Are we talking the same language? Contestable discourses between university staff accommodating students with disability

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Abstract

This study challenges the claim that in a university, a discourse of containment is predominant in the relationships that exist around students with disability and their requests for accommodations. It explores the work knowledges of those involved with the implementation of the processes of granting learning accommodations: the disability services staff and the academic staff liaison officers. Innovative analytical techniques were applied to interview data that identify the lexicons used by each group indicating they had different ways of conceptualising the process, with the former focussing on the development of the documentation that would stand as surrogate for the student and the latter concerned with tricky processes of negotiation with teaching staff, and problems arising from insufficient funding. These distinct work knowledges indicate the 'messiness' that predominates in the process of ensuring that students with disability can study 'on the same basis' as others.

Keywords: disability; university staff; work knowledges; students; reasonable accommodations;

Points of Interest

- The work knowledges of disability services staff focus on documenting the student's 'impairment' while faculty staff rely at second-hand on what the student choses to disclose and are concerned with negotiating support options with student's tutors and lecturers and confronting the impact of funding cuts.
- A novel tool TerMine software was used to analyse the interview transcripts, identifying two sets of norms and values at play through the vocabularies used.
- Reductions in funding to universities had an unanticipated impact on decisions to implement recommendations for support in learning.

Introduction

Education has been a human right since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN General Assembly, 10 December 1948). Yet, people with disability have remained marginalized in educational opportunities across primary, secondary and tertiary education

globally (World Bank, 2019). This situation exists albeit to varying degrees across both resource rich or resource poor countries and across many other areas of social participation and citizenship. Despite a series of strategies to improve the position of people with disability globally, the United Nations regarded the issue so seriously that it developed the *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (2006). Now signed by over 180 nations, the Convention has a program of ongoing monitoring. Despite some improvements, the presence of people with disability in tertiary education has remained stubbornly low for the last 16 years. This paper examines the discourses of the two distinct groups of university staff who seek to support students with disability through their requests for reasonable accommodations in their higher education, to identify their work knowledges (Smith 2005). In this context, the phrase reasonable accommodations, found in legislation and policy documents, refers to various forms of support for learning, including extra time to complete assignments and special conditions for examinations among others.

Under the Australian Vice Chancellor Committee's Guidelines relating to students with a disability (2006), university students with disability are able to apply to facilitate their participation in learning "on the same basis" as students without disability. These Guidelines are enacted under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, which draws on the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (World Health Organisation, 2001). Each university has its own policies and processes for the implementation of these Guidelines. Gabel and Miskovic (2014) demonstrated how institutional discourses of disability in higher education have been framed around an architecture of containment. Expanding on the Foucauldian concept of containment, Clouder, Adefila, Jackson, Opie, and Odedra (2016) argued that universities use these approaches to containment as a 'tidy way' to deal with disability. Yet, the range of discourses used to discuss disability and the arguments on the lack of appropriateness of dominant discourses suggest that this notion of tidiness must mask

a messy situation in the everyday experiences of students with disability and of the staff, professional and academic, who manage their applications for accommodations and engage in their learning experiences.

Bourdieu (1990) argued that the production of the ways of thinking encompassed in systems of containment and categorisation and incorporated into legislation and policies are part of the cultural capital of a society. Hence, they are extremely influential in setting expectations about practices, that is, ways to act and ways to think. People implementing policies have an understanding of the rules of the game they are engaged in, an institutional perspective which shapes their practices. Others involved with the policies will have their own interpretation of the rules, their own social practices, which may be in conflict with those implementing a policy. Smith (2005) argues that to understand what she refers to as the "ruling relations" in social interactions, an important aspect is finding the lexicon (or language used) and understanding the social relations the lexicon reflects. This study explores the experiences of staff in higher education whose role is to facilitate accommodations for students with disability. The intention is to compare the 'messiness' of practice with the desire for a 'tidy' process. This messiness will be revealed through the use of the everyday languages of university staff, indicating different ways of conceptualising the process.

Disability and its discourses

The discourses of disability exist at two levels, the first being the abstract or theoretical level and the second being the discourses arising from the experiences of everyday life. There is a significant literature concerned with discourses at the abstract level, including the medical model of disability, the social model of disability, ableism (e.g. Campbell, 2012, 2019; Dorfman, 2019); a human rights discourse on disability (e.g. Waddington & Priestley, 2021) ; and a social justice discourse (e.g. Van Aswegen & Shevlin, 2019). However, the concern

here is not with this level of abstraction, but with the languages that express the experiences of everyday life.

