

March 11, 2016

DSS Comes to Hogwarts

Last weekend, I watched a Harry Potter marathon on TV. It got me thinking about the *The Last Word* posts about Star Wars over Christmas break. It made me remember a similar challenge, surrounding the Harry Potter saga, that several of us took up in 2008.

At that year's AHEAD conference, there was a session titled "DSS Comes to Hogwarts." It revolved around the issues that would confront a DSS provider from the US, assuming a similar role at Hogwarts. It seems that while recognizing that they were not bound by muggle law (much less the ADA!), the Board of Governors had decided to adopt the idea behind equal access for students with disabilities, and was recruiting an experienced DSS provider to help them establish services.

[As an aside, in that earlier discussion, someone pointed out that since all of the students at Hogwarts are under 18, IDEA might be a better model for the school to follow than the ADA. However, not all of the students have parents who can or would take an active role on behalf of their children (can you just see Uncle Vernon at an IEP meeting?). Besides, the wizards might think that No Child Left Behind referred to a student who was accidentally splinched (a reference that will only make sense to the REAL Harry Potter aficionados in the group! GRIN).]

Now, you may ask why there would be a need for a disability service provider at Hogwarts. Couldn't they magically cure any disability among their students? Shame on you! Don't you know by now that disability is not something to be "fixed"? Disability is part of the human condition, be ye' muggle or witch or wizard. And we've seen plenty of examples of the people with disabilities who populate the wizarding world. There is Luna Lovegood, who simply MUST be ADHD. I suspect that classmate Seamus Finnegan is LD, and that his problem with spells gone wrong may be a wizarding form of dyslexia. The last time around there was speculation that Draco Malfoy might have Oppositional Defiant Disorder, and I have always wondered if Hermione might not occasionally show signs of OCD (remember her methodically drawn, color-coded study schedules?).

We've seen disability among the teachers, as well. There is Mad-Eye Moody (hmmm... we are going to have to do something about the language used to describe disability), and Professor Trelawny – although she only qualifies for support when she stops tipping in the cooking sherry. There is Professor Flitwick, who is a Little Person, and there is Hagrid... who is NOT a little person. Of course, thoughts of Hagrid (and Madame Maxime) take us in an entirely different direction. Are there disability conditions (like Giantism) that are, essentially, unique to the wizarding world?

Would the centaurs of the Dark Forest consider themselves to be disabled? They certainly would require accommodations to function comfortably in the Hogwarts environment. And what about the squibs (those born to wizarding families but who are

unable to do magic)? Are we going to have to review the Hogwarts admission standards to determine if their policies are unfairly excluding otherwise qualified applicants?

The discussion back in 2008 began with potential problems accommodating a student in a wheelchair who was scheduled to take Professor Trelawny's Divination class in the tower room reached only by a ladder. For that matter, everything we have seen of Hogwarts suggests that the ancient building was built long before there were building codes that would have required alternatives to the many staircases. (And those pesky staircases like to change position – VERY confusing for the poor kids with LD or ADHD!) But honestly, folks... if you can enchant a muggle vehicle to create a flying car, why not a wheelchair that doesn't need to worry about staircases or ladders? And THAT leads to a discussion of other accommodation options open in the wizarding world that are not available to the average DSS provider here in the States.

Hermione's Time-Turner would certainly come in handy for providing extended time on tests, just as the Muffliato charm could be used to create a quiet, distraction-reduced testing environment for the witch or wizard with attention problems. Rita Skeeter's quill pen already takes dictation. We must assume that one could be charmed to include spell check, as well (a wizarding form of assistive technology?). Extendable ears could take the place of our very ordinary assistive listening devices. As pets are already allowed at Hogwarts, the need for an ESA probably wouldn't be problem. Before you ask – owls are only service animals if they are used by people with disabilities for some disability-related reason. Carrying mail isn't disability-related. The owls are WORKING animals, but not service animals (are owls animals?).

There are lots of intriguing possibilities, but it struck me as I was writing this that I had no ending – no meaningful life lessons learned, no words of wisdom to come from all this speculation. All I can offer is the thought that, perhaps, if disability exists even in the world of magic, then maybe there is magic in OUR world, too. Hmmm...

Janie

*"I just hope you realize that not every first year student could take on a fully grown Mountain Troll and live to tell the tale. Five points will be given to each of you... for **sheer, dumb luck!**"*

Minerva McGonagall