

Estée Klar

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Director of Wretches & Jabberers At York University Tomorrow Night!

Filed Under ([Communication](#), [Critical Disability Studies](#), [Film](#)) by Estee on 06-11-2013

Hi everyone...sorry I haven't posted in a while, but this is well-worth visiting at York University in Toronto tomorrow night:

**Narratives on Ability with
Geradine Wurzburg, Director of the Film, *Wretches & Jabberers*
November 7, 2013 4-6 p.m.
York University
Nat Taylor Cinema
North Ross Building 102**

More Details Here: [Narratives on Ability](#)

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Tomorrow is Convocation Day

Filed Under ([Academia](#), [Accessibility](#)) by Estee on 15-10-2013

Tomorrow is convocation day for my Master of Arts in Critical Disability Studies in the department of Health Policy and Development at York University. It feels like a whirlwind as I had just finished my MRP and then launched into my first-year PhD study. I'm simply taking a moment to breathe before I teach my next class, wanting to think (and later write) how I ended up here. I had dreams of Adam being at my ceremony, but I checked out the schedule and it will be unbearably long for him. Instead, I ordered the video and we will watch it together. I still wonder what I can do for Adam, as a person with a disability; with the autism label. I have worked because in the end, I still hope. I hope for positive changes that will enable him, nay PERMIT him, to be in the world – be accepted in the world, as an autistic person. I don't feel at all this convocation is about me, although I worked hard. I don't think the convocation is an accessible event. In cases like ours, I wish Adam

would be allowed to make noises, allowed to come up on the stage with me to accept the degree. Disability is still not as accepted in academia, in ceremony, as I would like it to be; as I hoped and envisioned. By stating that, I inch my way forward, in hope of change. And I use this meagre platform to say it again – that I did it for Adam and he in fact has earned it along with me. My next photo will be of Adam holding that degree with me. No achievement is accomplished alone.

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[Universal Design & Making Spaces for All Bodies](#)

Filed Under ([Uncategorized](#), [Universal Design](#)) by Estee on 12-10-2013

I'm in Denver at the AutCOM conference, having posited the question of who gets to occupy space (and how)? At many autism-friendly conferences I attend, autistic people are permitted to get up, make noise, sleep under the table. How many times, I think, do I discipline my body to fit into spaces – in the classroom, at a luncheon, at a conference. In fact, I sit so long as a student, for instance, that I'm developing sciatica! Universal Design is about bodies – the way bodies live in space. Autistic people teach me that I've been trained from the time I've been young, to be a docile and compliant body.

There are many ways that universal design is good for business because it creates permission for bodies to act and be as they are. As a simple example, an automatic door opening is good for strollers, for when my hands are full. Thinking about universal design for all bodies is to also consider how people's bodies can take breaks, work comfortably.

I'm putting up the video on the Ed Robert's Campus because it helps us to reconsider space, but also permission and the disabling affects that current design restricts people from living with and among others. Although this is still a segregated campus that is arguably affordable to attend for only a few, it is an example of how easy it is to design creative spaces that enable all types of bodies to contribute and participate in society outside of restrictive normative constructs. And accommodation isn't difficult – while designing spaces is an inclusive and creative necessity, as I mentioned, permission to allow people to use their bodies the way they need to use them, enables participation. Does anyone want to sit upside down now, or take a break under the table?

Ed Roberts Campus—Building Community



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[Foucault and Autism](#)

Filed Under ([Critical Disability Theory](#)) by Estee on 09-10-2013

In my work now on theory, I am sharing this wonderful lecture: *A Critical Intro to Foucault*.

“The search for styles of existence as different as possible from one another appears to me one of the points on which contemporary research within particular groups can start. The search for a form of morality which would be acceptable to everyone – in the sense that everyone must submit to it – appears catastrophic to me.” Michel Foucault, 1984.