All members of society have different preferences for accepting or rejecting the medical and social models and accepting one or other model affects the way a student with disability will be treated. Students with disability themselves may also preference one model over another, and their preference will also affect the way that they act within the system. Haegele and Hodge (2016) demonstrate this in their hypothetical scenarios of a child moving from one school to another; the language used to label people with disability affects interactions with them at both the individual and institutional levels. Dolmage (2017, p.81) refers to two discourses found in managing accommodations for students with disability, one where teachers refer to students "jumping the queue" (Brueggemann, White, Dunn, Heifferon, & Cheu, 2001, p. 378) and the other which considers the granting of accommodations as "acts of charity". In these cases, teachers regard the referencing of disability as a way to circumvent systems of quality or equity, or to denigrate accommodations not as an equitable learning support but as a lessening of standards which might tarnish excellence.

Garsten and Jacobsson (2013) find the effect of a neo-liberal discourse, showing how, in the context of employment service for people with disability in Sweden, the use of language in the application process and subsequent interviews results in the shaping of the way people behave and in the construction of an identity (p. 845-6). Similarly, Barfoed (2019, p. 203) argues that the act of form filling online produces "a standardised client", whose own voice has been silenced.

There are relatively few studies that present the discourses of staff involved in the process of granting accommodations to students with disability. Gabel and Miskovic (2014, p. 1155) identified the factors that "legislate, surveil behavior, and conscribe discourse", in their

conceptualization of an architecture of containment. This was expressed through Foucauldian discourses that regulate disability. They found several constraining factors, significant among which were the individualisation of disability, inherent in the medical model, and the importance of time and time limits, as students were presented with deadlines or were asked to wait to see whether they were able to meet subject requirements before accommodations were considered. Other factors, which were part of the "taken for granted 'scripts for behavior'" (p. 1156), included cultural representations of disability and institutional policy. Gabel and Miskovic (2014) argue that in their study, 1% of the students were identified as being with disability whereas the reality is that 8 – 10% of the students live with disability. The discrepancy arises because of the way the university collects its data and because students do not disclose (Pitman, Brett & Ellis, 2021). Institutional policy concerned with regulation may act as a measure of containment if it does not take into account the lived experience of students with disability. Disclosure of disability either in application processes or in a student or employment circumstance remains a significant issue for those with 'invisible' disability such as some cognitive or mental health related impairments. It is in such a context that Abes and Darkow (2020) encourage the development of a discourse which represents the reality of a student with disability in an ableist world, arguing that while such a discourse might not provide ways to change the dominant narratives, it would provide a way for university staff to re-think the assumptions made by universities and colleges in such a way that students with disability would be more likely to disclose their condition.

The discourse of teaching staff and placement supervisors in Norway is one of ambivalence, characterised by six themes (Langørgen, Kermit, & Magnus, 2020). The concern with upholding the standards of the area of professional practice reflects a requirement of the AVCC Guidelines (2006) in Australia and within the legislation of "inherent requirements" through the Federal *Disability Discrimination Act* 1992. As Langørgen et al. (2020) found,

academic staff and placement supervisors experience conflict in their roles of supporting students and upholding professional values, and this can lead to stress. At the same time, they often find themselves in unfamiliar territory, having to make arrangements for accommodations, or organise and implement placements for students with challenging disabilities, without dependable institutional support. The requirement for confidentiality was dubbed "the elephant in the room". While it was expected that students would be open about their condition and its impact on professional practice, feedback from teachers and placement supervisors to students was "apparently difficult" (p.624), and it appeared that staff found that persuading students that they were not suited to their chosen field of professional practice was "not an acceptable topic" of discussion (p. 624). This was discussed in the article as showing the influence of 'political correctness' on these relationships.

A study of the beliefs about inclusive education, held by academics in Spain (Márquez & Melero-Aguilar, 2022) showed that the concept of inclusive education was unknown to many participants, and there was no common interpretation by those who are familiar with it. That the concept was unknown to so many participants was surprising as they had been nominated by students with disability as having used an inclusive approach to teaching. Three beliefs emerged related to inclusive education and therefore, indirectly, to disability. The first linked inclusive education to equality of access, especially through the removal of barriers for marginalised groups; the second focussed on students with disability and emphasised the importance of providing services and resources to facilitate their access to and engagement in education; the third belief shifted its focus to all students, and the development of their capacities and potential. The findings suggest that an academic's empathy towards students with disability may account for a student's perception of inclusivity, but this should not over-ride the importance of training for academics in the design and use of inclusive education. While it would be difficult to train empathy among academic staff, training for awareness of

disability and inclusive practice is feasible.

