

Episode 45: Dev Bose

Pedagogue podcast

Transcript

Welcome to Pedagogue, a podcast about teachers talking writing. I'm your host, Shane Wood.

I received an email the other day from a listener who just wanted to encourage me and the work I'm doing with the podcast. I wanted to make a note of that because I really love getting these emails. It's one of the best parts about doing this work, and I cannot emphasize that enough. So, thanks to all of you who have spent a little bit of your time reaching out to me and sharing your thoughts and offering kind words about the podcast. I actually have been doing that more frequently, too. I'll read someone's work and send them a quick email thanking them and letting them know how it resonated with me. These small acts of kindness can go a really long way. Whenever you have a minute, feel free to send me an email or tweet. Whenever you have another minute, feel free to tell a colleague about the podcast. I think someone tweeted the other day that this podcast has been particularly helpful right now. They mentioned it being like going to a conference panel and hearing people talk about their teaching or chatting in the hallways with their colleagues. Pedagogue has hopefully been a source for community and engagement. Something I know I'm missing a lot right now.

In this episode, I talk with Dev Bose about disability studies, accommodations, ethics and disclosure, his research on college writers with ADHD, and portfolio assessment.

Dev Bose is an assistant professor and writing program administrator at the University of Arizona where he teaches courses in rhetoric, composition, and pedagogy. His research focuses on disability and digital composition, especially privilege and access pertaining to technology and rhetorical conceptions of (in)visible disabilities. He was twice awarded the Conference on College Composition and Communication Disability in College Composition Travel Award, and is currently working on a second edition of *Disability and the Teaching of Writing: A Critical Sourcebook* (originally in 2007 by Bedford St. Martin).

Dev, thanks so much for joining us.

SW: Let's start by talking about disability studies and accommodations. Can you talk about the challenges students face at the institutional level and in the writing classroom when it comes to accommodations?

DB: Reasonable accommodations are essentially just adjustments made in the system after the individual has proven that their request is fair. However, accommodations often require expensive medical proof, right? Which draws both a financial burden, but I also argue that that delineates privilege of sorts in terms. So, that's kind of the big answer for the university as a whole. Relatively easier, I think for a lot of students that ask for or think of the accommodations

that one might need in a classroom that doesn't focus on writing or learning to compose it in written context, as it's like primary discourse or mode of assessment.

However, I think for writing classrooms, students may not know necessarily what kind of accommodations to ask for, right? In my experience, for example, in working with writing instructors, and by the way, this is a good thing, writing instructors, oftentimes, won't rely on quizzes or timed assessments, I guess I should say. Timed assessments are often things that aren't really going to work very well for many people, right? Regardless of disability status.

Having that clock on you as you're trying to complete your writing or finish your writing can be stressful, right? It can cause a lot of anxiety for someone who has anxiety or depression, OCD. I kind of identify with all those things as well. Oftentimes timed writing assessments can just really be disastrous. Many writing instructors say that they don't use those things, but that's not to say though that there's not room for a crip time pedagogy. Tara Wood, of course, has that amazing article back in Cs where she talks a lot about that.

But essentially, the need for crip time, I argue, goes beyond just timed assessments, because writing instructors will often say that, "Well, hey, I don't use timed assessment. So, I've already kind of passed that inaccessibility hurdle," but I think that there are still avenues for injustice to occur. I think that's something that students with disabilities could face in a typical writing classroom context. I'm actually a big fan of portfolio assessment, because I think that that's super helpful, and if it's done right, that is, it's helpful for students to kind of identify their own path of success and provide evidence for that path of success through the various writing artifacts that they've put together in the classroom then, and then kind of compiled in a portfolio.