There’s a lot to unpack from Foucault (see Parekh’s, *A conversation on madness: Foucault and Ripa in Disability & Society*, 2012), but the work is substantial in our understanding of history, historicism and difference; there’s a lot to think about with regards to power, the state and the rehabilitation industry *and* the monolithic possibilities from diagnostic labeling. I’m currently concerned about an autism culture created in response to the medical model, and the dialectical loop this might create for the “autistic” community. It might be more “liberating” (Foucault) to move to cross-disability issues while also intertwining them with human issues of freedom (a big word) vs. control and power. Happy watching:

A Critical Intro to Foucault



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[The Co-Production of Autism in the film Wretches and Jabberers](#)

Filed Under ([autism](#), [Autism History](#), [Communication](#), [Critical Disability Studies](#), [Critical Disability Theory](#), [Film](#), [Language](#)) by Estee on 30-09-2013

Well, [I finally posted my Master's Research Paper](#) that I completed in August and defended in September. [You can read it here](#). Much more work will be going into this as I now pursue my PhD in Critical Disability Studies. I have to say, that a 65-page limit on this topic was extremely challenging. I look forward, as well, to presenting on [October 12th in Denver at the Autism National Committee \(AutCOM\) conference](#).

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[Thesis, Birds and Naoki Higashida](#)

Filed Under ([Acceptance](#), [Book Reviews](#), [Inspiration](#)) by Estee on 07-09-2013

I successfully defended my thesis on the film *Wretches & Jabberers* this week, a day before a bird-deluge on Adam. (I'll post this thesis to my website later this week). It is my hope that we can all promote this self-

advocacy film to be *the* new film people talk about autism (rather than Rain Main). The day before my defense, Adam got bird-pooped on by a rather big bird. He was not happy about it, but I kept explaining that despite it being messy and a damper on his recess time, it meant he was going to have lots of good luck! It seemed to work; Adam smiled in the car all the way home as I heralded my enthusiasm about bird-poop-fortune.

But today I really want to point to something I am very happy about: a review of Naoki Higashida's book (he is the film subject in *Wretches & Jabberers* who lives in Japan) in our very own [Globe & Mail today – arts section, page R.4](#). It would be wonderful to keep talking about this and the film and the contributions that non-verbal autistic self-advocates make to our understanding about autism. I hope this review will also [lead people to watch the film](#).

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[Back to School 2013](#)

Filed Under ([Acceptance](#), [Adam](#), [Communication](#), [Identity](#), [Joy](#), [Love](#), [school](#)) by Estee on 03-09-2013

It was back-to-school day. Adam started his new inclusive school today. It was not unfamiliar; he had been there two years ago. He had a great day and was typing very well. Adam was happy when I picked him up and was apparently glad to be back with the big kids at lunch and recess. In the meantime, I'm up to planning the rest of his programs, and my own. I am due to defend my thesis this Thursday and if all goes well, will start my doctorate and teaching assignment next week.

