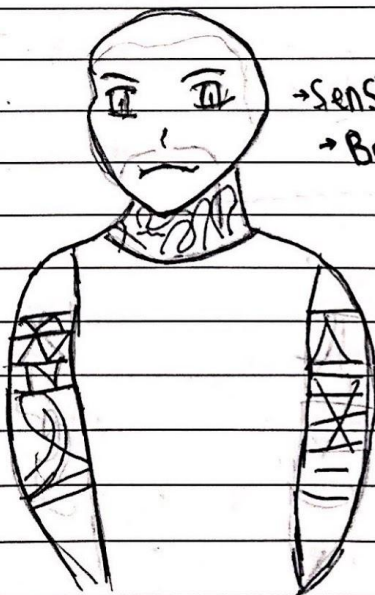
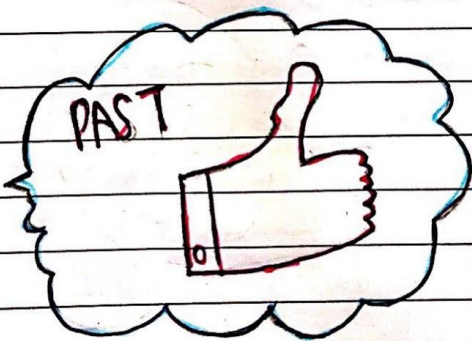
- Job performance
- Social acceptability



Type of disability

Presentation: disability or Strength?

Characteristics of employer :



- Sensitive
- Bikes ⇒

Previous Experience

Employers use
Stereotypes + Job Prototypes
 to match person to job

Another article we considered was Nota, Santili, Ginevra, & Soresi's (2013) "Employer attitudes towards the work inclusion of people with disability", where the authors hoped to better understand employer attitudes on the work prospects of individuals with disability. As Zinab describes, *"First, researchers focused on variables such as type of disability and the description of a hypothetical employee with a disability. They found that the type of disability was a very crucial element influencing the attitudes of potential employers. In addition to this, employers showed more positive attitudes towards individuals with a sensory disability (down syndrome, hearing, being in a wheelchair) as opposed to those with a personal physiological disability (aggressiveness, angry outbursts). Employers also showed a more positive attitude towards individuals with disability who highlighted their strengths, skills or previous employment history as opposed to those who mainly focused on their disability or who did not present this information."*