When I was thinking about your question, I immediately thought of students coming in to self-advocate for themselves. I think that in a first-year writing classroom, first-year writing classrooms are often themed as being the threshold or the gateway for entering the college or the university. In fact, I tell this to a lot of the grad students I work with, for example, your class is more than likely going to be your students' first college class, ever, right? So to me, I think that holds a lot of rhetorical agency for the instructor being able to be open to their students' needs. But also to students, hopefully being able to, if it's possible, to advocate for themselves.

SW: How do you define (in)visible disabilities, and do you mind talking about rhetorical conceptions to (in)visible disabilities?

DB: (In)visible disabilities are those which are not immediately detectable, so to speak. My current research, I've actually been interested, in particular, in caregivers and caregiving as a rhetorical construct. Now, I argue that disability does carry a sense of rhetorical presence, and I want to take just a second to actually acknowledge my graduate student, Paul Padilla. But I'm relying on terms like agency, authority, delivery, identification, invention, and memory. I borrow just a bit from Kenneth Burke's *A Rhetoric of Motives* for making the case that disability can be identified internally and externally.

You might even say using Burkean terms, that a disability is “consubstantial,” right, with shared interests between those who are disabled and those who are designing for the institution as a whole. So, going back to what we had talked about earlier, Shane, accommodations are an external factor for students to succeed in the classroom. But more importantly, a motive for post-secondary institutions to improve upon themselves by delivering education that is universally accessible while keeping in mind the ways that marginalized groups operate within their boundary even to the extent of recognizing disability while erasing it.

Stephanie Kerschbaum's recent article, “Signs of Disability,” makes a case for how disability is shaped by a collective understanding of meanings, which contribute to how we notice and erase it. I'm actually a big fan of Kerschbaum's writing, and that particular argument, I think, speaks really well to what I want to think of in terms of (in)visible disability. In a nutshell, if one doesn't see a disability, it still exists but may not be likely to be reported. I'm particularly interested in scholars like Margaret Price. She's doing some writing, a disabled faculty study. On my own hypothesis, that (in)visibly disabled people might not be receiving as many accommodations due to the burden of proof being a challenge, that you have to always kind of show something.

I think going back to the rhetorical constructs that I was thinking about earlier, one can identify that a disability exists, and is therefore in need of accommodations if it's kind of more visible, right? But if it's not seen –that's immediately obvious I guess should say – then, right, some more challenges there. In no way, I don't think disabled people should pit themselves against one another. I definitely don't believe in that. So, the importance of having a disabled community, of people representing themselves for themselves, right?

SW: I'm thinking about writing teachers who want to be accessible and accommodate all students, maybe using a universal design for learning framework. I'm also thinking about students with (in)visible disabilities that might not be reported to Accommodation Offices or Disability Resource Centers. Can you talk a little bit about ethics and disclosure?

DB: This was one of the ones that I had to think about a little bit more because I'm thinking right off the bat...let me give some institutional context, first. So, the University of Arizona has access consultants at their disability resource center. Our access consultants act like the bridge between the student who needs accommodations with the instructors, right? Access consultants, they'll work directly with the instructors and with the students, but they also have a team of other people, like staff members. So, our DRC, so we use universal design for learning as our theme for providing access across the institution. I do think in some ways, I mean, there is some neo-liberalism involved with that, I'll just say. I'm thinking back to the Jay Dolmage's chapter in *Academic Ableism*, like the one specifically related to universal design, which I absolutely love. I quote from that whenever I can because Dolmage is addressing, right, there is a certain neo-liberal aspect to it because when a university or an institution relies upon this pedagogy that says that they're going to meet the needs of all the learners, but at the same time, that also has potential to kind of erase identities, right, or erase disabilities.

All that to say, okay, so we need to step back for a minute, right? So, how might teachers become more aware of students' disabilities? This is where I think, nonetheless, a really huge value, well, to know about universal design for learning as something that they can use in their classrooms. I guess I'll just say I take some issue with any instructor who actively seeks out what their student's disabilities are. Because, disclosure is political, but it's also personal. I mean, I've worked at quite a few institutions, even after having gotten my PhD back in 2011.