Finally, Cox (2017) explored the interactions between students with disability and administrative staff, as students moved through the university bureaucracy. He notes that these interactions are complex, as both use different kinds of power: administrative staff may use the language of the medical model, but, Cox observes, they do not have the authority of the field; and students may choose to act as consumers, selecting one service or resource, or to resist and not engage (p. 19). Importantly, he argues that administrators act as brokers (p.22), promoting the process of disclosure by the student which then enables the university to fulfil its legal obligation. He acknowledged that mental health disabilities are ambiguous, resisting labelling, and as such could be perceived as a danger to the administrative system, and as a consequence were subject to labelling by lay persons, with the student's case open to scrutiny and doubt or non-acceptance.

There is significant empirical data that demonstrates the existence of a range of discourses in the interactions between students with disability, academics and administrators as the students seek accommodations. The discourses are complex, with power not wielded only by administrators or academic staff, but also by students who resist or subvert the system (Yerbury et al., 2021). However, little attention has been paid to the micro-level descriptions of how the process of granting accommodations to students with disability works from the perspective of academics and administrators.

Studies of students with disability are increasing in number. The question of disclosure is the focus of most studies of students, exploring how they claim or lose their autonomy and control over identity through disclosure or how they are stigmatised or marginalised through disclosure. It has been reported as difficult to gather data from university students who do not disclose in large scale studies (Grimes, Scevak, Southgate, & Buchanan, 2017), and therefore,

difficult to explore factors influencing non-disclosure. Kranke, Jackson, Taylor, Anderson-Fye, and Floersch (2013) refer to students "outing themselves" as they disclose a "non-apparent" disability, such as mental health issues or learning difficulties. In small scale studies, including autoethnographic studies such as that by Pearson and Boskovich (2019), tales of personal circumstances reveal the micro-level interactions of everyday life, identifying the discomfort of making the private public, and the consequent impact on their relationships with others, including academic staff and on their studies. One the few large-scale studies (Grimes, Southgate, Scevak, & Buchanan, 2019), identified four themes that affect whether students disclose their disability or not, themes which are echoed across small scale studies. These themes, thus, become part of the discourse of disclosure. The first theme is that of individual responsibility, where students may make selective disclosures, but take steps themselves to support their learning and their everyday lives. The second theme is that of stigma and fear where disclosure has consequences for the student not just from academic staff but from their peers. The third theme relates to the institutional processes involved in seeking accommodations, including problems arising from recent diagnosis, cost of obtaining documentation and unfounded acceptance from the student that they fall outside the boundaries of the scheme. The fourth theme is concerned with student identity, raising questions of "who I am" and what it means to be normal. These themes are echoed in many studies, including (Yerbury et al., 2021; Blockmans, 2015; Dali, 2018; Denhart, 2008; Grimes et al., 2019; Peruzzo, 2022; Spier & Natalier, 2021).

Methodology

This study challenges the claim that in the context of a university, a discourse of containment is predominant in the complex set of relationships that exist around students with disability and their requests for accommodations. The paper seeks to explore the messiness inherent in

the processes of seeking and granting or denying accommodations in a university in Australia. In doing this, its purpose is not to add further weight to the empirical data that demonstrates the persistence of a medical model of disability with its emphasis on deficit, nor to confirm ambivalence in the beliefs of staff making decisions on the requests, key themes in much of the literature. Rather, its purpose is to reveal the everyday languages of university employees involved in these processes.

Institutional ethnography provides an appropriate methodology for such a study. Institutional ethnography is not concerned with an organisation or employment sector, but with the way that everyday activities are institutionalised. Thus, it is based in the experiential, everyday practices of university staff involved in the accommodations processes and draws on their work knowledges. Work knowledges is defined by Smith (2005, p. 151) as having two aspects: "One is a person's experience of and in their own work, what they do, how they do it, including what they think and feel; and a second is the implicit or explicit coordination of his or her work with the work of others". Thus, the study is concerned with work knowledges of staff in the university's disability services unit who meet with the students, oversee the process of applying for accommodations and make recommendations on appropriate accommodations and those academics who are the point of liaison between the student and the teaching staff in the faculty.

The study was conducted in a metropolitan university in Australia. Data were gathered through interview, in late 2019, from these two groups of university employees.

The Human Research Ethics approval processes noted that, because the researchers are experienced academics and one has a reasonably high profile in the field, they would have been familiar with the processes involved in seeking and granting accommodations, the recruitment of participants to the study was to be done at arms' length, through an email sent

by an intermediary. The focus on work knowledges of staff, rather than their interactions with students, meant that one of the researchers was able to carry out the interviews with those who agreed to take part in the study. Five of the six disability services staff were available for interview. The actual number of academic liaison staff fluctuates from semester to semester. Seven academic staff were interviewed, leaving two academic units with relatively small numbers of registered students outside the study.

