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A SINGULARITY THEORY:
UNIFYING PEDAGOGICAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN “ABLED” AND
LEARNING “DISABLED” WRITERS

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Abstract

Universal Design in Learning (UDL) was designed to provide support for students with learning disabilities (LD). It gives flexibility to both teaching and learning: how to present information (teaching), how to receive and respond to information (learning), and how to create a classroom space that is both accommodating and challenging to students with LD. UDL is a fairly recent installment, enacted in 2008, addressing the question of how to teach students with LD – a legislative pairing to LD pedagogy theory – while the field of Rhetoric/Composition (Rhet/Comp) has existed for decades, though it is not necessarily wedded to any specific demographic, such as LD.

This piece will review works from LD and Rhet/Comp theorists, as well as individuals who have influenced or are influenced by Rhet/Comp. It will look at the theory and practice of teaching LD and non-LD students, what the differences are and, in some cases, shouldn't be, and how to create a singularity theory that merges UDL with already existing theories and practices in the field of Rhet/Comp. In order to do this, two schools of thought will be discussed, compared, and re-thought to the extent that the two can be latticed together. In the end, this thesis will posit the idea of singularity – that pedagogical segregation should not necessarily be the result of being different nor should it be the initial reaction in the discussion of how to teach students with LD.

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Introduction

Imagine two students on the first day of their first English composition class as *tabula rasa* individuals in the eyes of the university. In the eyes of their classmates and teacher, upon walking into the classroom, neither student has an outward appearance of disability. They walk in on two feet without assistance from a wheelchair, cane, or stick. They can see, hear, and speak with clarity. There's no indication that either student might be in pain or discomfort in some way while laboring under the weight of bags and books. Neither student has requested a spatial or environmental accommodation from their teacher or the university. In essence, at first look, there is no visible indication that either student might have a disability.

As the days and weeks pass, it becomes clear that between the two students, one is showing signs of a struggle with the coursework while the other, in layman terms, could be described by his/her teachers as an “average” student. He/she is average only in the sense that he or she is *not* struggling in a way that negatively impacts his or her work product and grades or causes emotional or psychological distress – this student comprehends the readings, the assignments; this student is able to show understanding of the course through his or her writing; this student meets deadlines with relative ease and finishes exams in the time allotted.

However, the teacher notes the other student is not average like his/her counterpart. The other student has difficulty translating his or her understanding of the course onto the page via coursework: he/she might forget basic concepts in grammar, cannot focus on lengthy academic articles, has difficulty creating coherent

sentences or paragraphs. As a result, the student consistently receives low test and homework scores. What his/her teacher, the department, and the university may not realize is that the student's work is not the result of any ailment that might plague the average student, such as disinterest or procrastination. Whether or not this student is aware of it, has or has not submitted forms to the college or university, this student might be a student with learning disabilities (LD).

This hypothetical situation illustrates a point and poses a question: if a learning disability isn't visible on the human body, then what defines a learning disability? Rather, how does one identify a learning disability? It is not one's mind on crutches nor is it one's mind fingering Braille. A learning disability is not a visible manifestation of otherness, but something that exists in the mind, and a mind is a difficult thing to map out. The minds of a million students will show a million different ways of thinking, with some overlap in certain thought processes, making it difficult to draw singular, exact, or catch-all conclusions about teaching from such a vast array of learning processes. If learning disabilities are added to this mix and students with LD cannot adhere to mainstream or status quo curricula, one might then ask, "*How does* one teach a student with LD?"

The theory and application of Universal Design in Learning (UDL) is the attempt to create accessibility and equality in education and educational resources to account for differences in learning abilities. An in-depth discussion and applications of UDL in colleges appears later on; however to begin the discussion, it should be noted that one of the primary goals of UDL is to create an environment in which both

students with and without learning disabilities can co-exist without the necessity of separate spaces containing separate technology or facilities.

Although many Rhet/Comp scholars do not study or focus on any one specific demographic, their studies can and *do* impact the specified field of LD studies. Amy Vidali, Patricia A. Dunn, Robert McRuer, Andrea Freud Lowenstein, Jeffrey Porter – all mentioned here and included in LD pedagogical theory – focus their research and writing on “otherness.” Scholars like Kenneth Bruffee, David Bartholomae, bell hooks, et. al. can be applied to the study of composition and LD, though their works do not address LD directly. What exists in this field is the opportunity to create a wider conversation about how to think about teaching Rhetoric/Composition to students with LD, and that is the intention of this piece: to begin that conversation.

Chapter 1: A Review and Comparison of Theories

Many LD theorists and scholars embrace and draw from the pool of broader composition theories that Rhet/Comp scholars have presented in the past and continue to write about today. Rhetoric/Composition theorists do not necessarily apply themselves or associate themselves specifically with matters of feminism, sexuality, race, gender, class, ability or disability. They do not necessarily ignore these issues; rather, their focus on the act of teaching in the general sense gives them the flexibility to move from one topic to the next. Because of this, the field of teaching students with LD is not limited to one set of theories or one group of theorists. The theory of singularity in LD and non-LD composition pedagogy is founded in and dependent on this flexibility. This section will look at both Rhet/Comp theories (those theories and studies that are not wedded to social, economic, political, or religious backgrounds) as well as theorists who specialize in LD studies.

In David Bartholomae's "The Tidy House: Basic Writing in the American Curriculum,"¹ Bartholomae relies on the works of Mary Louise Pratt's 1991 article "Arts of the Contact Zone".² This section refers to the work of both Bartholomae and Pratt, often as a cohesive unit with the same ends, though neither describes nor explicitly refers to students with LD. Instead, Bartholomae reflects on his experiences in what he calls "basic writing." This course was designed to give students lacking the necessary skillset to pass a university composition course the opportunity to achieve these skills, though Bartholomae rails against the idea of separating these

¹ David Bartholomae, "The Tidy House: Basic Writing in the American Curriculum," *Journal of Basic Writing* 12, no. 1 (1993): 4-21.

² Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession* 91 (1991): 33-40.

students out. He provides for his audience a cherished piece written by a student who would be defined, by university standards, as a basic writer and illustrates what “basic writing” looks like. The piece in question, as Bartholomae describes it, was unconventional when one might think about a First-Year student essay designed to answer a philosophical question. It contained scratched out sentences, formatting and word play reminiscent of Ginsburg and Whitman when the assignment was meant to be an essay. Pierce utilized vulgar language (“I don’t care about this shit/fuck this shit, trash and should be put in the trash can with this shit/Thank you very much/I lose again.”³) to create a rebellious statement. It was not a typical five-paragraph essay in that it did not show a clear understanding of grammar, syntax, diction, and sentence structure. Because of what it *lacked* and because it was different, the student was deemed a basic writer, regardless of fact that Bartholomae believed it to be “a very skillful performance in words.”⁴ To Bartholomae, while he was conflicted as a teacher, he was able to see that Pierce, despite the vulgarity and failure to adhere to the standards of the assignment, was very much “abled” in some way.