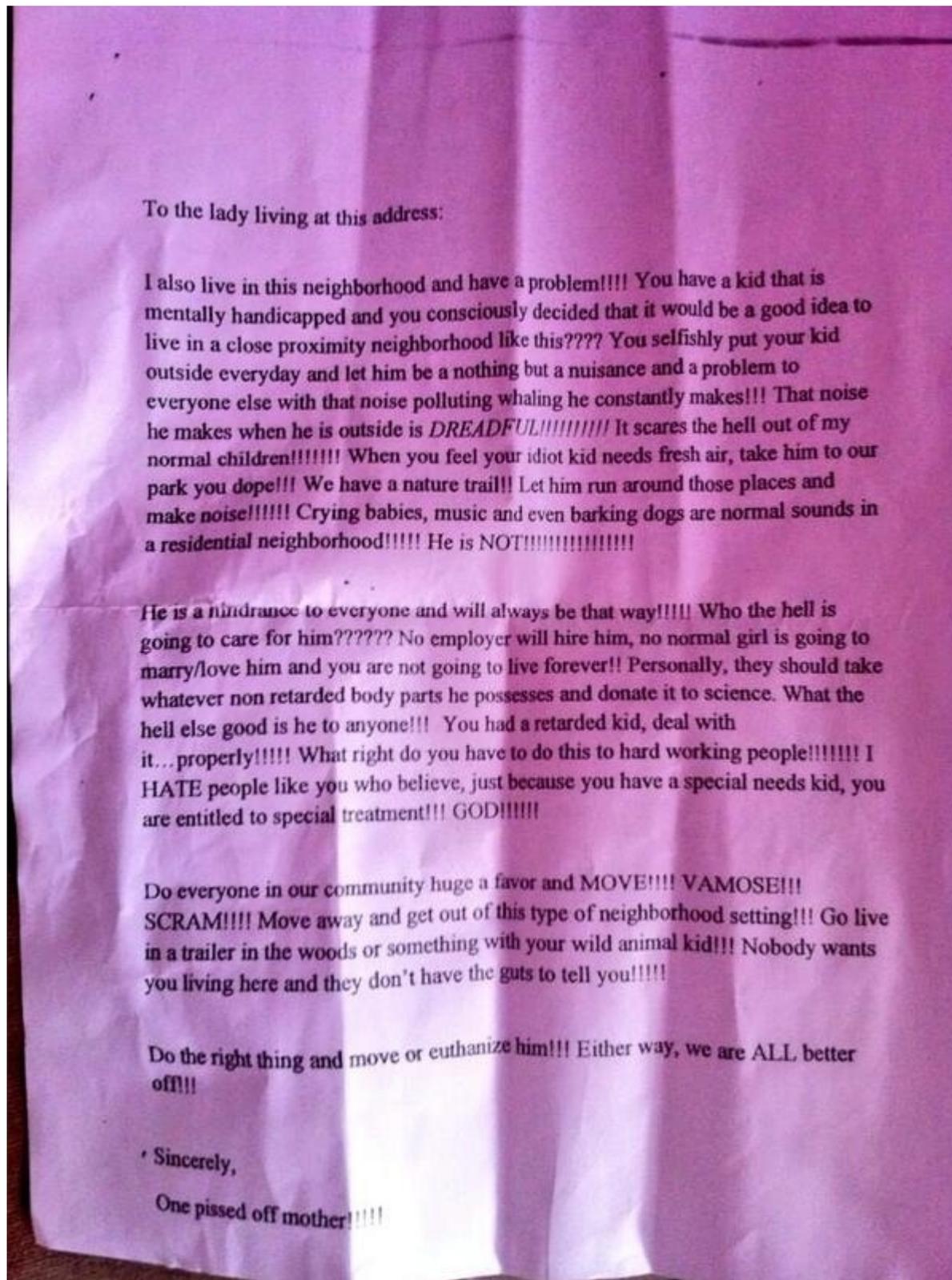
As I opened Adam's bag this evening I got a new kind of homework that I was most delighted to find – I was asked to tell the teacher *about* Adam. I was asked to write in a circle about what Adam likes to do as well as answer questions such as: *Who is he? What does he mean to you? What are the things about him that I should know?* I was just thinking again the other day how, just because are kids have this label we name autism, that our children inherit an identity that does not belong to them. I mean, how often are we asked to talk about our children in positive ways (for lack of a better word)? Aren't we typically asked by therapists what our kids like for the sake of using them as reinforcement as opposed to knowing *who* our children *are*? And what about knowing our children as people first? In thinking about the year ahead, I've spent much time over the summer pondering all the things that Adam *is*, what he loves, what he is good at, and what he brings to his family and to the world. Then *surprise!* I got this "homework" in his backpack today. Needless to say, all that thinking about what Adam is, as opposed to what he isn't, helped me to fill the circle quickly. I'm so glad someone else sees the value of this too.

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[When does a hateful letter become a hate crime? An Open Letter-Post to the Begley's](#)

Filed Under ([Activism](#), [Human Rights](#), [Law](#)) by Estee on 21-08-2013



I returned home from Germany to find this story (the letter above) in my email box. How ironic. I had lived in Germany 26 years ago for school, and spent much of this trip marveling at the new Jewish museums, memorials

and many new races living in Germany that did not do so to this extent when I lived there. Still, I didn't get the sense that in cities such as Berlin, for instance, that these museums of *hopefully-never-forgetting* insures the security and citizenship rights for Jewish citizens or citizens of other races or disabilities. Work goes into protecting rights; they are not, sadly, given, and often impermanent. Therefore, there is work to be done.