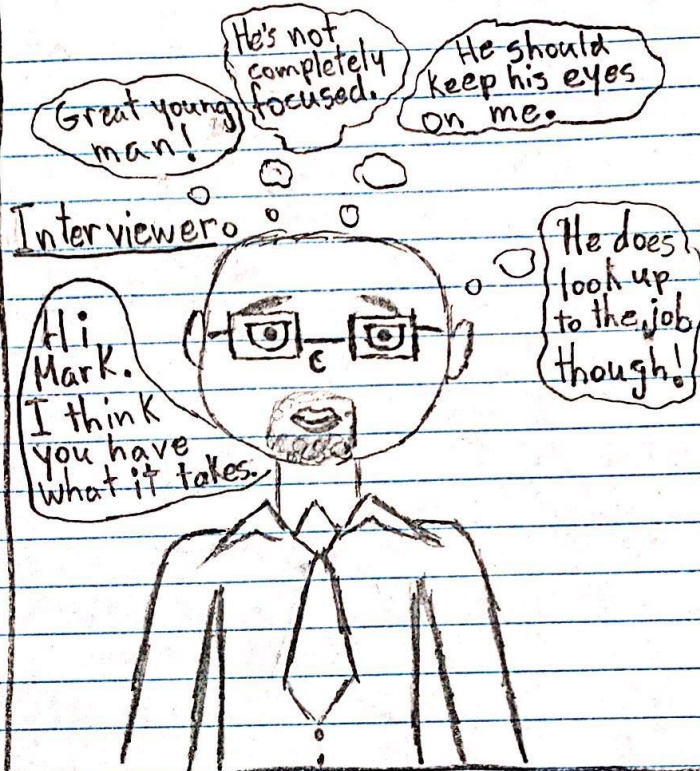
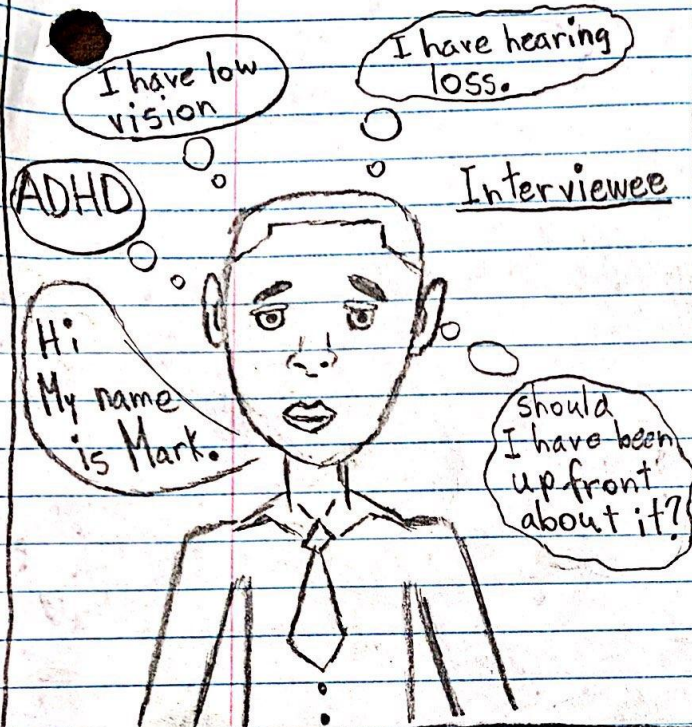
Zinab continues, describing *"With respect to the characteristics of employers, those with previous experience of hiring persons with disabilities had a more positive attitude and frequency of rehiring as opposed to those who did not. Finally, the type of job was also a very important factor that played a role in the hiring prospects of individuals with disabilities. Researchers found that employers used job prototypes and stereotypes to match an individual's abilities to perceived job requirements. They also found that there was a much higher level of discrimination against individuals with a visible disability (e.g. in a wheelchair) if a job involved interpersonal contact with customers as employers would fear eliciting discomfort or social avoidance, which could result in the loss of potential customers. These findings could be used to guide individuals with disability seeking a job. Career counsellors and social health workers could also utilize this information and teach individuals with disabilities how to identify and focus on their skills, strengths and career achievements when applying for jobs. To conclude, future research should be conducted to examine other types of disabilities as only sensory and psychological disabilities were considered in this paper. Other studies should also examine reasons as to why employers are generally more negatively inclined towards those with psychological disabilities (e.g. angry outbursts) as opposed to those with sensory disabilities (e.g. Down syndrome) no matter what job type was considered."*

What happened	What did you see?
<p>→ Workplace inclusion of people w/ disabilities → pressing issue in modern society due to constant job market uncertainty + technological advances etc</p> <p>→ despite national + state policies → IWD ↓ ↓ employment rates due to stigma + prejudice</p> <p>→ talked about 2 factors influencing IWD treatment</p> <p>1) attributes of disabled workers</p> <p>2) employer characteristics</p> <p>→ focused on employer attitudes and variables that characterize them</p>	<p>characteristics:</p> <p>① type of disability</p> <p>a) Sensory disability (hearing, down syndrome, being in wheel chair)</p> <p>b) Psychological disability: anxiety outbursts, psychosis, schizophrenia</p> <p>② Presentation → disability or strength</p> <p>③ Previous experience = w/ disabled = more ⊕ = hire more frequently than those w/ no or little contact</p> <p>- knowledge + interaction = key element</p> <p>→ anxiety + hostility</p> <p>④ type of work appropriate: jobs w/ ↑ interpersonal contact = ↑ discrimination. bc fear of eliciting fear, discomfort, toward response</p> <p>social avoidance.</p>
<p>Quote</p>	<p>Questions</p>
<p>"An overall rethinking of of stereotypes and negative attitudes towards the potential of individuals w/ disability should be fostered"</p>	<p>"Why are employers generally more ⊖ towards people w/ psychological disabilities as compared to sensory disabilities?"</p> <p>"further research should examine other types of disabilities intellectual disability or multiple disabilities."</p>