This is a prime example of why Bartholomae stands in opposition of basic writing courses. Basic writing courses *reinforce* notions of difference where different has negative connotations or suggest inferiority; these courses claim to bridge the gaps between basic writers and the rest of the student body while still maintaining the idea that there is such a thing as a basic writer.⁵ Pratt’s “The Arts of the Contact Zone” is predominately about cultural differences and how different cultures interact

³ David Bartholomae, “The Tidy House: Basic Writing in the American Curriculum,” *Journal of Basic Writing* 12, no. 1 (1993): 6.

⁴ Ibid. 6

⁵ Ibid, 8.

with and communicate with one another. While the ideas of assimilation and hegemonic power struggles are a central theme, the “contact zone” is the area in which these cultures converge so that, while these cultures might “meet, clash, and grapple with each other,”⁶ ultimately they are able to communicate and therefore learn from each other.

In the composition classroom, this translates to a space in which a contact zone is created, where differences are valued as a means of learning. Bartholomae goes so far as to suggest that the tracking of students be eliminated and instead “offer classes with a variety of supports for those who need them.”⁷ Instead, the differences in students – those differences that do not reflect ability/disability/inability – would become the focus and therefore engender a sense of multiculturalism whereby “the various cultures [are] represented in the practice of its students.”⁸

How does this apply itself to basic writers? Being culturally different does not mean being intellectually inferior. It’s a well-known truth that there is no direct correlation between a person’s culture (in the ability/disability sense as well as ethnic culture, sexual culture, and so on) and their ability to write. In fact, as Pratt demonstrates and Kenneth Bruffee reinforces, diversity provides a greater opportunity to learn.

In his 1984 publication “Collaborative Learning and the ‘Conversation of Mankind’” Kenneth Bruffee observes human social behaviors as applicable to how

⁶ Mary Louise Pratt, “Arts of the Contact Zone,” *Profession* 91 (1991): 33-40.

⁷ Ibid. 14

⁸ Ibid. 14

humans as social animals learn as a collective.⁹ To promote learning and to assuage possible ailments in the learning process, Bruffee promotes the use of social interaction among student peers to learn – contrary to the one-way learning process described in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.¹⁰ Here, Freire describes what he identifies as the “banking concept” of education¹¹, in which the students hold no power over each others' abilities to learn.¹² The original idea of the “conversation of mankind” is derived from Michael Oakeshott's “The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind,” published approximately 20 years before Bruffee's article on collaborative learning. Oakeshott believes that conversation is first an internalized process derived from thought; so, from thought people form words and these words reflect their thoughts. Conversely, understanding thought requires understanding speech. Most importantly, Oakeshott places emphasis on the idea of community: thinking well means thinking as a community or collective such that thought is derived from communication, and communication is derived from social interactions within a community. Thought, communication, and community are intertwined; for an individual to think well, the community as a whole must think well, and cultivate, as a collective, the *type* of thoughts, values, and ethics that it wishes to see reflected

⁹ The concept of collaborative learning as Bruffee describes gained a foothold in America in the 1980's, but was first seen in the 1950's and 1960's Britain as a political statement speaking out against “destructive authoritarian social forms,” not as the pedagogical theory that is spoken of today. Rather, America grasped onto collaborative learning as a means of helping students who entered college seemingly unprepared.

¹⁰ Freire, Paulo, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970)

¹¹ Ibid. 71-86

¹² Kenneth Bruffee, “Collaborative Learning and the ‘Conversation of Mankind’”, *College English* 46, No. 7 (1984).

in itself, its thoughts, and speech.¹³ A de-centered classroom, therefore, must be one in which there is a strong conviction and belief in the students' abilities and less focus on difficulties in learning. Once established, the students will think of themselves as being abled and will strengthen the peer learning process by giving each other the thought-support needed to further convey this support to and through each other.

Students speaking with other students create a community of peers and each student, as unique, experienced human beings, brings different skills or knowledge to the conversation. Bruffee argues that, because no student is without his or her own knowledge and because everyone has a unique knowledge base, students can use the resources that they already have to work as a group and seek a resolution, generate meaningful responses, or arrive at conclusions. In other words, every student, even and especially the student with a learning disability, is capable of participating in the collaborative learning process.

Both Bruffee and Freire play significant roles in, and influence many Rhet/Comp scholars, each reinforcing the idea of a "student-centered" pedagogy. Paulo Freire posits and opposes the "banking concept" of education, a pedagogical outlook that renders students, no matter what their abilities or disabilities, stunted. The "banking" model is how many view "traditional" classrooms – whereby teachers stand on pedestals of knowledge, depositing, as a one-way street, their knowledge into the eager and empty minds of their students. Freire, however, believes that learning does not move in a single direction; rather, the students learn from the teacher and the teacher learns from the students. Students should not be viewed as

¹³ Kenneth Bruffee, "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind'", *College English* 46, No. 7 (1984).

mere depositories for information; such a viewpoint is dehumanizing. It fails to accept that students are capable, individual thinkers and instead molds them into automatons of learning. Students are not given the chance to create and wonder on their own. The Banking Concepts fails to acknowledge or trust students to think critically and instead pushes them into a submissive role. Instead, what has already been created is instilled into the student like a computer pre-loaded with software.¹⁴

Freire's piece on the Banking Concept of Education includes a brief list of ways in which the teaching-learning, teacher-student relationship can be oppressive. He states that in the banking model, "the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply" and "the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it."¹⁵ This rigidity fails to account for otherness or differences that inevitably exist in the student body. For that reason, any teacher or professor adhering to such a stringent model might find themselves in situations for which the banking model can offer no solutions or answers. The college and university experience is not a strictly academic pursuit. To counter the banking concept, Freire poses the "problem-posing" method. Under problem-posing, the teacher is malleable enough to engage in conversation with his or her students (to talk *with* versus *at*) and let his or her students affect the way that their teaching is thinking: in other words, the teacher not only accepts that the students have a different perspective, but he or she embraces that perspective and allows it to become part of his or her own thoughts, to change him or herself in some way.¹⁶

¹⁴ Freire, Paulo, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 71-86.