During my trip, [I brought my portable Hanna Arendt](#). I am thinking specifically of her essay, *The Perplexities on the Rights of Man* where she discusses inalienable rights and The Rights of Man which proved to be unenforceable: "The calamity of the rightless is not that they are deprived of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, or of equality before the law, but that no law exists for them..." She goes on to say how having a country was important for the Jewish people because without one, they were not considered people at all. Of course, we can't produce a country for disabled people in order to obtain citizenship – it's a silly thought if not a dangerous one; Arendt protests the classless citizen – one without rights – by arguing that the prisoner, at least, has a citizenship status; the Jews on the other hand, much like disabled people, have been targets for complete erasure from society. Similarly today, my concern is that autistic people continue to be status-less.

"The fundamental deprivation of human rights is manifested first and above all in the deprivation of a place in the world which makes opinions significant and actions effective. Something much more fundamental than freedom and justice, which are rights of citizens, is at stake when belonging to the community into which one is born is no longer a matter of course and not belonging no longer matter of choice, or when one is placed in a situation where, unless he commits a crime, his treatment by others does not depend on what he does or does not do. This extremity, and nothing else, is the situation of people deprived of human rights" (Arendt, 2000, 37).

I conflate these situations – the disabled and citizenship status – with the recent story of this [hate letter sent to the Begley family](#) regarding their son Max playing in their yard. Waking at 4 a.m. this morning from Europe, I turned on CBC news to hear that this letter is not considered a hate crime (the other report suggests it is still under investigation at the time of this writing), and I thought that we must, as a community, ask just when, then, does a hate crime occur? Does it take more than one letter? Hundreds? Physical violence? Institutionalization? Calls for euthanization? Would this be in question if this letter was written about other "acceptable" diversities such as race, gender or sexuality? Why might we even have to accept this letter, regarding an autistic child, as escaping the category of *harmful crime* when it threatens, if not illustrates, many ignorances about autism? Why must we live – as autistic people and the families who love them – as second class citizens, or, as Arendt would probably argue, non-citizens? Are we not allowed, as this letter suggests, to go out and play, go shopping, be with others?

In Ontario, the disabled have the mechanisms under [The Ontario Human Rights Commission](#) and the [Canadian Charter's Section 15](#) for the rights of people with disabilities (although another discussion, I posit these Canadian instruments for reference purposes, not for the issues inherent in enforcing these codes or issues I have with the OHRC process). In 1976, the *Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation* released the landmark statement that provided the beginnings of the social model of disability; "disability is a situation caused by social conditions...[d]isability is something imposed on top of our impairments by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society (UPIAS, 14). While we have these new mechanisms that can be enforced, we know that until autism is understood in social terms, as a human rights issue, and not only governed by etiological interests that often occlude autistic personhood, enforcing autistic rights and cultivating understanding will encounter further discussions of citizenship, that merge with notions of capacity, various models of disability, and more.

For the purposes of this post, it is important, I think, to stick with a fundamental concern I have which is the right for autistic people and their families to live and thrive in their communities, to go to school, to have support, and be accepted as they are and to live a life without arbitrary labeling, diagnosis, testing buttressed by ignorance and the ignoring of a person's right to live in society *with* their disability – to live free from harmful words and threat. As for the Begley's and our families, we must not cave in to the violent words produced by their neighbour, but to protest against them in order that we too may partake in the fruits of life, to contribute to them, to be allowed to roam free with our whoops and flaps and delight in the lives of our children, and them in ours. For when these fundamental human necessities for life and well-being are threatened, particularly

considering the tenuous status of the autistic human subject, we might consider this letter in and of itself the words of a hate crime – for words are the foundations upon which further human atrocities are built.

To add, CBC also posted an essay, [What is a Hate Crime?](#) which highlights section 319 of the Criminal Code: “The Criminal Code of Canada says a hate crime is committed to intimidate, harm or terrify not only a person, but an entire group of people to which the victim belongs. The victims are targeted for who they are, not because of anything they have done...It is illegal to communicate hatred in a public place by telephone, broadcast or through other audio or visual means. The same section protects people from being charged with a hate crime if their statements are truthful or the expression of a religious opinion.” I would think that we should all take up this as a threat to the entire autism community.