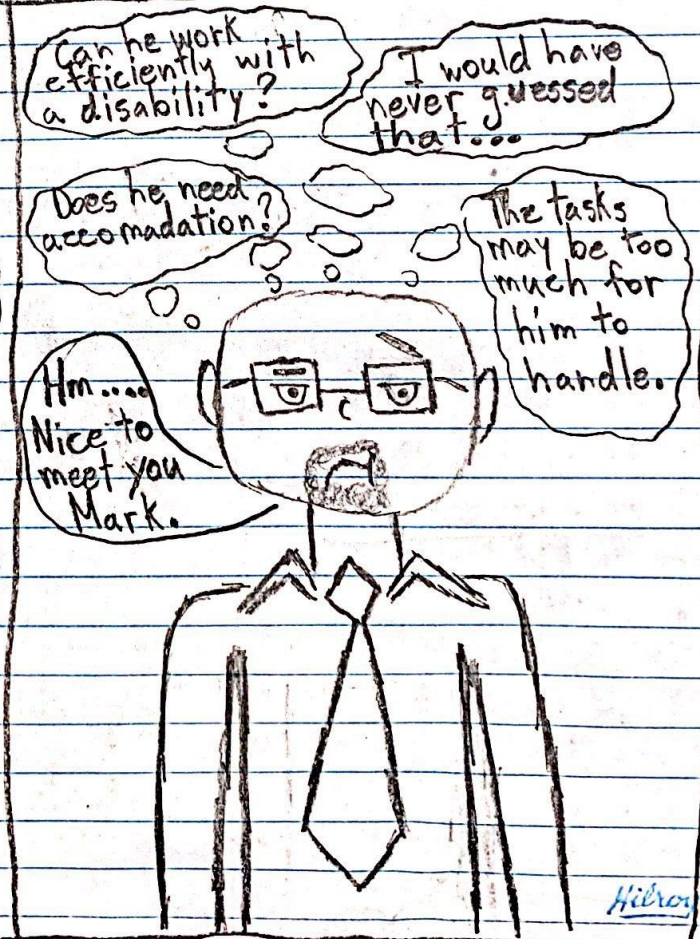
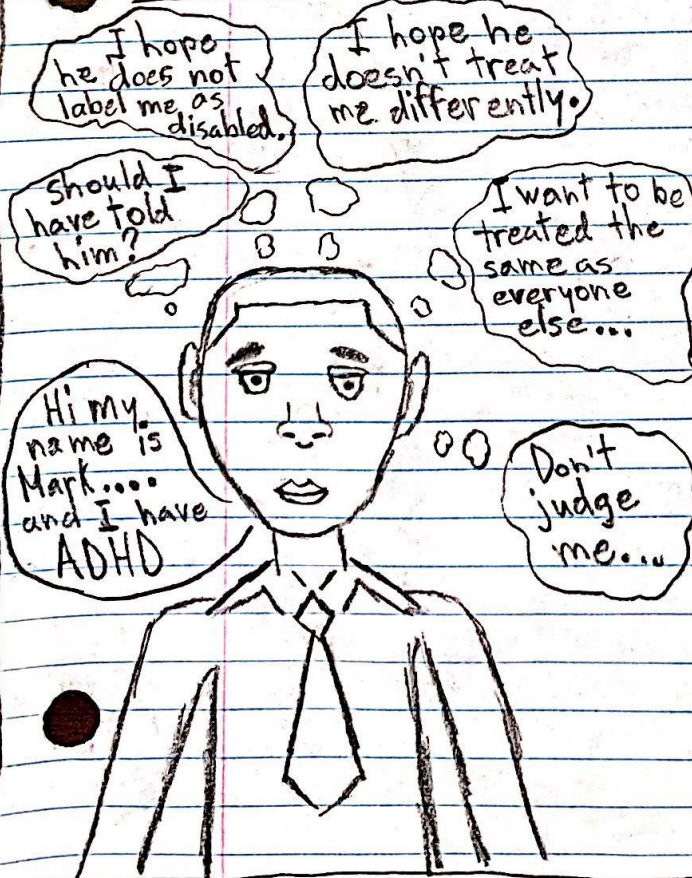
Nota, L., Santili, S., Ginevra, M.C., & Soresi, S. (2013). Employer attitudes towards the work inclusion of people with disability. *Journal of applied research in intellectual disabilities*. 27(6). Visual Lit Review by Zinab Bakroun

Article: Invisible Disabilities: Unique Challenges for Employees and Organizations.