¹⁵ Ibid. 73

¹⁶ Ibid. 80

Margaret Price, a LD-pedagogy theorist, describes an experience in which she came to fully understand what it means to learn from the student. She learned neither data nor factual information. Instead she learned a hard lesson about disability pedagogy and how to further her efforts in teaching or tutoring students with learning disabilities. In her 2011 book *Mad At School*, she confessed that while working with an LD student, she was unable to tear herself away from writing process methods and revision processes that she herself felt most comfortable with. These methods included “brainstorming, listing, sketching, dialoguing, walking around campus, even phone calls...”¹⁷ It was *her* process but not necessarily the student’s process. It was this realization – and confession – that lead her to relinquish the tried-and-true methods that she had grown so accustomed to and to become malleable enough to work with the student in the ways that *he* was best able to learn:¹⁸

Finally, I was forced to concede that what I had assumed to be true of all writers was not true for this writer. His drafting process was indeed a process; it just wasn’t one that I could easily observe and participate in, since most of it took place via thought rather than physical action ... He was earning fair grades on his writing, and I finally admitted – to myself and to him – that I was pushing him to try other strategies not because his writing “needed” it in terms of the way it was valued by his teachers, but only in terms of how I valued his process.¹⁹

Thus far, the discussion of LD pedagogy in this thesis focused heavily on the abilities of the brain. There is another approach/theory in education that moves

¹⁷ Price, Margaret. *Mad at School: Rhetoric of Mental Disability and Academic Life*. (Michigan: The Michigan University Press, 2011), 67.

¹⁸ Ibid. 67

¹⁹ Ibid. 67

beyond the brain to nurture the whole of an individual. An avid follower of Freire, bell hooks believes in the unification of the mind, body, and spirit in the classroom. Education is not simply about one's brain; students, regardless of ability, inability, or disability, can reach a place of (secular) spiritual satisfaction in the classroom. Composition is not just about placement words on paper, rote memorization of rules, or instructions for essay writing. With guidance, composition can also be a place where students are granted the freedom and opportunity to express themselves, learn about themselves and each other, grow and mature in the ways in which they think about life and the world around them. Given that this is a *very* different stance on teaching, hooks goes into this with perfectly reasonable expectations: "While it is utterly unreasonable for students to expect classrooms to be therapy sessions, it is appropriate for them to hope that the knowledge received in these settings will enrich and enhance them."²⁰

This is a form of holistic learning, whereby students can expect more than textbook knowledge of grammar in their composition class. Students can expect freedom from traditional classroom experiences, whereby growth goes hand-in-hand with learning. Similar to Freire, hooks also encourages a certain level of vulnerability on the part of the teacher; in doing so, the teacher encourages his or her students to take risks themselves. Margaret Price's anecdote is a perfect example of this: being overconfident, proud, or rigid does not provide the flexibility or mindset necessary to grow as an educator. To be fluid and vulnerable, one can readily accept changes and challenges.

²⁰ bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 19.

However, hooks' theory does not mean being overly forward or creating an uncomfortable situation, risking the delicate relationship between student and teacher. It does not suggest becoming an intimate mediator between the student and the institution, nor does it recommend that the teacher become personally and emotionally involved in the student's life. Rather, it is designed to show that the teacher is human, not an autonomous overlord sent to force information and knowledge upon the classroom.²¹

In the realm of LD, hooks' philosophy gives educators the gift of adaptability, and the question of "how does one teach students with LD" can escape from the confines of what some might refer to as conventional means of teaching students in general. Furthermore, it looks beyond what the brain is or is not capable of and addresses other components of a student's whole being.

Students are not merely the sum of their abilities but a conglomerate of their abilities, their inabilities, their insecurities, their virtues, strengths, weaknesses, personalities, ethnicities, cultural identities, and so on. This opens up the classroom and allows everyone the opportunity to *be* vulnerable (and simply *human*). While not every student might want to participate, those who do will benefit from moving beyond a passive student to one who holds the reigns on their education.

So what makes Bruffee, Freire, and hooks similar to LD pedagogy writers and theorists? The latter group focuses heavily on the ideas of trust and ability in students with LD. The theorists discussed below, like those above, drop the rigidity of the

²¹ bell hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*, (New York: Routledge, 1994), 21.

banking concept and instead observe the quandaries of the LD teaching world and the dynamics of the classroom through their conversations on LD pedagogy.

In his article titled “Disability in Higher Education: From Past-Based to Interaction-Based,” Jeffrey Porter describes two viewpoints on LD student education: “The conventional one, with limited educational relevance, sees a disabled student. An alternative one, with greater educational utility, sees a student experiencing disability.”²² Kenneth Bruffee’s thoughts on collaboration parallel Porter’s stance on *experiencing* the disability. If life is composed of experiences and each experience is unique to each person, then a student with LD has an *experience* to share, a uniqueness that can be brought as part of student collaboration in the writing process, and a set of skills and knowledge that mainstream students lack. Porter’s very words, “student experiencing disability,” and the very structure of this statement emphasizes the student as human first and the disability not as something that defines the student, but perhaps something that is worthy to note about the human. It is not something that *defines* him/her. In other words: this is a person with a problem – not a problem to be dealt with. This is reminiscent of hooks’ thoughts on serving the student holistically, as the disability in question is not the overarching or major quality of the person, and by nurturing other aspects of the *student*, rather than shining a spotlight on the *disability*, a teacher can help that student utilize his or her whole self in the writing and learning process.

Porter argues that teaching students with learning disabilities must focus on teaching in accordance with the students’ strengths and that the environment in which

²² Jeffrey Porter, “Disability in Higher Education: From Person-Based to Interaction-Based,” *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, No. 5(I) (1994): 72.

students with learning disabilities are expected to learn should “fit” the students in question. Further, he redefines “disability” and “dysfunction.” There’s no such thing as an inability; rather, there is a continuum of learning whereby “some students are relatively strong, others relatively weak, others in the middle.”²³ By this definition, Porter attempts to break down the wall between abled and disabled so that there are no longer two separate camps of students or pedagogical approaches that come with the having two definitions of student ability. Like Bruffee’s belief that every student is knowledgeable about something, Porter believes that every student is abled in some way. Some students are abled in ways that others are not while some students have or show great aptitude in some areas and struggle in others. This re-definition of disability and the educational approach to disability engenders blurring the lines in composition pedagogy. No longer is there “abled” versus “disabled.” Porter introduces not-so-subtle grey areas in his discussion of continuums and he does not fail to follow through. Teaching and the approaches taken to teaching should not be a static activity and should not assume that all students learn in the same way; teaching should be as dynamic as the students – regardless of ability or disability – sitting in the classroom.²⁴ Instead of carving a path that navigates the teaching process from point A to point B, from assuming that there is a checklist of methods and prescriptions for teaching students with LD (or teaching in the general sense), the teacher should always be in flux, always able and willing to review and attempt the different theories and philosophies on teaching, see how they are applied in the

²³ Jeffrey Porter, “Disability in Higher Education: From Person-Based to Interaction-Based,” *Journal on Excellence in College Teaching*, No. 5(1) (1994): 72.

²⁴ Ibid. 73

classroom, observe the effects they have on their students, and modify their methods based on the needs of the student.