So let’s ask the key question again and I challenge our autism societies to take this up – when does a letter *become* a hate crime? Or, why is considered *not* to be a hate crime – perhaps this question is more revealing in how we regard autism and autistic people, and that society-at-large considers autistics, non-persons. Therefore, how can we protect the future of our children and autistic adults living in society? As for me, I write this open letter/post in support of any legal action they pursue against the author of this letter.

Reference:

Arendt, Hanna. (2000). *The Portable Hanna Arendt*. Peter Baehr (Ed.) Penguin Books.

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[I Am In Here by Mark Utter](#)

Filed Under ([Acceptance](#), [Communication](#), [Community](#), [Computing/iPad](#)) by Estee on 08-08-2013

I AM IN HERE Prologue Scene 3



We met Mark this year; he was so sweet to Adam. Mark also wrote the script for this movie *I Am In Here*. Mark answered many questions after the filming of this, and Adam listened. Thank you everyone for your hard work. I believe we are getting to know how difficult it can be to learn how to type, to translate an experience into a language. Thanks to many autistic typists, so many kids are accessing AAC or learning how to type, and support workers are learning what *support* means in terms of autonomy. Thanks to typing, Adam is becoming a two-handed typist on some days. Some people will become fully independent and others will always need some form of support, and I certainly hope with a greater understanding of interdependent relationships, that support becomes better understood and accepted. I suppose the main message I would have for people would be: do we support people and enable autistic people by mitigating our proclivity to normalize (and over-value independence)? I think many of our practices are the *taken-for-granted* normative methods and attitudes that erase many autistic contributions. Are we supporting autistic people in order not to be frustrated, to self-advocate? I won't go into the "system" which lays out how we value people and for what (such as productivity, independence) – in fact, I think these mechanisms are universal, except they are more difficult standards for disabled people to achieve, especially when they are not accommodated. I suppose any method could be used for normalization, and this is what we always have to be troubling; by thinking about autistic self-advocacy and autobiography as valid and primary information about autistic experience, and thinking of how our treatments, attitudes and supports can even affect these experiences. By thinking and talking about such topics, perhaps we can better support the community instead of rushing in to say how autistic people ought to be in society.

To Order the Film, Visit [VSA Vermont By CLICKING HERE](#). Thank you, Mark!!!

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[Bring a Friend to Camp Day](#)

Filed Under ([Acceptance](#), [Friendship](#), [Inclusion](#)) by Estee on 07-08-2013



Here's Adam with his buddy again. Inclusion and acceptance, not social or community isolation, please.

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Blehhhhh!!

Filed Under ([Joy](#)) by Estee on 06-08-2013



I'm just posting this photo because I love it. That's it. Here's Adam with his assistant and counsellor, obviously having some fun.

Okay, I'll get political too...what opportunities that some kids could have if human support workers were part of the mosaic of supports that many people need in order to participate in society. Instead, Canadian governments and most autism charities will send our kids to ABA camps. I know... at least it's something, but in the end, it's still segregation. In the end, the goal is to make one like others, to normalize, and as a disability cannot be normalized, think of what we're doing to autistic folks. Let's lobby for the right to be autistic and the right to have the supports that people need, including other people!

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That Loving, Fellowship Feeling

Filed Under ([Adam](#), [Family](#), [Friendship](#), [Inclusion](#), [Joy](#), [Living](#), [school](#), [Single Parenthood](#)) by Estee on 05-08-2013



This is Adam's best friend. Aside from going back to camp this summer, which he is able to do with an assistant, this is the friend who Adam spends time with. We recognized it was a real, unscripted friendship when the two of them preferred to play without words, to roll around on the floor, or when Adam would lead his friend around the house to show him things. His friend is verbal and not autistic and seems to understand and have compassion for Adam, and I believe the feeling is mutual for Adam towards his friend.