Scenario #1



Scenario #2



We also considered Santuzzi, Waltz, Finkelstein, and Rupp's (2014) "Invisible disabilities: Unique challenges for employees and organizations." In Matthew's drawing, we see the competing questions and concerns individuals with disabilities and employers consider at the time of an interview, and two scenarios for how these interviews might play out depending on the individual's disclosure of their invisible disability. Upon reading, Matthew was left with the question: "*Upon learning of an invisible disability, how do employers treat employees as equals to other employees but also in an equitable fashion to maximize performance and well-being?*" The idea of how to provide spaces and opportunity for persons to disclose, and how employers might receive those disclosures, emerged upon discussing Matthew's interpretation of the article.

And the relevant voices

Readings are one thing. But there was also a palpable sense of something missing from the literature (acknowledging our limited review) - the voices of folks with disabilities themselves. So, we didn't limit our scan to journal articles - we stumbled upon a hashtag trending on Twitter one day in March - #thingsdisabledpeopleknow.

We read posts by folks on the hashtag and found a story being told in community, there. It ended up being one of the most intriguing sources because it's an ongoing discussion coming from persons with disabilities themselves. Although the conversations weren't specifically centred around employment prospects, examples of barriers experienced by persons with disabilities abound on the hashtag. Ryan created the following drawing as an interpretation of the conversations he saw on the thread, and the questions that emerged for him as he read these first-hand accounts and stories of ableism and equity-seeking behaviours. Some of Ryan's questions include "*How do we foster empathy, compassion and respect in our culture? What forms of unconscious discrimination do we engage it? Are the barriers to equitable access truly too complex to change? What does allyship look like? What societal structures benefit only those without disabilities?*"

ABLEISM & EQUITY

INTERPRETING VOICES FROM DISABLED AND 'ABLED' SOCIAL MEDIA.

HOW DO WE FOSTER EMPATHY, COMPASSION & RESPECT IN OUR CULTURE?

ARE THE BARRIERS TO EQUITABLE ACCESS TRULY TOO COMPLEX TO CHANGE?

NEED TO ACCEPT HOW THINGS ARE!

WHAT MORE DO I HAVE TO DO FOR THEM?

WHY AREN'T YOU CLIMBING UP HERE?

WHAT FORMS OF UNCONSCIOUS DISCRIMINATION DO WE ENGAGE IN?

YOU'RE SO BRAVE!

WE'VE HELPED THESE POOR PEOPLE! LET'S GET A DRINK!

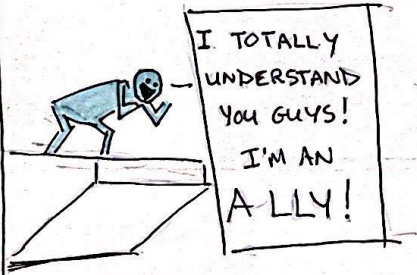
I WANT TO HELP, BUT IT'S JUST TOO EXPENSIVE

THIS IS TOO HARD! WHY SHOULD WE CHANGE? THEY CAN'T DO STUFF...



WHAT DOES ALLYSHIP WITH A MARGINALIZED COMMUNITY LOOK LIKE?

I TOTALLY UNDERSTAND YOU GUYS! I'M AN ALLY!



HELLO! UHH... YOU NEED HELP?

PROBLEMS MUST BE UNDERSTOOD TO BE SOLVED. DON'T ASSUME.

SURE WISH THIS ARBITRARY BARRIER WASN'T HERE...

THANKS FOR ALL THE NOTHING!

THEY DON'T GET IT...

CAN HELP MYSELF JUST FINE...

NOT LIKE YOU COULD!

OH...

Now Do You Get It?

THE GAME IS RIGGED

WHY AM I ON ALL OF YOUR SIGNS?



WHAT SOCIETAL STRUCTURES BENEFIT ONLY THOSE WITHOUT DISABILITIES?

HOW CAN WE ENTER, LEARN FROM AND WORK WITH A MARGINALIZED COMMUNITY?