The idea of flexibility and fluidity that Porter describes is actually grounded in an earlier context: as early as 1982 James A. Berlin, in his publication *Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories*, recognized that there were/are different pedagogical schools of thought. He describes the four major theories of the time: Neo-Aristotelians or “Classicists,” The “Positivists” or Neo-Traditionalists, the Neo-Platonists or “Expressionists,” and the New Rhetoricians.²⁵ The crux of the article is to establish, from Berlin’s perspective, his preferred school of thought (New Rhetoricians) based on the history and pedagogical implications of each theory.²⁶ Additionally, Berlin strongly encourages teachers to “become more aware of … their pedagogical strategies. Not doing so can have disastrous consequences, ranging from momentarily confusing students to sending them away with faulty and even harmful information.”²⁷

Berlin criticizes the Neo-Aristotelians, Neo-Traditionalists, and Neo-Platonists for their belief that truth is static and offers advice on how truth should be sought and conveyed. The first group believes that truth is syllogistic and heuristic, and there is a focus on how to best convey truth through rhetoric;²⁸ the second group believes that truth is found through inductive reasoning and focuses on ways in which truth can be presented from the mind to the audience placing great emphasis on style

²⁵ James A. Berlin, “Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories,” College Composition 44, No. 8 (1982): 765-766.

²⁶ Ibid. 766

²⁷ Ibid. 766

²⁸ Ibid. 767-768

and arrangement²⁹; the third group believes that truth is engendered within the individual and “cannot be communicated,” so it is the writer’s task not to teach truth but “the removal of that which obstructs the personal apprehension of the truth.”³⁰ However, Berlin favored the theory of the New Rhetoric. Under the theory of New Rhetoric, truth is not to be found in a static location as is the case in the former theories discussed. Instead of molding language from truth, New Rhetoric believes that language creates truth, and without language, there is no truth.³¹ Reminiscent of Freire, Berlin states: “The New Rhetoric sees the writer as a creator of meaning, a shaper of reality, rather than a passive receptor of the immutably given.”³²

Berlin’s piece on the different pedagogical theories was just one way of showing that teaching composition, like truth, like people, is dynamic. Each theory that Berlin discussed focuses on a different aspect of writing itself – from the basic building blocks of grammar, syntax, and structure, to Aristotelian notions of eloquence, to the liberation and expression of the mind. Essentially, there is no “correct” theory; it is up to the teacher or establishment to decide and prioritize what should and should not be emphasized in the composition classroom.

Bruffee’s writing on collaborative learning is likewise dynamic as it can be applied in any learning environment, though is more likely to be found in composition courses. If each student has a different strength, then each student can contribute to his or her peers’ work. If disability varies as Porter states, then it stands to reason that *ability* varies as well. If there is an area in which a student founders,

²⁹ James A. Berlin, “Contemporary Composition: The Major Pedagogical Theories,” College Composition 44, No. 8 (1982): 769-772.

³⁰ Ibid. 771-772

³¹ Ibid. 774

³² Ibid. 776

then there might be an area in which his or her peer excels. A group of students in a peer review group, by virtue of every member having something to contribute, can feasibly mold and fuse their strengths and weaknesses as one might think about the odd shapes of a puzzle fitting each other's gaps.

As proof of this, Brenda Jo Brueggemann conducted an exercise with her class to teach them about collaboration and learning disabilities first-hand. In this exercise, she took her class out on the campus, away from the building, blinded folded two students, and asked these now-“disabled” students to make their way back to their building. As the two fumbled and began to lose their way, the rest of the class chipped in and offered directions and help to the extent that the exercise allowed.³³

Afterwards, we talked about the sense-making that happened, the moments of question, collaboration, trust, and context-building that took place ... We talked, for example, about why no one wanted the couple to become totally dependent on our directions, on outside sources, and everyone worked instead to find the right balance between enable their independent success and fostering a helpful, but not overwhelming, dependence on others.³⁴

Brueggemann’s focus in her experiment was on physical disability with emphasis on collaboration and the desire as “disabled” students to act independently. The “disabled” students had the support of the class.

Brueggemann was able to use the environment to recreate, tangibly, what a physical disability might feel like and how to use the space and resources given to present a “solution” to the problem. Prendergast’s “rhetorical black hole” suggests

³³ Brenda Jo Brueggemann, “An Enabling Pedagogy: Mediations on Writing and Disability,” *JAC* 21, No. 4 (2001): 799.

³⁴ Ibid. 800

that the student with mental or learning disabilities becomes lost or isolated within the classroom and amongst his or her peers.

However, Margaret Price contends that the environment in which a student with a mental or learning disability learns can also be modified to suit the needs of the LD student, whose needs might not be satisfied by changing physical space. Price refers to this as “kairotic space.”³⁵ By her definition, kairotic space includes “the beliefs, discourses, attitudes, and interchanges that take place there,”³⁶ as well as meets all or most of these requirements:

1. *Real-time unfolding of events*
2. *Impromptu communication that is required or encouraged*
3. *In-person contact*
4. *A strong social element*
5. *High stakes*

Additionally, Price places emphasis on “the pairing of spontaneity with high levels of professional/academic impact.”³⁷

Price, having cited Catherine Prendergast, argues that mental disability exists in a “rhetorical black hole.” This term is used to describe how students with mental disabilities are viewed as rhetoricians – that is to say, they are *not* viewed as rhetoricians, that their validity as thinkers and writers is hindered by their statuses as

³⁵ Kairos, a term coined from classical rhetoric by the ancient Greeks, can be described as the most psychologically or emotionally effective time to deliver a speech assuming that the impact on the audience will be greater if the audience has a particular frame of mind or emotion. On page 60 of *Mad At School*, Price, via Cynthia Miecznikowski Sheard, argues that kairos, aside from time, also includes physical space and attitudes, all of which are interconnected.

³⁶ Price, Margaret. *Mad At School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life*. (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2011), 61.

³⁷ Ibid. 60-61

students with mental or learning disabilities.³⁸ In essence, Brueggemann and Price posit that environmental limitations can be stymied and open communication – even creating a community within the classroom – can create a sound learning space where students with disabilities/LD are challenged to grow socially and academically.

Patricia A. Dunn took on a different approach in her research. Instead of theory and/or observation, she instead conducted an interview with a student to gain first-hand insight about academic life for a student with a learning disability. The student in question, Nick, was gifted with a silver tongue but struggled with reading and struggled with the *very idea* of having a learning disability. In his school career, he worked his way around his disability, or worked *through* it, having been diagnosed late in his secondary education career.³⁹

During her two-hour interview, Dunn asked a very simple, yet vital question regarding teachers of students with LD: “... are there any specific do’s and don’ts you would tell them regarding LD students?” Nick responded by stating that a teacher should not look down upon students with LD, that in assuming that a student with LD cannot (and therefore shouldn’t be expected to) sustain the same levels of academic output that a student without LD can would only perpetuate the difficulties that a student with LD already faces and “set a lower standard, and that perpetuates a continuously low quality of work.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Price, Margaret. *Mad At School: Rhetorics of Mental Disability and Academic Life*. (Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2011), 26-27.

³⁹ Dunn, Patricia A., “From Learning Differences: The Perfective of LD College Students,” in Disability and the Teaching of Writing 2008 (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s), 148.