There have been lots of events this past week, most importantly the decision to send him back to the school he attended two years ago, which is not an autism school, but a school for all kinds of wonderful kids. Adam had good friendships there; we could make adaptations in the way work was presented; he could show off his skills and he especially enjoyed the mentoring program when the older kids would teach him. There, he made lasting friendships that have stood the test of time – the same friends attend his camp, and they enjoy each other's company. His typing stories is getting stronger this summer with our daily practice, and helping Adam with schedules and learning to be patient with me (I'm a single mom... I need his patience) is another important lesson he's learning with success. Let's just say, I've made these things my mission and I find when I attend to them carefully, we generally do well.

Here's an example: Every weekend, he wants so badly to go to his grandparent's house. There, he is soothed and served by my mother. My father gives him strong hugs and takes him on his long walks and subway rides. How could he not love the attention and understanding he receives there? (In fact, he loves them so much, I'm going to ask the TTC if they will take us on a special learning tour). If I don't take him and I don't have a plan, he had been getting quite distraught with me. I decided to let it be. I broke part of my foot on Friday and couldn't do everything he asked. This prompted a teaching moment.

“Grandma’s house,” he demanded on Saturday, looking at me with determination in his eyes. I was a bit nervous he would bite his wrist if he got angry with me; he wears a chewy tube or heart around his neck so if he’s inclined to do so, he will choose that now instead.

“We can’t go today. We’ll go tomorrow,” I said, thinking *whoops* – that’s an abstract concept and I’m not sure if tomorrow could wait. What is tomorrow when we want it now? I tried making a calendar, and since he can read – I simply wrote in the plan for the days. We went through Saturday, then Sunday...

“Grandma’s house,” he said again emphatically.

“Not today. First we will eat lunch, then we will go for a drive,” I declared, thinking of my foot. Adam got out of the chair, he was sitting in, and I wondered what he was going to do next. Then, he walked towards the rotary phone I bought – to gain his interest in making telephone calls, since he seemed averse to talking on the phone. He picked up the receiver and began dialing. I quickly held up grandma and grandpa’s phone-number, just to make sure we weren’t calling Australia. He put his finger in each hole and dialed each number carefully. He began speaking into the phone, without my assistance.

“Hi,” he said quietly.

“Adam, may I listen?” I asked, knowing that my folks weren’t likely to be home. Sure enough it was the answering machine. “Okay, they’re not home,” I said to Adam. “Let’s call grandpa’s cell phone.” I held up the number for him to follow again and dial.

“Hello” he said into the receiver. Again, I did not know what was being said to Adam, or if anyone was even there. “I’m fine,” he said again. “I love you...can... I... go...to...your...house?” he asked softly, speaking each word deliberately.

“Adam,” I interjected. “May I please speak to grandpa?” I took the phone from Adam to ask my parents where they were and indeed, they were not going to be home. I asked if they would please tell Adam themselves (they were in the car on speaker phone).

“Tomorrow” I heard Adam say softly and he began to whine. “Bye.”

I was elated that Adam made his first phone call by himself. After that, we were able to follow through with the day without a hitch. I asked him if he wanted to go for ice cream, it went so well.

“What flavour do you want...raspberry?” I asked.

“No.”

“Lemon?”

“No.”

“How about chocolate?”

“No.” In fact, if you’ve [ever watched Gumby, you might recall Mr.Nopey](#), from which Adam has earned one of his many nicknames; you’ll just about get the right intonation and speed of Adam’s replies.

I waited for a bit. Then Adam declared...”White!” I realized that someone told me he had tried lemon once and really liked it.

“I think white is lemon, Adam,” I said.

We drove to the frozen yoghurt shop and indeed, he loved lemon.

So today, with my broken foot, I sent Adam along with his friend to [Canada's Wonderland](#) where they shared rides and won a couple of prizes. I've been thinking of the typing, the relationship we share when we do it together, preparing Adam the way he needs to be prepared, and Adam's strong desire to connect. I think when I spend more time with Adam typing and sharing, and when he can spend more time in sincere relationships that aren't always highly verbal and difficult for him, he is a happier kid. Then, as I finished my Master's Research Paper (more or less) today, I was thinking of Larry's line in the movie *Wretches and Jabberer's* when he speaks to Tracy about their trip to Japan and Sri Lanka, and they're in dialogue about how nice it was that they traveled together: "Larry loops twice on that loving fellowship feeling." Indeed, there is something about the summer that triggers these feelings -perhaps it's simply more time – and I've learned how important these feelings are... all year long.