When I see instructors doing that, actively seeking disclosure without the student's consent, really, it becomes kind of problematic. Well, my response is also kind of based around the ethics of disclosure, which, as you can tell, I'm very interested in ethics, so that could be bad. So, I think that what I would suggest for these teachers is that they just try to design their curricula in a way that's accessible for as many types of learning as much as possible. Instructors can and should be aware of the different ways that their students learn. Then, they should hopefully try to create content that's based around that.

SW: Your dissertation, Communication Crossroads: Assertiveness Pedagogy for College Writers with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder, is a study on college writers with ADHD and their perceptions on writing and on collaboration. Can you talk more about this research and how it has shaped your approach to teaching?

DB: Yeah, I can start to talk about that. Well, I'd had an interest in that because I am diagnosed with ADHD, but also going back to disclosure, I'm also somebody who was diagnosed relatively later in life. Right? I got this when I was in my twenties, when I was a graduate student. This was at a time when it had gotten to a point where some of the things that I knew that I had had already and were finally diagnosed along with the ADHD, which were anxiety, depression, OCD, obsessive compulsive disorder. It all kind of came together for me. I mean, I guess I hate to say, but it was kind of like an enlightening moment for me. I actually don't hate to say it because it actually helped me get my degree when I finally realized what was going on and I could conduct an academic study about it, but it's been a little while since I wrote my dissertation, which was back in 2011, but it was on assertive pedagogy.

When I was writing it, I used a method of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), which this particular one used writing as a means to go through some of the issues that occur as a result of what I had discussed earlier: ADHD, anxiety, depression, OCD. But my dissertation, though, tried to engage assertiveness therapy, which was this particular type of CBT as a means to actually engage in argumentation. So, that actually came about because in my findings, so I did a qualitative study, did lots of interviews with undergraduates who were enrolled in writing courses but were also diagnosed with ADHD.

So, a lot of things came out of that. The things that some people might think that, "Oh, that's kind of because of the ADHD," right? So, everyone knows about distraction. Some of the things that people told me about were like, "My mind is like on I'm on a rollercoaster and I'm thinking from

one thought to the next." I remember hearing a lot of that in my data. Some people said, "If I wasn't on my medication, I wouldn't be able to succeed." Whereas, other people told me, "Well, I mean, either it's too much or just some at all kind of cuts my creativity." I'm giving you direct quotes from some of the students I interviewed.

So, a lot of that, though, also boiled down to group communication and how the writers were perceived by other group members and also how they took on certain group tasks. So, the subjects identified as being really interested in not only being able to sort of delegate tasks whenever they could, but also do large brainstorming, where that often started at the top, fizzled through a little bit in the middle, but ultimately, not all but for some of them, they were able to pull through towards it at the very end. However, that could have some detrimental effects on group projects.

So all that to say, I thought about ways of this particular therapy. I was thinking to myself that, "Hey, in order for me to make a functional, logical argument that persuades my readers to think of X in a certain way, I need to come up with a very specific plan," right? So, they did that with a particular piece of writing. I said to them, "You can try this in your writing class, if you would like, but really this is for you." Anyways, so that's kind of how that sort of materialized.

Since then, though, I have been particularly interested in helping students and instructors, writing instructors, learn more about or understand more about time management. Time management being like one area of executive functioning specifically affected by ADHD. Time management has kind of stemmed from that, team writing and teamwork has kind of stemmed from that as well. So, to write team projects.

I've also kind of worked a lot, as we've discussed with universal design for learning as well, specifically, because I think UDL focuses a lot on executive functioning. That is affected by ADHD. Time management, goal setting are the ones that really stand out, and a lot of that came out of my interests in ADHD. I have thought a lot more about ways that we can stop seeing disability from...well, so the medical model means that the individual is responsible for it and society, it's all good. But then on the other hand, the social model, of course, just means that society needs to account for the types of barriers, right, that disability is actually constructed. But long story short, I'm leaning towards the latter method of that now.