⁴⁰ Ibid. 149.

Amy Vidali, in writing on the differences between “basic”⁴¹ writers and students with LD, sees a difference in how the overall system treats differences between the two: “While cognitivism recommends a developmental approach to teaching writing to address the ‘deficits’ of basic writers, people with disabilities are directed to doctors and rehabilitation to fix specialists to fix theirs.”⁴²

She, like many other LD pedagogy theorists, sees the divide in how different classifications of students (non-LD, “basic,” and students with disabilities, in addition to other factors in the broader socio-political-economic spectrum) are taught or treated in the academic (and outside) world. However, as Dunn discovered, this chasm in educational motions could be causing more harm than good for many students with LD. Vidali, in citing Rosemarie Garland-Thompson, places emphasis on environment and social interaction in defining disability.⁴³ In essence, as Dunn’s interview with Nick states, disability is exacerbated by how disability is perceived overall. If there is an assumption about what can and cannot be done, or how a student with LD can or should learn, and this assumption decreases expectations in a student with LD, then there will always be what Vidali refers to as “deficit models.”⁴⁴

There is a common thread among many LD pedagogy theorists and that thread is this: there is a strong emphasis on differences where “different” is defined in negative terms and that the definition of different has permeated into academia, causing educators and education administrators to make certain assumptions about the

⁴¹ Here Vidali cites David Bartholomae’s 1993 publication “The Tidy House.” (David Bartholomae, “The Tidy House: Basic Writing in the American Curriculum,” *Journal of Basic Writing* 12, no. 1 (1993): 4-21.

⁴² Vidali, Amy, “Discourses of Disability and Basic Writing,” in *Disability and the Teaching of Writing* 2008 (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s), 42.

⁴³ Ibid. 43

⁴⁴ Ibid. 43

abilities of students with LD. These assumptions create a system in which the institutions attempt to mediate between what they see as fairness and pragmatism, which only results in a portion of the student body that is redefined; these students are subsequently pushed into a niche, a metaphorical corner, of academia that attempts to account for these differences/disabilities by emphasizing the idea that these differences do exist and must be accounted for in ways that both suggest and continue the view that students with LD cannot succeed (or are unlikely to succeed) without an educational crutch.

Chapter 2: The College Landscape: Then and Now

Before delving into the academic world, it is interesting and important to note how disability rights have changed legislatively over time. Laws and statutes often greatly affect academic policies, even if they are not academically based or if college campuses are not the source of change or solely intended recipient of change. In 1991, the federal government, under the Americans with Disabilities Act, issued the Standards for Accessible Design, which outlined and defined ways in which “places of public accommodation and commercial facilities” could be designed to fit the needs of “individuals with disabilities.” Section 3.5 defines items such as “accessible,” “adaptability,” and “occupiable,” as prescribed by statute; each of these definitions relates, however, to strictly physical disabilities – and the statute, in 1991, failed to define “disability” itself. Section 4 “Accessible Elements and Spaces: Scope and Technical Requirements,” is a list of more than 30 elements within a physical space that must meet certain minimum requirements. These elements include, but are not limited to: ramps, stairs, elevators, telephones, signage, doors, toilets, telephones, alarms, and so forth, showing no indication of consideration for non-physical disabilities.⁴⁵ Many of these regulate a physical space or public accommodation, such as a park bench or public restroom, in terms of length, height, and width, or they account for the blind and deaf through audio and visual accommodations.

In 2010 the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 was amended and fully enacted in 2012, and it is here that the federal government recognized mental

⁴⁵ 1991 ADA Standards for Accessible Design, Appendix A to part 36 <http://www.ada.gov/1991standards/1991standards-archive.html#Anchor-11482>, date accessed, April 29, 2015

disabilities in addition to physical disabilities. Under Section 12102. *Definition of disability*, a disability is defined as “(A) a physical or *mental* impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities...” while major life activities include, among other tasks and actions, “... learning, reading, concentrating, thinking communicating, and working.”⁴⁶ However, the amendment, while acknowledging and protecting the rights of individuals with mental disabilities, has no prescription for *how* a public space, for instance, accommodates for the needs of the mentally disabled individual. While physical disability, mental disability, and learning disability are not necessarily the same,⁴⁷ the ADA is cited here as a general reference as to how space can or cannot be regulated in regards to disability. In essence, to accommodate for a physical disability, physical space and objects can be manipulated while the rights of the mentally disabled can only be protected by statute under the law.

Andrea Freud Lowenstein once wrote a narrative essay about her life as a learning disabled student.⁴⁸ Her story dates back to a time when “dyslexia was

⁴⁶ Public Law 101-336. §§ 12101 et seq. 108th Congress, 2nd session (July 26, 1990)

⁴⁷ The DSM-IV defines a mental disorder as “a clinically significant behavioral or psychological syndrome or pattern that occurs in an individual and that is associated with present distress (e.g., a painful symptom) or disability (i.e., impairment in one or more important areas of functioning) or with a significantly increased risk of suffering death, pain, disability, or an important loss of freedom. In addition, this syndrome or pattern must not be merely an expectable and culturally sanctioned response to a particular event, for example, the death of a loved one. Whatever its original cause, it must currently be considered a manifestation of a behavioral, psychological, or biological dysfunction in the individual.” Learning disorders, under the DSM-IV-TR, are less specific, citing only “Reading disorder/Mathematics disorder/ Disorder of written expression” in terms of diagnostics. The DSM-IV-TR has separate classifications for Autism, Asperger’s, Attention Deficit Disorder, Rett’s Disorder.

American Psychiatric Association. 2000. Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-IV-TR. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.

American Psychiatric Association. 2000. Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-IV. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association.

⁴⁸ Andrea Freud Lowenstein, “My Learning Disability: A Digressive Essay,” *College English* 66, No. 6 (2004): 585-602.

invented”⁴⁹ and later, in high school, where students were lumped into groups A, B, C, or D – socioeconomic and intellectual dividers that served as definitive measures of a student’s ability.⁵⁰ The work is a reflection of her (dis)ability. It defined her as a student from her earliest years until graduate school, how the elitism and pride of being in Group A forever resonated in her mind as she “spent … hours memorizing words and numbers in a foreign language in order to pass the exams, to get the degrees, to keep up with Group A.”⁵¹ The school experience for students with LD has undergone some changes since Lowenstein’s time.