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[My Comment on CBC Synesthesia Story](#)

Filed Under ([Synesthesia](#)) by Estee on 31-07-2013

Neuroscientist Dr. Tom Schweizer, here in Toronto, discuss synesthesia in a stroke patient with CBC's Michael Serapio. It's a cool story, but one that alerted me to the ways in which the neuroscientist and reported began to frame the phenomenon. [Click here to listen](#). This is not the report I heard with Michael Serapio, but may give you an idea. In that report, the doctor stated he didn't expect to meet anyone else with synesthesia in his lifetime. The report in the link is not entirely similar, but it's what I could find for you to at least listen. The comment below reflects the language that was used in the report I heard to frame the phenomenon.

Here was my comment:

In this report, I was alerted by two ways in which this story was framed. The first was the purported rarity in which people experience synesthesia. I was wondering if the researchers paid any attention to autistic individuals who experience it (and report about it) fairly often – Tito Mukhopadhyay, Amanda Baggs...there are many more; the second point deals with the ways in which this report discussed synesthesia on the radio using the dominant discourse of medical pathologization – as something to recover from and a “cross wiring” in the brain. This is of course a metaphor to discuss something that falls outside of the normative margin – it's not literally a “cross wiring” or a mistake or an aberration. As a critical disability scholar, I like to call attention to how we conceptualize the brain and how we persist – even post-Susan Sontag and Thomas Szasz – to use metaphors of illness and aberration. This shrinks the space we need to accept all different kinds of brains and bodies that exist in which we refer to as neurodiversity.

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[Communication as a Human Right](#)

Filed Under ([Aides and Assistants](#), [Communication](#)) by Estee on 24-07-2013

Every morning since returning from *The Communication Institute* in Syracuse, Adam has been typing. I've realized that he actually doesn't need the levels of support that I thought he did, when given the right equipment at the right angles, and when I present opportunities for communication that are for now, more constructed. I don't tell Adam what to write, I'll suggest it. I'll begin by asking him to get a book we can read or talk about together or he'll get a toy on his own. We'll start to write a story – this morning we wrote one about a green dragon. When he seems stuck, I'll say we'll write the story together and I'll write a line. We'll read it together, then he'll write the next line. When he types for things he wants, he is a two-handed typist now, and reading his own sentences assists with his verbal speech.

For someone as literate as Adam, as are many non-verbal autistic children, often labeled with hyperlexia when they were very young, with-holding communication technologies with the proper teaching and support people who are trained becomes a discussion about human and legal rights. I dread thinking of all the days many autistics are taught to label and verbally “mand” without access to other supports. People, we've got to change the way we rethink literacy and autism, AAC and supported typing!

In the meantime, I'm writing a paper on this dealing with the discursive tendencies to think of communication as normative, and typical language is, but also how autistic individuals have a right to this access to level the playing field.

“Is it normal to use only spoken language as the accepted currency for exchange of interests? It is certainly usual or normal for talkers to talk, but if you are not a ‘talker’ you might use other methods to converse.” (Lawson, 2008). I'm certainly aware of the work it takes for Adam to *translate* his experience, if you will. I'm in no way undermining it by suggesting that to write and type is the only way to be a person. He is already a whole person. He just lives as a minority in a majority world of talkers and he has a right to communicate in his own language as much as is his right to be able to have access to translation and interpretation. When I think of support workers for communication, I think to my lectures, where a deaf individual is supported with two translators who must translate normative speech to deaf sign and vice versa. It takes two sign language interpreters to support this person in a three-hour class.

Why should the standard be any lower for the non-verbal autistic person in terms of support?