The semi-structured interviews, which lasted between 40 and 65 minutes, were recorded and transcribed. They acknowledged the "experiential authority" of participants (Smith, 2005, p. 141). The opening question in the interviews: how do you go about the processes and making the decisions about accommodations? set the tone for an opened ended account of how the work was done. The closing questions: "if you were to ask [a student] [an academic] what do you think they would say were the strengths and weaknesses of the process?", attempted to gather data on the coordination of her or his work with that of others. While the member of the research team conducting the interviews may have been familiar with the generalities of the processes used by participants in both groups, they were not familiar with the specifics of their work knowledge, presenting the interviews as a chance to gain insight into how the work was done from those with expertise (Smith, 2005, p. 149).

A preliminary analysis of the transcripts of the interviews with the two groups by theme and by identification of key terms was carried out. It showed that the work knowledges of the disability services staff were quite different from those of the academic staff. At one level, this was not surprising as there is no overlap in their work, but on the other hand, the ways the processes were described and the ways staff felt about them made the two parts of the process seem unconnected, as though they were not related parts of the university's approach to the AVCC Guidelines. To clarify the lexicons of the two groups, and overlap among and

between them, the software tool TerMine (Frantzi, Ananiadou, & Mima, 2000) was used to identify significant phrases in the interviews, as a first step in constructing a lexicon through which work knowledges are expressed. TerMine requires the interviews to be combined into a single file in .txt format and its term recognition algorithm combines linguistic and statistical analyses to produce a list of significant word pairings. To consolidate the work knowledges expressed in each data set, an analytical approach drawing on Halliday's notion of field was used (Halliday & Hasan, 1986), where the field refers to the subject content, identified through significant elements of language such as nouns and verbs.

Findings

The system for managing requests for accommodations from students with disability involves two groups of staff in the university, staff in the disability services unit and staff in faculties. According to the university's website, the main purpose of disability services unit is to enable participation in learning and coursework by students with disability and/or health conditions, while maintaining academic integrity and the integrity of the profession connected to the University course that the student is enrolled in if that is applicable taking into account requirements of accrediting bodies, for example in nursing, teaching or accounting. It does this by providing access to resources and other forms of support, as well as through a range of assistance, including involvement in the making of requests for assessment arrangements and reasonable adjustments.

Staff in the unit also help students to learn how to manage their disabilities or health conditions in the study environment, to develop autonomy and skills in self-advocacy and to prepare for life after study. While some of these supports are generally around study skills, many are specific to the impairments of the individuals. The names and contact details of the academic staff in each faculty with responsibility for assisting students with disability and/or

health conditions as well as those with carer responsibilities are listed in the university's website. These academics, who work closely with the staff in disability services and the teaching staff in their faculties, are responsible for determining whether the recommendations for reasonable accommodations made in consultation between the student and the disability services staff and supported by documentation, can be approved, keeping in mind the need to maintain the academic integrity of assessment. Even though a student may have registered with the disability services unit, their request and the circumstances on which it is based can only be referred to the relevant faculty with the express consent of the student, who also decides what level of detail about their particular circumstances can be communicated. The state-based privacy legislation is an important influence on the processes that take place.

Lexicons

The interviews asked participants to describe how they engaged in the processes related to requests for accommodations from students with disability, to elaborate on what they took into account in the process, who else they engaged with in, what interactions if any they had with students and what they saw as the strengths and weaknesses of the system. The analyses demonstrated that though each group is part of the same university system for manging the requests of students with disability, the two groups have distinct lexicons, indicating that they see different factors as being important. The disability services staff have a lexicon dominated by notions of documentation, health conditions and options for students to complete their study whereas the academic liaison staff have a lexicon dominated by negotiations with other staff, links with disability services and the problems and issues of balancing student requests with staff resources and course requirements. Table 1 is based on the TerMine analysis and shows the top ten phrases used by each group. TerMine assumes a technical vocabulary, with known and accepted terms; the interview data is not based on the

use of common terms, although the underlying shared meaning is clear, thus some modifications were required to the lists produced. For example, in the academic staff data, the terms ‘accessibility coordinator, accessibility consultant’, ‘accessibility counsellor’ and ‘accessibility services’ are all listed in the top ten ranked phrases as separate phrases, yet all refer to disability services staff. Overlapping phrases of this kind have been consolidated for presentation in Table 1.