The original version of the statute and the later amendment meant that college campuses sought to make some changes as well. Whether prescribed by law or if it was just a matter of equality for students with LD, some college campuses took steps to become more LD-friendly while others became LD-centric. Below is a review several LD-friendly schools and what how they distinguish themselves from other schools. The details, found below, illustrate how higher educational institutions define LD-friendliness and the methods they use to tackle the issue of “how” to teach and assist students with learning disabilities. There is a growing number of LD colleges, universities, and programs. In June 2010, *The Huffington Post* created a list of the “top” colleges for learning disabled students.⁵² This list includes Landmark College, University of Arizona, Beacon College, Curry College, Northeastern University, University of Colorado (Colorado Springs), Ausburg College, University

⁴⁹ Andrea Freud Lowenstein, “My Learning Disability: A Digressive Essay,” *College English* 66, No. 6 (2004): 586

⁵⁰ Ibid. 587-588

⁵¹ Ibid. 590

⁵² Jet Wells, “Colleges with the BEST Learning Disability Programs,” *The Huffington Post*, last modified June 7, 2010, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/06/07/best-ld-programs_n_603369.html.

of Connecticut, University of Iowa, and American University. Each school uses a slightly different approach to teaching students with learning disabilities.

College	Description	Key Features/Highlights
Landmark College (Putney, VT)	<p>Landmark College uses an ability-based entry system called the “Points of Entry.” Each entry point correlates to a different level of “college readiness,” ranging from the Credit entry point for college-ready students to the Learning Intensive Curriculum, (LIC) “a non-credit, one- or two-semester intensive program for students with significant difficulties who are reading and writing well below college level.” EN0111 teaches students writing as a multi-stage process; they learn writing strategies such as “generating and organizing, including freewriting, brainstorming, and using Inspiration software.” They also learn about sentence and paragraph structure; they learn about narration, description, and illustration (remedial coursework). In CO0111 the focus is on oral language as a basis for reading and writing skills; students learn to “derive meaning from language and generate language in an academic setting.”⁵³</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Placement exams •Tiered coursework based on exam results •Specialized software •Focus on oral skills •Focus on writing strategies
Ausburg College (Minneapolis, MN)	<p>Ausburg College offers remedial coursework and an ability-based entry system: ENL101 Developmental Writing. ENL101 is merely described as “a preparatory course for ENL 111 Effective Writing, this course is required of students identified by the English Placement Test as needing additional preparation in composition.”⁵⁴</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Placement exams •Tiered coursework based on exam results

⁵³ “Points of Entry,” Landmark College, accessed November 22, 2014, <http://www.landmark.edu/academics/first-year-experience/preparing-for-landmark>.

⁵⁴ “Course Descriptions,” Ausburg College, accessed November 22, 2014, <http://www.augsburg.edu/english/courses/>.

Beacon College (Leesburg, FL)	<p>Beacon's ENG1101 College Composition course runs concurrently with ENG010 Writing Center as mandatory resource. The purpose is to improve the basic writing skills necessary to complete ENG1101; ENG1101's emphasis is on expository essay writing Beacon College's Writing Center utilizes LD assistive technology, such as Kurzweil3000, WordQ, Inspiration, and Editor. It also hosts Television Game Night, which enables students to learn through play.⁵⁵</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Writing center as a requirement •Specialized software •Learning through play/games
University of Iowa (Iowa City, IA)	<p>University of Iowa's REACH (Realizing Educational and Career Hopes) program is a 2-year transitional program. In REA:0051 Practical Writing, students engage in different forms of writing and in peer-review processes, assisting each other "with self-expression in written formats, with focus on organization and communication with others," extending all the way into residence halls and the community. REA:0010 Social Skills I teaches students basic social interaction such as initiation conversation, learning social cues and how to respond appropriately. In a sense, REA:0010 gives students a basic how-to on speech before writing where needed.⁵⁶</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Focus on social interaction/oral skills •Focus on the community •Peer learning •Extended/transitional coursework

Some colleges, such as University of Connecticut, include LD centers designed to assist students with disabilities.⁵⁷ Upon review of the various LD-friendly schools/programs, it would seem that colleges and universities insist on the idea of

⁵⁵ "Academic Catalog 2014-2015," *Beacon College*, accessed November 22, 2014, <http://www.beaconcollege.edu/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Beacon-College-Catalog-2014-20155.pdf>.

⁵⁶ "UI Reach," *The University of Iowa*, last modified September 2014, <http://www.registrar.uiowa.edu/registrar/catalog/education/uireach/index.html>

⁵⁷ "Welcome to the Center for Students with Disabilities," University of Connecticut, accessed November 22, 2014, <http://www.csd.uconn.edu/about.html>.

differences, if not outright, then by specifically appealing to certain academic demographics or traits within students. One of the major similarities among these institutions is that each college or university includes some version of a remedial writing track or otherwise assumes that some students with learning disabilities should be included in a segregated writing program. These are all based on the assumption that the student is “behind” in the language arts – reading and writing – or that students with learning disabilities require additional help to get through their college years. One may ask which is the best approach: one of them? All of them? The Universal Design in Learning, described below, might argue that the overall approach of segregation is incorrect.

So why is there still a focus on the differences between students with and without learning disabilities, even at the college level or in the “top” LD-friendly schools? Singularity, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, is a “singleness of aim or purpose” or “the quality or fact of being one in number or kind; singleness, oneness.”⁵⁸ Singularity seeks to expand on universality by converging LD and non-LD pedagogical theories and practices so as to blend and mesh.

Most non-LD students aren’t expected to start with remedial writing courses, so professors and teachers tackle the issue of “how to teach” with a different set of beliefs about “who” and “how.” There is emphasis on collaborative learning and peer reviews, leaving teachers to wonder how should writing be assessed. Robert McRuer argued that “composition in the corporate university remains a practice that is focused

⁵⁸ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “singularity.”

on a fetishized final product”⁵⁹ and that “de-composition and disorder always haunt the composition classroom intent on the production of order and efficiency.”⁶⁰ While the higher education system continually tries to focus on “types” of students in very distinct ways, proffering specified agendas for Type A and Type B, putting the student body in a sieve, shaking it around and separating one lot from another, there can be value in sameness and in Universal Design where everyone can be included.

Students with learning disabilities are “held back” and forced to learn rudimentary skills needed to “succeed” in “regular” coursework and ultimately, life after college. They are taught sentence and paragraph structure, organizational skills, and they are given additional resources or, in the case of Beacon College, instructed to visit the Writing Center for credits in conjunction with their coursework. Is there an umbrella in which disability and non-disability pedagogy can exist with certain singularity? This might be an extreme hypothetical, too-quick of a step in any direction. Perhaps it is too broad or too difficult and near impossible to create a singularity theory; however, the tools to *try* are already available and, in some cases, they are well known.