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[Intelligence Redefined](#)

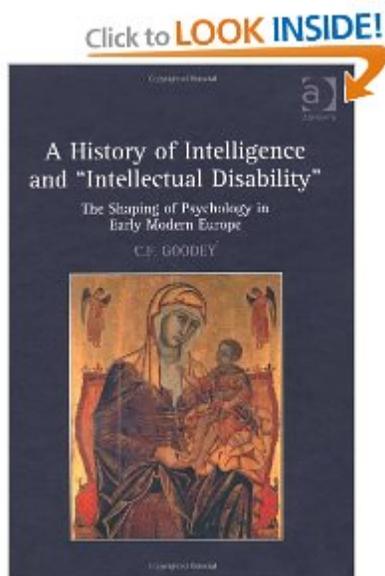
Filed Under ([Communication](#), [Intelligence](#)) by Estee on 20-07-2013

Yep, yep...that's how I felt reading a review of Scott Barry Kaufman's book [Ungifted: Intelligence Redefined](#). Dr. Kaufman, a cognitive psychologist from New York University claims that he was dismayed by IQism: “I would look into textbooks and look at these charts that said if your IQ was this score or your IQ was that score, these were your chances of obtaining various things in life. I just didn't accept it.” (Globe & Mail, Focus Section, p. F3, July 20, 2013). He cites our definition of intelligence conflating with speed and efficiency. Yet, a

question I always ask myself in reading such books is if it is achieving recognition and transformation in the way we provide opportunity for all people.

Certainly when I was growing up, IQism was hammered into us – our fates seemed sealed by childhood – supposedly. Poor at the time in math (primarily because of the way it was taught – I graduated an Ontario Scholar from high school after finding the right tutor in math), I remember my grade four teacher announcing to the class that I was a failure. I'd like to tell her now that I'm a doctoral student, and how long it took me to get here, and how devastating her words were for me that I remembered and had to fight against for the rest of my life. Subsequently, of course, I had other teachers who felt I should be a writer, or an artist – thankfully. The question I have now is how these transformations can take place for people with the autism label in recognition of disability and various intelligences. Again, what kinds of support must we all provide to enable autistic rights and well-being? When I say rights, I believe education is but one of them.

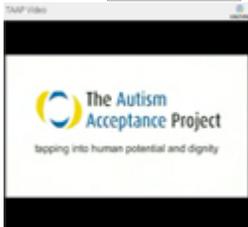
While we all work having to prove ourselves throughout our lives, I believe it is more exhausting when a severely disabled, particularly a person with a communication impairment and movement/sensory differences, is confronted with daily prejudice about their intelligence. When it takes a long time to get out a few words by typing or speech, you are more discriminated against. Stephen Hawking can only type about twenty words per minute and we speakers utter about 157 words per minute. In other words, there's a lot of work that goes into having to communicate for many people, and by the time people finish a basic greeting (unless it is preprogrammed into a device) most people will have walked away.



I'd highly recommend that if people are interested in the history of this prejudice, and how we've come to view intelligence in terms of speed, to read C.F. Goodey's, [The History of Intellectual Disability](#). It seems to have informed Dr. Kaufman's work, and this is a promising step in shifting the manner in which we support people's potential throughout their lives, for as Kaufman writes, "Potential isn't something that's fixed at birth. Potential is a moving target." While I'm not sure about his concept on ability grouping – I'm always wary of the power imbalances at work in our society and how we favour some abilities over others – I do support the idea that people have many different types of potentials and types of contributions throughout the life-span. In summary, this kind of popular book may create more dialogue about how we are coming to understand intelligence, but our challenge is to transform the way we accommodate it.

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About Me



ESTÉE KLAR

I'm a PhD candidate at York University, Critical Disability Studies, with a multi-disciplinary background in the arts as a curator and writer. I am the Founder of The Autism Acceptance Project (www.taaproject.com), and an enamoured mother of my only son who lives with the autism label. I like to write about our journey, critical issues regarding autism in the area of human rights, law, and social justice, as well as reflexive practices in (auto)ethnographic writing about autism.

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because finding joy doesn't come without struggle;
because the point is to find it;
because if an autistic person calls autism their way of being, not an illness, then it is;
because every human has value and is a joy;
because despite inhumane acts, I believe in humanity;
but most of all, because of my son Adam.

The Joy of Autism

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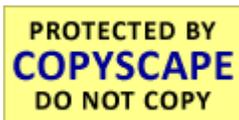
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