Ryan Mawdsley's visual interpretation of the #thingsdisabledpeopleknow conversation on Twitter.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, in the midst of all our various wonderings, and readings, a couple of us attended a talk at the Ryerson Student Affairs PD Day in February which sent us down another path. Shariya Kaiser, Student Accessibility Specialist in Student Learning Support collaborated with a student she'd worked with for a few years to present a talk titled "Sensory Integration: Tips to Consider when Creating Inclusive Programming." This was deeply informative. A Deaf engineering student described his experiences with the accommodations process, working with interpreters, and collaborating with classmates. He shared personal insights he hoped educators and other professionals could consider when working with persons with disabilities, and Deaf people specifically, from his experience. He shared some ideas he had specifically around the job hunt, reflecting on his own experience searching for student jobs and the extra steps he and Shariya had to take to either request accommodations for interviews or to even assess whether the job requirements would suit his skills as well as accommodate him.

He described Deaf friends of his who are relegated to "back of the office" jobs or jobs that don't require interaction with other people - without having been actually asked if that's the person's preference. In other words, his Deaf friends found themselves placed in a role that limited their interaction with other people on an assumption, not via an accommodation process or conversation. Finally, the student suggested that something as simple as a drop-down list on a job application inviting applicants to list their needs for accommodation or any disabilities that they wished to disclose could ease the anxiety around the job application process. A clear invitation and option to describe what sort of accommodation he would need, he said, would help him be transparent with the employer and feel prepared for the interview.

A kind of content analysis

This got us thinking - could such a simple intervention change the job application process and employment prospects for persons with disabilities in a meaningful way? We wanted to know whether employers, university career centres, employment agencies, and organizations were suggesting to applicants right from the start of their search that they were a workplace that would accommodate their needs. So, we conceived of a rudimentary content analysis to take a look at a few job boards and see whether and how they invited applicants to disclose or request needs.

We recognize the complexity of this line of thinking - employers are obligated by law to accommodate; we're not sure of the best practices when it comes to requiring folks to disclose. But it felt like something worth investigating to see if there might be a "drop-down" option like the student described, and what it might look like.

We each assessed up to three different job boards from a variety of Canadian organizations, including government entities and the job board that Ryerson endorses specifically, Magnet.ca.

We looked for the following things:

- Is there a statement about employment access for persons with disabilities?
- Is there an equity statement about equity-focused hiring?
- Is there an invitation to disclose?
- Is there a general invitation to identify needs?
- Is there a specific invitation to identify needs, in the form of a menu?
- Is the user experience for persons with disabilities the same as persons without disabilities?

We also noted whether the job board was from the public sector, specifically for persons with disabilities, and/or specifically for students seeking employment. We looked at the following boards:

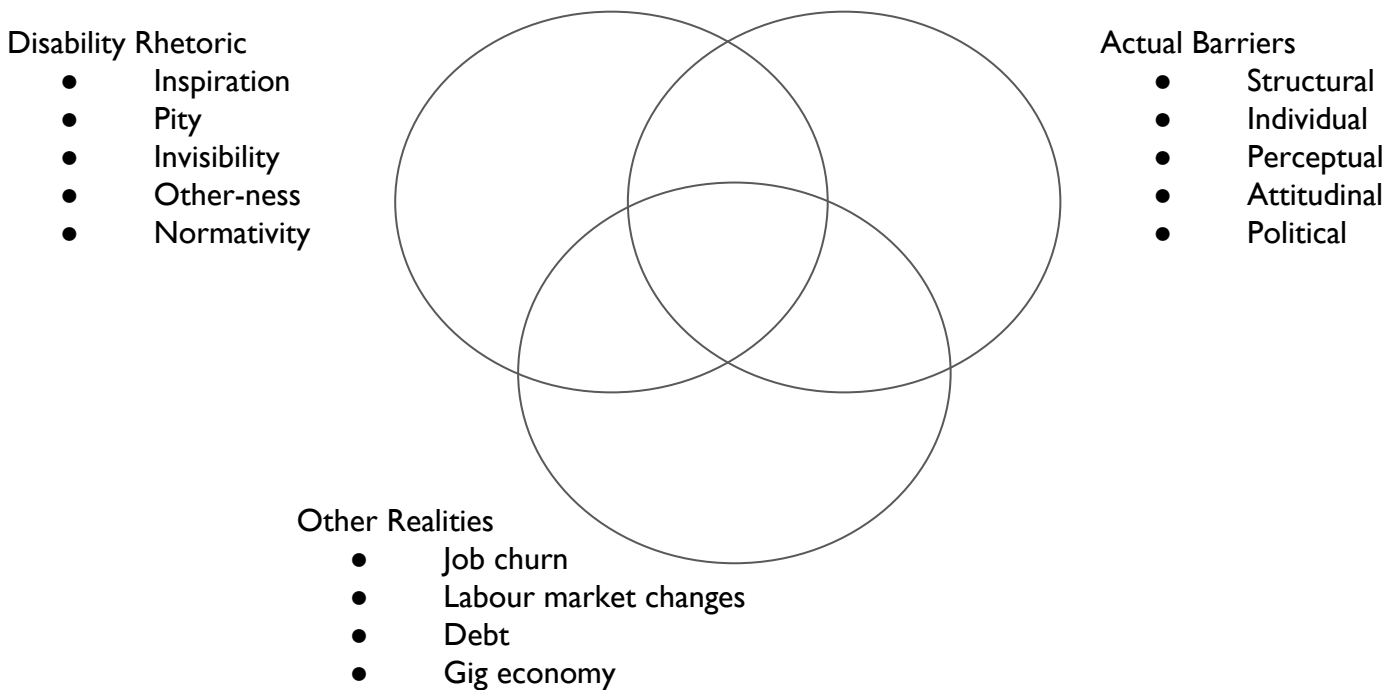
- Specialisterne;
- TalentEgg.ca;
- Summer Jobs Gov't of Ontario;
- Federal Student Work Experience Program (FSWEP);
- FSWEP for Students with Disabilities;
- BUNZ job zone;
- Craigslist;
- The Ryerson Student Union;
- Career Boost, Ryerson's On-Campus Employment Program;
- Magnet.ca;
- RBC jobs;
- Workopolis;
- Indeed;
- Kijiji;
- Workink (Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work employment site);
- Monster;
- Ryerson University External Job Opportunities Board;
- Work in Culture;
- LinkedIn;
- Charity Village;
- City of Toronto Jobs

So, with a kind of process designed, not for generating definitive answers, but for generating insight, we looked in these places - the readings, the hashtag, the student presentation, and the content analysis of job-search sites, to highlight and gather some preliminary ideas, thoughts and questions for consideration. We found ourselves deeply mired at every turn with the stark reality that arriving at insight that might usefully inform public policy is an exceedingly complex thing to do - and requires a commitment to acknowledging that complexity. And, above all, it requires the meaningful inclusion of folks who live with disabilities. Below is a simple rendering of some of our preliminary insights about this that could inform future directions or lines of inquiry for the Public Garage Project.

General Descriptions					Features					
SERT member and Job Board		Public Sector?	Specifically for PWD?	Specifically for Students?	Homepage - Disability Statement?	Equity Statement?	Invitation to disclose?	General invitation to identify needs?	Specific invitation to identify needs from a menu?	The same user-experience for PWD?
John	Specialisterne	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
	TalentEgg.ca	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
	Summer Jobs Gov't of Ontario	yes	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Tesni	Federal Student Work Experience Program (FSWEP)	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
	FSWEP for Students with Disabilities	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
MK	BUNZ	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	No	No	No	No
	Craigslist	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Ryan	RSU job board	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
	Career Boost	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Zinab	Magnet	yes	Yes	No	No	yes	Yes	yes	yes	no
	RBC Jobs: Persons With Disabilities: https://jobs.rbc.com/ca/en/PersonsWithDisabilities	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes	yes
	RBC jobs	yes	Yes	No	yes	Yes	Yes	yes	yes	no
	Workopolis	yes	Yes	no	yes	yes	no	no	no	no
Matthew	Indeed	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
	Kijiji	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes
	Workink (CCRW (Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work) employment site)	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	Yes
Alicia	Monster	yes	no	no	no	yes	no	no	no	yes
	Ryerson.ca/Jobs	yes	no	no	no	yes	no	yes	no	no
	Work In Culture	No	no	no	no	yes	no	no	no	yes
Vanessa	LinkedIn https://www.linkedin.com/	No	no	no	no	no	Yes	no	no	no
	Charity Village https://charityvillage.com/app/	yes	no	no	No	No	No	No	No	No
	City of Toronto Jobs https://www.toronto.ca/home/jobs/	yes	no	no	No	yes	Yes	no	no	no