Table 1: Top phrases used

Ranking	**Disability services staff (DSS)**	**Academic staff liaison (ASL)**
1	Extension request	Subject coordinator
2	Subject coordinator	Academic staff member
3	Inherent requirement	Health issue
4	Exam provision	Accessibility student
5	Medical documentation	Disability services staff
6	Mental health condition	Special consideration
7	Health professional	Mental illness
8	Health impact	Sessional staff
9	Health condition	Student request
10	Alternative assessments	Reasonable accommodation

The thematic and field analyses of the interviews emphasise the difference between the two groups. This section of the findings will highlight the outcome of this analysis and the resulting differences.

Relationships with Students

The relationships with students are markedly different. Disability services staff describe how

they meet with students, face to face and in phone meetings, emphasising the importance of establishing rapport with the students. The university uses a case-work model, whereby students with disability are assigned a disability services staff member: “The case-work model is really important. That’s building a relationship and hopefully empowering and encouraging [the students]” (DSS3). This builds a familiarity with the student: “we chat” and “get a better picture” (DSS1) of the student and their needs for accommodations. This rapport enables the disability services staff member to ensure that “what [the student] is needing aligns with the documentation” (DSS2). The documentation is crucial for disability services staff. It represents a “stringent process” (DSS3) that a student’s condition and request for accommodation “is backed up by documentation” from a health professional. DSS4 describes the importance of focussing on the “intersection of those three things: the individual, the documentation and the health condition, and the student’s course”. The development of the request, through the submission of documentation and the completion of forms, can be daunting; DSS3 refers to “get[ting] them through all this paperwork”, and DSS5 notes the importance of “talk[ing] through the processes” of requesting accommodations. A key aspect of this development of the request is the decision the student makes about “disclosure and non-disclosure” (DSS1), the “levels of permission” (DSS2) they agree to in sending information to academic staff and the “reputational impact” (DSS4) this might have in the future. The documentation and the subsequent recommendation written by the disability services staff come to represent the student and their request, as this is what is forwarded to the academic liaison person in the relevant faculty and to the teaching staff/subject coordinator.

Disability services staff do not focus only on the development of the request for accommodation in their meetings with students. They play an active role in providing “as much support as possible” (DSS1), as students negotiate “the big complex turning wheel of a

machine" that is the university (DSS2). They "work with the student on communication skills" (DSS3), and on developing skills in "self-advocacy" and empowerment (DSS1, DSS3). They also provide students with information on the avenues of appeal available to them – "the option of speaking to the [equity unit]" (DSS5), "if things get hairy" (DSS4).

The academic liaison staff mostly do not know the students and rarely have any interactions with them. ASL3, who is very new to the role, has made a point of getting to know the students who have made requests over time. ASL4 notes that occasionally a student with disability makes contact with her: "I quite like that", and "It always makes a difference, knowing somebody". However, the common refrain from the ASLs is: "We have almost no access to student information … [and] … can't independently verify" (ASL2); "[Disability services] would reveal only a little bit of information" (ASL6). This perceived lack of information leads the academic colleagues of one liaison person (ASL6) to pressure him for information and him to respond: "I can't do much more than ask, because I can't coerce them". ASL1 says "It is necessary to trust [the recommendations of the disability services staff]", whereas ASL2 expresses the opinion that "[the university presumes] that academics are evil and that they should only be given the amount of information they absolutely require to do their job. It's essentially like looking through a pinprick in a piece of cardboard."

Some academic liaison staff question whether students who need accommodations, such as extensions of time, will "manage in the real world" (ASL6), wondering whether they are "doing the profession a disservice by not aiding and abetting this person into it" (ASL3), and acknowledging that "honest advice could be helpful" (ASL6) to indicate to students that they may not be able to meet professional requirements, a point echoed by ASL3 who notes: "sometimes we might just have to say no, and that's the wiser decision.".

They may also find their role may put them at odds with their academic colleagues: "You

might have to make decisions that make you unpopular" (ASL3); "A lot of [the academic staff] think that students are scamming, that this [applying for accommodations] is a form of cheating"; "There can be a bit of argy-bargy" (ASL7). ASL5, on the other hand, "reassures [new staff members] it's part of business as usual and I explain we're required to do this [grant accommodations] under the [Disability Discrimination] Act". ASL7 also notes that "people aren't aware" of the legal requirements of the DDA.

These academic liaison staff recognise that very often, the granting of accommodations is a "bucket of annoyance" (ASL2), leading to "extra work" for the subject coordinators (ASL7). It also has an impact on sessional staff (ASL4), that is, on casual academic staff, because "they don't necessarily know the processes" (ASL7) or because the assignment may come in after the staff member's contract has expired "and then there's no one to mark the assignment" (ASL1).