⁵⁹ Robert McRuer, “Composing Bodies; or, De-Composition: Queer Theory, Disability Studies, and Alternative Corporealities,” *JAC* 24, No. 1 (2004): 53.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.* 55

Chapter 3: From Theory to Execution

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines “universal” as “Extending over or including the whole of something specified or implied, esp. the whole of a particular group or the whole world; comprehensive, complete; widely occurring or existing, prevalent over all.”⁶¹

The OED’s definition of “universal” is suited well for the approach to disability education called Universal Design in Learning (UDL). The National Center for Universal Design in Learning (The UDL Center) defines UDL as:

“... a set of principles for curriculum development that give all individuals equal opportunities to learn. ... UDL provides a blueprint for creating instructions goals, methods, materials, and assessments that *work for everyone—not a single, one-size-fits-all solution* but rather flexible approaches that can be customized and adjusted for individual needs.”⁶²

Simply put, UDL defies any attempt to segregate LD and non-LD education. The UDL Center also outlines and defines The Three Principles (of UDL). The First Principle is “the ‘what’ of learning” and prescribes multiple methods for representing information to account for differences in how students with disabilities understand information; the Second Principle is “the ‘how’ of learning” and focuses on the idea that students with disabilities absorb and express information differently; the Third Principle is “the ‘why’ of learning” and focuses on ways to engage students in the

⁶¹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “universal.”

⁶² “*What is Universal Design for Learning?*,” National Center on Universal Design for Learning, accessed May 6, 2015, <http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/whatisudl>.

learning process.⁶³ These Principles are all based on flexibility to account for differences in students with LD, on how information is presented, processed, and reflected.

Scholars Patricia A. Dunn and Kathleen Dunn De Mers, authors of “Reversing Notions of Disability and Accommodation: Embracing Universal Design in Writing Pedagogy and Web Space,” make specific suggestions about UDL and the writing process. Instead of diving directly into writing, Dunn and Dunn De Mers suggest using “sensory pathways and other representational systems to spark the intellectual play and growth involved in writing and revising: sketching, role-playing, talking, graphing, literally moving pieces of an argument around on a table, interviewing each other, etc.”⁶⁴ These are practical methods that all students are privy to and can benefit from. There is a discussion of composition pedagogy and an expanded universalization of what is already in practice in UDL. What can one pedagogical approach learn from the other to push singularity further?

There is a plethora of theory on teaching composition that isn’t necessarily relative or directed towards students with learning disabilities. However, there is much to learn from the LD colleges. Beacon’s model of First-Year Writing and its use of the Writing Center can be expanded to all First-Year Writing programs in some way, shape, or form. Unfortunately, finances are typically an issue in college education. A single Writing Center may not be staffed enough to support an entire class of First-Year Students, especially at larger universities, but tutor support or

⁶³ “The Three Principles,” National Center on Universal Design for Learning, accessed May 6, 2015, <http://www.udlcenter.org/aboutudl/whatisudl>.

⁶⁴ Patricia A. Dunn and Kathleen Dunn De Mers, “Reversing Notions of Disability and Accommodation: Embracing Universal Design in Writing Pedagogy and Web Space,” Kairos 1, No. 7 (2002), http://english.ttu.edu/kairos/7.1/binder2.html?coverweb/dunn_demers/index.html.

other forms of peer or mentor support can be made available outside the walls of the Writing Center. Instead of suggesting, or in some cases, *pleading* with students to use the assistance that is available, working with the Writing Center or a peer/mentor could be included in the syllabus. This might also alleviate the overburdened professor, adjunct, or graduate student who is expected to handle X number of students per semester.

Bruffee observed the issue of students refusing or disregarding instructional assistance in the 1980's and attributed it to poor performance in the classroom and failure to adapt to college life. The presence of tutors and counseling programs were often times not enough though, contrary of Beacon's model, he also states that *mandating* unwelcomed help was not always useful or helpful. This issue led to the "alternative to traditional classroom teaching" in the form of collaborative learning.⁶⁵ After all, a person cannot be forced to learn any more than they can be forced to accept help. That said, there is some emphasis on use of collaborative learning versus mandatory time spent in a Writing Center. The social aspect with ones' peers in a collaborative learning setting, even outside the space and time confines of the classroom, could fulfill the same goals as mandated Writing Center and engender the same advantages while removing the institutional feel and restraint that might exist with a Writing Center.

Something else that Beacon does differently is host a game night, although game night shouldn't be a tool reserved for any one particular group of students. Games are very common for younger children and while they seem like something

⁶⁵ Kenneth Bruffee, "Collaborative Learning and the 'Conversation of Mankind'", College English 46, No. 7 (1984).

that one might find *solely* in an elementary school classroom, researchers at Stanford University would argue that learning through games is not strictly for children:

... games help us develop non-cognitive skills that the panelists agreed are as fundamental as cognitive skills in explaining how we learn and if we succeed. According to Gee, skills such as patience and discipline, which one should acquire as a child but often does not, correlate with success better than IQ scores do. And those non-cognitive skills – that is, not what you know but how you behave – are far better suited to a game context than to a traditional classroom and textbook context.⁶⁶

This discussion explains and goes beyond the simple premise that students learn better when they are having fun. In fact, The National Center for Learning Disabilities (NCLD) compiled a list of game applications for smart phones and tablets to help students with ADHD, dyslexia, and dysgraphia, among other disabilities.⁶⁷

The NCLD's psychological take on learning through play, how its defined, and the theory behind why it works enables learning to take place beyond the desk, chair, classroom, and text books. Likewise, Bruffee's theory on collaborative learning can be extended beyond academic learning to encompass human experiences, thus providing a foundation of bonding necessary to even generate the collaboration in collaborative (academic) learning. The student with dysgraphia isn't necessarily void

⁶⁶ R.F. MacKay, "Playing to learn: Panelists at Stanford discussion say using games as an educational tool provides opportunities for deeper learning," *Stanford News*, last modified March 1, 2013, <http://news.stanford.edu/news/2013/march/games-education-tool-030113.html>.

James Gee is a professor of literacy studies at Arizona State University. In this paper, he stated that games allow people to use their intelligence as a collective, which is how our minds are meant to work.

⁶⁷ "Assistive Tech Innovations: 14 new Apps & Other Tools," *National Center for Learning Disabilities*, accessed November 22, 2014, <http://www.ncld.org/students-disabilities/assistive-technology-education/apps-assistive-technology>.

of literacy in his or her mind and might have much to offer the socially awkward peer with Asperger's Syndrome as they share the experience of being labeled "learning disabled." How about two students with ADHD help each other manage their frustrations through comradery and shared experiences, successes, or struggles? Or how about just having non-LD students engage in peer review with students with disabilities? Awareness would spike as the non-LD student learns that having a learning disability does not necessarily mean that a person is less intelligent or has less to offer. Conversely, students with learning disabilities might feel less stigmatized as the barrier between the two groups dissolves.