Some meandering insights

Even a simple glance at the titles in our tiny reading list tells us there's folks writing about the problem, reporting on the rates of unemployment persons with disabilities experience around the world and across Canada specifically. And the lit reviews created by the SERT members further indicates a kind of just-scratching-the-surface-ness of our inquiry. Still, we identified three interacting themes emanating from these readings:



We wondered whether investigating the complex issue of work for folks with disabilities could be usefully viewed through these interacting lenses.

We found it surprising that we didn't find substantial accounts investigating the specific barriers to employment that persons with disabilities come up against or employers' perceptions of and interactions with persons with disabilities as employees; indeed what we ended up wondering was whether the ways in which these reports describe the problem exacerbate the problem itself in some ways - so we zeroed in on this idea of the self-fulfilling prophecy we suspected might be at play. We became interested in the notion that by simply stating the problem over and over (which many of these articles do), we engage a disability rhetoric that poisons the psychological well for folks with disabilities. They hear it again and again so they believe it, and then fulfill the prophecy. The "job churn" rhetoric was also interesting. We kept digging and talking.

This early thinking had us focusing on the phenomenon of a "self-fulfilling prophecy" for both persons with disabilities and their perceptions about the world of work AND the perceptions of employers about what it means to have a diverse workforce that includes persons with disabilities. There's not much literature on that particular topic, though the phenomenon of self-fulfilling prophecy is obviously well known. We think this is a very interesting angle, asking the question: ***How do the combined narratives about grim job prospects for persons with disabilities and employer burden relating to hiring persons with disabilities create despair and fuel a vicious cycle that exacerbates the problem?***

It is a question that could be meaningfully asked of students in post-secondary institutions (and elsewhere) and of employers. And, if the presumption is correct, that this oft-cited narrative about the grim job prospects and cost of hiring folks with disabilities exacerbates the problem, it could lead to potentially fruitful and targeted efforts aimed at disrupting that narrative in ways that could help nudge job candidates and employers towards more hopefulness and re-engagement. The rightful target of those efforts - the, data, insight, change, policy, and awareness that comes from the work - is the institutional structures themselves, not folks with disabilities. They are just fine, but they encounter a world that is not, a thing so clearly confirmed in the #thingsdisabledpeopleknow conversations. The rhetoric around disability in all realms, including the realm of work, operates in what Jay Timothy Dolmage (2014) describes as a "normate culture" in which people "...mark out what is not normal, employing a logic of negation, even as they demand conformity..."

One of the SERT members, Ryan Mawdsley describes his feelings this way: *“In an attempt to incorporate my coursework in Sociology and Disability Studies, as well as a personal interest and exposure to relevant ideas, thinkers, etc., I’m building a literature review to explore this problem/area of research from a structural perspective. Something feels odd every time we discuss disability employment outcomes and I can’t help but feel we’re addressing symptoms instead of root causes. Acknowledging the “disease” of social inequity is widespread, historical and self-perpetuating structural reproductions of power, and that we can abstract everything back to our flawed human ape-brains being inherently horrible with wielding power (in particular when it comes to other human lives), I still feel it merits some investigation into the root of what we’re viewing as the problem.*

What I’m finding as I craft this (as-yet unfinished, self-indulgent) lit review is that the disparity in employment outcomes of students with disabilities is nearly obvious and tragic in origin. We operate within a societal structure of inherited and concentrated colonial, oppressive, patriarchal power. Our governments and modes of production – of thought, physical good, or other – are embedded within a system designed to marginalize those who do not possess power and to further concentrate power for those who have it.

In terms of immediately supporting the ongoing research, I recognize that this is overall not helpful, but I can’t help but peer into the abyss that is our society and note that, for all of our efforts and truly good work that we do in supporting marginalized communities, we are working against a system purpose-built to extract resources from them with maximum efficiency where possible, and to contain them where not.”