Both groups of staff reported stresses and tensions in their roles. Some academic liaison staff find the role stressful, describing learning of the misfortune of some students as "an emotional burden" (ASL3), noting that they have "felt harassed" by the demands and expectations of some students (ASL7), and that they "struggle" with the conditions of some students, for example anxiety (ASL3). Disability services staff on the other hand report stresses arising from a "tedious administrative system that's copy/paste, copy/paste, copy/paste, tweak, tweak, tweak" (DSS3), a system based around "five or six different systems [with] just clunky admin procedures that worked when we were a small service … [but which] just slows things down" (DSS4) and from under-resourcing, especially in the faculties (DSS1, DSS2, ASL3, ASL4).

There are differences in the ways each group talks about their interactions with students, with academic staff and with each other. For staff in disability services, a strength of their

processes is that “it’s very much a collaboration” (DSS1). They describe how they collaborate with academic staff: “the initial decisions for the requests are for the student and then we have a conversation and collaborate about what might be reasonable” (DSS4), something that can be followed by “good outcomes” (DSS5). They also consult widely: “We just have to consult and that's so inbred into our team” (DSS3); they encourage the student “to consult with their health professional” (DSS5), while they might engage in a “consultation process” with the “subject coordinator and the tutor” (DSS1). The academic liaison staff do not talk of consulting, nor of collaboration. Instead, they talk of negotiating. ASL3 describes his role as “largely negotiating between the student, the lecturer concerned, and, in light of the subjects’ demands, and the student’s capabilities or circumstances” and ASL7 notes that sometimes it is difficult to come to an appropriate outcome, “so therefore I have to negotiate a little bit more”, perhaps reminding staff that the accessibility and accommodations programs are part of the university’s commitment to social justice. ASL4, who had several years of experience and has come back to the role after a break, notes a change in the level of interaction and says: “I've not recently negotiated anything”.

Yet, there is one aspect on which both groups have the same way of talking, where the lexicons are the same, and that is about the making of the decisions on the granting of accommodations. Each group asserts that they do not make the decisions, both acknowledging that final decisions are made by subject coordinators, that is, by teaching staff. The disability services staff “make decisions about what we recommend”, but “the subject coordinator … would be the primary decision-maker around whether they consider it reasonable or not, whether they’ll approve it or not” (DSS5). Students may not fully understand all the factors that go into the making of a decision, particularly those to deny their request, “and seeing it just on face value … that can lead to the student disengaging with us” (DSS1). Similarly, an academic liaison staff member (ASL4) was clear about decision-

making: “I don’t make decisions about accommodations”. The view of ASL5 is that disability services staff “make most of the decisions”, but this is in relation to the presentation of the documentation and recommendations on accommodations. ASLs acknowledge “Almost always it is going to be subject coordinators who are involved in making the decisions” (ASL3). The academic liaison staff also acknowledge the decision-making that students undertake: “I think it's a strength that the student chooses who they reveal to” (ASL1). However, ASL4 notes that there could be “a problem” with a student’s decision on what and when to disclose that can affect the outcome in difficult cases.

At one level, what might be construed as “a tidy way” to manage students with disability, through the document-based process managed by staff in the disability services unit, is an inherently messy process, influenced by the diverse work knowledges of the disability services unit staff, the intermediary of the academic liaison staff and the staff involved with the teaching of students with disability. This messiness manifests itself in several ways, from those which are part of decision-making at the university level – competing priorities and the impact of scarce resources; those which are part of everyday work practices – the challenges of managing anomalous situations; and those which arise from the belief systems of individuals, including academic staff and students, together with the collective discourse of each of these groups.

Discussion

These findings demonstrate the existence of two different work knowledges, expressed in different language. This means that the student with disability, requesting accommodations to support them in their studies, is confronted with two ways of conceptualising the process and thus different priorities in its implementation. On one level, that is not surprising, given the different contexts in which people work. For the staff in the disability services unit, the only

students they interact with are those seeking to make the claim to be with disability, and their concern is with substantiating the claim and its effects on the capacity to study and on making recommendations about appropriate accommodations. For the academic liaison staff, they rarely interact with the students registered with disability services and the experiences in their own teaching would reinforce the idea that students with disability are a small minority of the student population, but one that makes a set of demands disproportionate to their number, the "bucket of annoyance" reported on by one of the academic liaison staff.