As humans, both teachers are students alike are prone to fall subject to feelings of frustration, stress, weakness, anger, and so forth; humans do not exist in an emotional vacuum. Are exceptions made for students with disabilities that wouldn't normally be made for non-LD students? This isn't simply a matter of school policy, whereby students with learning disabilities are privy to certain resources that others might not have access to. First-Year Writing teachers might grow irritated when their non-LD students "do this" or "don't do that". They might grow easily frustrated if their students aren't "grasping" the concepts, if they're repeating the same mistakes, or failing to master the proper use of a semicolon. There's an emotional aspect to teaching that cannot be avoided and anger or sympathy might be provoked for a number of different reasons. Brueggemann confessed that she grew frustrated with a student because he failed to "grasp" her point about disabilities.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Brenda Jo Brueggemann, "An Enabling Pedagogy: Mediations on Writing and Disability," *JAC* 21, No. 4 (2001): 810

Conversely, if a student with a learning disability didn't "catch on" to a lesson as quickly as a non-LD student, how would a teacher feel? Conceivably, a teacher would not be as quick to anger or lose patience with the student because that teacher has a certain expectation of that student to perform in a certain way. The same can be said for students without disabilities – the expectations of the teacher might be gauged incorrectly.

The Pygmalion Effect and The Golem Effect theorize that a teacher's expectations of a student can bolster (Pygmalion) or hinder (Golem) student performance. The Golem Theory is less concrete than its counterpart, but that does not necessarily mean that it can be brushed aside without further acknowledgment.⁶⁹ A teacher may or may not even be aware of a student's disabilities. The National Center for Learning Disabilities states that one major sign of a learning disability is a "distinct and unexplained gap between a person's level of expected achievement and their performance."⁷⁰ This might manifest in a student's reading comprehension, slowness in reading rate, illegible handwriting, ability to commit lessons to memory, inability to sit still for periods of time, confusing letters, words, or sounds.⁷¹ The list goes on depending on the disability in question. If a disability is not identified, expectations are not met, and negative emotions begin to flow from both the student and the teacher. By maintaining the same level of expectations for both groups of

⁶⁹ Dennis Reynolds, "Restraining Golem and Harnessing Pygmalion in the Classroom: A Laboratory Study of Managerial Expectations and Task Design," *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 6, No. 4 (2007): 475-483.

⁷⁰ "What Are Learning Disabilities?" *National Center for Learning Disabilities*, accessed November 30, 2014, <http://www.ncld.org/types-learning-disabilities/what-is-lid/what-are-learning-disabilities>.

⁷¹ Ibid.

students, there is the possibility that success rates are likely to increase *for both groups of students.*

Freire's theory on education can easily be applied to a discussion on LD pedagogy. Students with learning disabilities are not exempt from teaching their teachers. They come from different rhetorical backgrounds, grew up with and/or dealt with different circumstances as a result of their conditions. Their problems are often unique to the problems "abled" people face. This is similar to the collaborative learning theory mentioned earlier. Teachers might not learn in the strictly educational sense or learn academically from students with learning disabilities. These would be lessons in disability rhetoric and humanity. A teacher cannot assume that can, should, or do intellectually tower over students over with LD, looming with knowledge that's waiting to fill a blank mind no more than they can assume they'll do the same with non-LD students.

Freire believes that a form of oppression can occur in the classroom, and the stance of teacher-as-oppressor stunts a student's ability to grow as both an academic and a person, a member of a community. In this light, it can be averred that maintaining an open learning environment is key to *enabling*. What does it mean to be open? Openness isn't limited to physical space or social environment. Openness is the free-flow of communication and openness of the mind. It's the ability to be flexible in teaching and learning, to face an obstacle and either overcome it or move on to the next possible solution to a problem. A teacher with a student (or students) with LD can react with grace and ease to the issue of how to teach a student (or students) with LD by learning about who their students are and allowing themselves

to take in the traits and personas of their students. Again, this isn't learning in the academic sense. Instead there should be a conversation about reversing or negating the idea that learning is best done by sending information to a recipient and failing to receive feedback or failing to note whether the banking technique is even contributing to the education of the student. This is focused on the idea that students be perceived as equals who can contribute more to the classroom/teacher than rote memorization from texts.

This sense of empowerment would give both LD and non-LD students the chance to breathe freer, to crawl out from under the pressure that is created when students are given a label. There is no point in reinventing the wheel when it's easier to reassign its given purposes and expand upon what it can do. Theory has a plasticity that makes it the perfect tool for stretching the boundaries of what and cannot be accomplished in the classroom.

Conclusion

Singularity, as defined by the Oxford English Dictionary, is a “singleness of aim or purpose” or “the quality or fact of being one in number or kind; singleness, oneness.”⁷² Singularity seeks to expand on universality by converging LD and non-LD pedagogical theories and practices so as to blend and mesh.

In the end, one must pose the question: “What does this theory of singularity achieve?” *UDL acknowledges that education and the tools used to teach should be accessible in such a manner that students with LD can have the same access that non-LD students have.* Colleges dedicated to, or colleges that have particular interests in and accommodations for students with learning disabilities often go out of the way to create something specifically designed to help students with learning disabilities. For some, the special accommodations simply include remedial coursework, however, a few schools are thinking outside the box by implementing the use of play and games as learning devices. Their methods can be used for every student, just as non-LD focused theories can benefit students with LD. It’s just a matter of seeing past the labels. This is by no means an attempt to discount the idea that learning disabilities *actually hinder* one’s ability to learn. Of course, the need to give students with learning disabilities extra attention or to take a different route when teaching might always exist, like giving additional time for exams or providing a note taker, and there might always be different expectations between the two groups. Disabilities and the effects that they have on individual people vary greatly. These variances might

⁷² *Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed., s.v. “singularity.”

hinder the path to singularity. This is simply theory in progress, a means to initiate a conversation and ask, “What can one set of pedagogies offer the other?”

There are certainly differences in the way people learn, but there exist some overlaps in the way that people can be taught. *Singularity attempts to not only give students with LD access to techniques and tools of non-LD students, but it also seeks to give non-LD students the tools and techniques that students with LD are privy to.*

While creating overarching composition pedagogies might be a difficult feat to achieve, educators can certainly make strides towards generating the ideas necessary to actualize a cross-theory classroom that provides the benefits of both Rhet/Comp and LD-pedagogy to *all* students. Tactics that are used for students with learning disabilities are no less beneficial to students who are not learning disabled and vice versa. Ultimately, students from both groups can benefit from a merged system of teaching/learning; both sets of techniques have something that can be offered to “the other side.” Higher education is quick to see differences even in its growing efforts to create equality for students with learning disabilities. Singularity asks that differences between LD and non-LD Rhet/Comp pedagogy be acknowledged, questioned, and rethought, that the differences in pedagogical techniques should be used to expand and build upon the other – not acknowledge the idea of differences as something negative in order to *perpetuate* them.

In the end, the two students introduced in the early pages of this thesis will progress through their educational movements. They will transition from their first composition course to the day of the Commencement ceremony and perhaps onto graduate school where they might find themselves writing their own theses. Both will

hopefully spend countless nights studying into the early hours, complaining about exams and papers, “living the college life” as a layperson might describe it. The teaching methods that are implemented and used as these two students experience college will undoubtedly play a role in their successes, achievements, failures, and struggles - not as LD v. non-LD students, but quite simply as two people trying their best to accomplish something great.

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