SW: So this is my last question. I'd like to talk about multimodal literacies, disability studies, and portfolio assessment. How does multimodality and portfolio assessment help you center disability studies in the writing classroom?

DB: I think that multimodality recognizes that literacy is developed through a combination of sensories and sensory outputs. However, bearing that in mind, integrating video and audio is just the beginning. Accounting for and accepting different ways of assessment can actually assist in the ethical construct of things, right?

I think one thing that multimodal scholarship should definitely consider is the way that student work, in the way that it's submitted, I guess I should say, is then assessed. Well, I guess we can say it's all part of the assessment process, right? If a student is able to produce work in somewhat of a different way than what was asked and yet show evidence that they have met student learning outcomes, right, and as we all know, in writing program administration, right, success in programs is often measured by the way that we can show that how are our students in writing classes have met these outcomes.

Well, I like to think that evidence can be, this goes back to my thoughts on portfolio assessment, a good portfolio assessment should include a highly reflective component to it. Okay? Where the student has the right to go through, to collect, and then analyze and reflect on all the different artifacts that they did in their writing classroom, in such a way that shows that they have met the outcomes. Okay? The other thing with portfolio assessment is that it's not just that big portfolio that's at the very end of the class, but the other thing is that portfolio assessment, for it to work out, should have a reflective component throughout the course. Okay?

So, students should have the opportunities to reflect on their writing right from the start. I think that multimodality has the way to do that, but I also think that students should be able to participate in ways...so, I'm thinking to myself, like note taking, right? If a student with a disability, for example, say someone with anxiety, is unable vocally participate in class. As we all know, like in Western cultures, right, where individualism is highly prized, it might be hard for an instructor to assess like, "Oh, how did participation work from my quiet person who didn't really say much in class?" Right?

So, one thing that I think that multimodality can really benefit from is recognizing that there are students who can participate in a variety of ways and in a variety of modes. So with note taking, so students can voluntarily produce notes, class notes, for the entire class, and then post those, say to the learning management system. Right? That could be their way of participation. Right? Portfolios, I think have the ability to do that as well.

Now, so bearing that in mind, I'll go a little bit further now. I'll say that instructors have an ethical obligation to make sure content delivery is accessible to a wide range of students, especially when using technology. An article I'm currently working on with a colleague is about online predesigned courses. I think online predesigned courses have the potential to do just that. For example, loading scripted videos, like TED Talks videos, for example, right, which always have a script associated with them. Using a table of contents and linking reminders I think can be useful for time management, as well as for goal setting.

So, I'm going to end this response on just a very practical note, and that's on captioning and scripts. If we make videos for classes, I think that we should caption them. Nowadays, captioning is a lot less overwhelming than it used to be, being that there are several auto captioning tools out there. Accessibility can be tough, right? Making your assignments as a

writing instructor accessible can be tough. But I will say, though, that there are some low-tech guidelines that instructors can follow, right?

So, they can keep the technology learning curve low, while also keeping accessibility at the forefront. For example, an instructor can write a script and read from it as they record, and then they can attach it to the video that they're giving to their students. Videos should be pretty short. They should be like about three to five minutes, if possible, and that's not always the case. I think longer videos can be preceded with a table of contents. Even if they're going to be long, instructors can do the students a favor by giving them time markers, for example. It requires a little bit of planning.

During the recording, it can be useful to talk through detailed texts. It can be definitely useful to use visuals, for example, PowerPoint slides. So, all that to say, I hope that answers this particular question, though, wrapping back to multimodal literacies. Because, I do think that multimodality really should keep accessibility at the forefront, and these are just some of the more practical ways, hopefully practical ways, that I think instructors can do just that.

SW: Thanks, Dev. And thank you, Pedagogue listeners and followers. Until next time.