The existence of these two lexicons has implications for the notions of containment set out by Gabel and Miskovic (2014) and Clouder et al. (2016). The disability services staff note the importance of documentation that is predominantly mainstream medical or allied health in its nature, a factor of containment, but by the same token, they emphasise the importance of the student's narrative in explaining the impact of disability on their study and learning arrangements. While these narratives may not be written in the discourse representing the reality of the student's experiences that Abes and Darkow (2020) have in mind, they would appear to go some way to breaking out of the containment inherent in a system that is based on forms requiring standard or 'normative' responses. The constraints that these staff note are ones that affect them, brought about by the legacy of incompatible administrative systems, leading them to repetitive actions of copying and pasting content into each of the relevant databases. For the academic liaison staff, containment is clearly a factor. For them, the documentation represents the student with disability, as they rarely meet with these students, and in this way, the student is reduced to a file which carries a request. Secondly, the word 'liaison' in their title suggests that they act as a conduit, between disability services staff, the student with disability and the teaching staff in the faculty. Academic liaison staff noted a change in their role over time where the contemporary reality is that they rarely have interactions with the student. They receive emailed requests from the disability service staff

and predominantly use email for communication to teaching staff in their faculty. Only occasionally when email communication cannot resolve the "negotiation" they may meet face-to-face with teaching staff. Effectively this means that disability services staff can make direct contact with the subject coordinator, seemingly obviating the need for the liaison role. The actions that academic liaison staff might like teaching staff to take are further contained by the resource issues in faculties, which affect staffing levels and in particular the appointment of casual tutors; these levels of staffing and the "extra work" involved in setting up ways to provide accommodations for students with disability act as measures of containment, in some cases prevent the student from gaining access to the levels of support they need, and which should be theirs by right.

Students with disability find themselves subject to an architecture of containment, as Gabel and Miskovic (2014) identified. Individualisation, noted by Gabel and Miskovic as "a significant feature of the architecture of containment" (p. 1155), is apparent here, but the roles of the disability services staff, and to a lesser extent, the academic liaison staff, mean that there are others actively engaged on behalf of the student, ensuring that they are not left to take the full responsibility for the consequences of disability. However, a key feature of this architecture is significantly different from that described by Gabel and Miskovic (2014). They note that "institutional policy and procedure" are instrumental in an architecture of containment (p. 1156), referring to the policies that relate to the implementation of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Although there is evidence in this study of the concern for the demands of the integrity of professional and academic standards, it is not the policies and processes related to DDA that have the biggest impact on the containment of students with disability, but the creeping lack of funding for teaching that impacts any approaches which cannot be justified by economies of scale.

The TerMine analysis has shown that the phrase “subject coordinator” is significant for staff in both groups. This study has suggested that subject coordinators are perhaps the most significant players in the architecture of containment, much as Gabel and Miskovic’s findings (2014) indicate. However, their role in the consideration of requests for accommodation is not institutionalised in the way that the academic liaison staff role has been. Since any member of the university’s continuing academic staff can expect to be coordinator for at least one subject each semester and possibly more, the number of academics acting as subject coordinators would be more than a hundred in any semester. While some would be made aware of their responsibilities under the DDA and the AVCC Guidelines, and some would have a personal or ideological approach making them more likely to support requests from students with disability, many would be unaware of the ways that students with disability could be supported, at the same time as the learning experience of all students could be enhanced. This situation was identified by Márquez and Melero-Aguilar (2022), who found that even university teachers identified by students with disability as taking an inclusive approach in their teaching declared themselves ignorant of it as a pedagogical approach.

While much is written about the stresses and tensions suffered by students with disability, (see for example Boucher, 2021; Brett et al., 2021; Cumming & Dickson, 2013; Maggiolini & Molteni, 2013; Vaz et al., 2015; Cologon, 2013), the study by Langørgen et al. (2020) is one of the few to be concerned with the stresses felt by academic staff, concerned with the maintenance of professional standards in a program of professional education. Similarly, academic liaison staff in this study noted that there were aspects of their role that was stressful. They talked of the challenges and difficulties experienced when students were not willing to disclose their condition to teaching staff or when they were seemingly unaware of the mismatch between their professional aspirations and the reality of their capacity for fulfilling those aspirations, and overtly placed emphasis on threats to their emotional

wellbeing, as a consequence of their role in handling students' requests for accommodations.

Language will have an effect on interactions and, potentially, on the outcomes for individual students (Haegele & Hodge, 2016). In this study, some academics are known to consider students with disability as "scammers" or "cheats", seeking an advantage over other students; their requests for support lead to "extra work", seen as a "chore", and leading to unfair expectations of casual staff. To some extent, the power of this language may be mitigated by the sense of trust that some academic liaison staff express in the work of disability services staff. In the context of this language, and the power imbalance between staff and student, it is notable that the disability services staff provide services and support to empower the students, including information on how to lodge appeals on what they may find unfair treatment. However, studies of students indicate that few are willing or able to confront the power imbalance (Grimes et al., 2017; Grimes et al., 2019; Peruzzo, 2022).