The presentation given by the Deaf student about his experience as a learner, as a job-searcher, and as a worker, made vivid to us that, while the prospect of a world fully hospitable to folks with disabilities is still difficult to conceive, it is also true that even small, thoughtful shifts in thinking - in policy, in practice, in consciousness - can make a world of difference, and is where the change needs to start. The student described his job-search experience whereby he felt either excluded or imposed upon by not being able to safely declare his needs - in his case, a sign-language interpreter - to be able to equitably compete for the jobs. He wanted to be able to declare this need without any fear of prejudice and without having to bear an extra burden not present for non-disabled folks. And he offered a simple solution - the inclusion of a drop-down menu on job search sites that simply asks ALL candidates to declare any accommodations or access considerations necessary for the employer to know. Simple. Equitable. Inexpensive. Potentially game-changing. And all the more alarming given that even our rudimentary content analysis reveals a near complete absence of such a feature in job boards. This begs the question why, and begins to reveal some of the complexities of it all.

In our discussions about this, we noted also a suspicion that there is a rise in job-search sites, or employment opportunities specifically geared towards folks with disabilities - a thing that simultaneously indicates a shift towards greater equity and greater segregation. Folks with disabilities, perhaps feel better acknowledged by this development while also feeling set-apart, patronized, othered, or relegated to limited opportunities. And, of course, we make the horrendous assumption that folks with disabilities are a homogenous group. Again, a scratching-the-surface feeling emerges when we look more closely.

A job search is a process most of us take for granted, a thing designed for a privileged set in a culture with deeply held notions of normativity. In simple moments of listening and acknowledging the experience of others, we raise our collective consciousness; by small degrees, we make changes to public policy, to codes of conduct, to the design of infrastructure - an equity statement here, an AODA compliance there. But it feels like so much paper over a thousand cracks. It's a thorny issue that becomes all the more thorny the closer you look. And it becomes such an intractable problem so difficult for policy-makers, those folks responsible for making improvements for the long-term, but handcuffed by a short-game context. Equitable, dignified access to work and a meaningful life of employment is a foundational right and, while it may seem a banal conclusion, the simple truth is that there needs to be more folks with lived experience of a disability sitting at the tables where decisions are made about how to ensure that. Period.

References

- Barry, L. (2014). *Syllabus: Notes from an accidental professor*. USA: Drawn & Quarterly.
- Brunetti, I. (2011). *Cartooning: Philosophy and practice*. USA: Yale University Press.
- Butler-Kisber, L., & Poldma, T. (2010). The power of visual approaches in qualitative inquiry: The use of collage making and concept mapping in experiential research. *Journal of Research Practice*, 6(2).
- Chen, L. J. (2015). "Effect of acceptance expectations on the employment development of individuals with disabilities: The self-fulfilling prophecy applied." *Journal of employment counseling*, 52(3). DOI: 10.1002/joec.12008.
- Dolmage, J. T. (2014). "Disability studies of rhetoric." In *Disability rhetoric* (pp. 19-30). New York: Syracuse University Press.
- Eglinton, K. A., Gubrium, A., & Wexler, L. (2017). Digital storytelling as arts-inspired inquiry for engaging, understanding, and supporting Indigenous youth. *International Journal of Education & the Arts*, 18(5).
- Eisner, E. & Barone, T. (2012). *Arts based research*. USA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Lavalee, L. (2009). Practical application of an Indigenous research framework and two qualitative Indigenous research methods: Sharing circles and Anishnaabe symbol-based reflection. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(1).
- Nota, L., Santili, S., Ginevra, M.C., & Soresi, S. (2013). Employer attitudes towards the work inclusion of people with disability. *Journal of applied research in intellectual disabilities*, 27(6).
- Santuzzi, A. M., Waltz, P. R., Finkelstein, L. M., & Rupp, D. E. (2014) Invisible disabilities: Unique challenges for employees and organizations. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 7(2).
- Sunstein, C. R. (2008). *Nudge: Improving decisions about health, wealth, and happiness*. USA: Yale University Press.
- Wolf, L. W. (2018). Undergraduate Research as Engaged Student Learning. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 2018(154), 75-85. doi:10.1002/tl.20293