A key difference in the languages used by these two groups of staff demonstrates the differences in the relationships they have with those around them, the "ruling relationships" as Smith (2005) refers to them. Disability services staff are engaged in collaboration and consultation, relationships that suggest interactions among equals. Cox (2017) refers to "administrators as brokers", and there is evidence in this study that the disability services staff do broker arrangements with subject coordinators in the faculties. While this study did not probe perceptions of authority, it was clear that the recommendations of the disability services staff carried authority. As Cox (2017) noted, this was authority by proxy, as the recommendations were developed drawing on the expertise of medical practitioners. However, the language of the academic liaison staff is one of negotiation. This is not to deny that the collaborations of disability services staff will always involve some level of negotiation, but the negotiations engaged in by academic liaison staff would seem to indicate

more of a bargaining style of relationship, potentially a less complex but more competitive form of interaction, where both parties have something at stake.

Inclusion and containment are acknowledged by each of the groups involved in this study, a recognition that each is at some level involved in the same 'game' in Bourdieusian terms. However, beyond that, distinct lexicons emerge, work knowledges that co-exist, indicating that each group perceives the process from a different perspective, bringing different rules to the game, each accepting and challenging the notions of inclusion and containment. Their work knowledge shows that staff in disability services do their best to ensure that students with disability can be included in the learning experiences of the university and that inclusion is beneficial; but the existence of containment cannot be denied. Clouder et al. (2016) consider that universities take a "tidy" approach to managing students with disability, in the organisation of the processes of seeking accommodations. However, this study suggests that the co-existence of work knowledges indicates that rather than tidiness, there is always a level of disorder. Disability services staff strive to moderate the containment of the form-driven processes of accommodations, introducing disorder by encouraging the students to use their own voice in telling their story and empowering them to appeal against the decisions or actions that deny them accommodations. For the academic liaison staff, disorder is perhaps beyond their control. It arises when a request is 'not straightforward' and is affected by the way they react to not having all the information about the student, whether with trust or cynicism. This disorder may lead to 'extra work' for teaching staff; delay or refusal of recommended accommodations for a student; and emotional burden for the academic liaison staff. It may be further compounded because the teaching staff may be unaware of the legislative requirements of DDA.

Limitations

This study took place in a major metropolitan university in Australia. As qualitative research, while it drew on a limited number of interviewees, those interviewees included the majority of people acting in those key positions. We recognise that the University could be regarded as an institution of best practice, being a recipient of national and international awards for access and inclusion of staff and students with disability, together with women, those claiming diverse gender identities, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and refugees. However, even at an institution with such a reputation, the systems and processes put in place to improve the success of marginalized groups can disadvantage those very groups. Ongoing research at a regional, national and international level arising from this study is called for.

Conclusion

The innovative approach of this study, with its focus on the working knowledges of the two groups of university staff involved in the processing of the applications for accommodations of students with disability and expressed through their ways of talking, has highlighted the fundamentally differing perspectives that disability services staff and academic liaison staff bring to the process. The language-based analytical tools show two sets of norms and values at play. The different working knowledges of the two groups emerge clearly, evident through the distinct lexicons used by these two groups, and their impacts on the process of seeking accommodations are manifest. This study has not confirmed the findings of other studies, that the process of seeking accommodations for students with disability might be presented as a strategy of containment, a “tidy way” to manage the disordered needs of students with disability; the use of working knowledges for handling and making decisions on the applications from students demonstrate that the process is anything but “tidy”.

The conclusion that what is intended as a single process to enable students with disability to study 'on the same basis' as students without disability operates as two processes is significant. The AVCC Guidelines indicate that decisions on granting accommodations should take into account the requirements of a given course of study, and this gives academic staff another criterion to take into consideration in their decision-making; in other words, the process inherently has two sets of criteria, one related to the student and the documentation of their capacity to study and one related to the requirements of the field of study and in some cases the requirements of professional practice. However, this study has demonstrated that, for academic staff, a factor in the decision-making process is the impact of reduced funding on staffing to implement any recommended accommodations and it is this that leads to the second process.

If people with disability are no longer to be marginalized in educational opportunities, and take their place as active citizens, further studies that elucidate these unanticipated barriers will be essential as will studies that use innovative techniques to analyse data. Without a renewed approach to research, another decade or more may pass without any significant increase in the number of people with disability enrolled in higher education.

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