LEARNING DISABLED STUDENTS IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM:

TECHNOLOGY, PEDAGOGY, AND LESSONS FROM LANDMARK COLLEGE

by

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Table of Contents

Introduction

Learning disability in the college writing classroom, a growing area of study in the field of composition, encourages an inclusive pedagogy that will ultimately benefit student and instructor alike. In November 2006, the Conference on College Composition and Communication submitted a position statement titled "A Policy on Disability in CCCC." In the position statement, the Committee on Disability Issues in College Composition acknowledges "that disability studies enhances learning and teaching in college composition" and affirms "that people with disabilities bring a valuable source of diversity to college composition classrooms." More importantly, the committee acknowledges "the right of full inclusion for all members of society" and that "full inclusion for people with disabilities means moving beyond narrow conceptions of disability as a flaw, a deficit, or a trait to be accommodated" ("A Policy on Disability"). It seems obvious to say that the field of composition should be fully inclusive, or attempt to teach every student. However, many learning disabled students have not encountered an inclusive, accessible classroom in their entire education. In order to have a fully inclusive classroom, a classroom where instruction can offer success to students, the methods of college composition instruction will need to change. Instructors will need to focus on the strengths of learning disabled college writers, which are not usually the same as the strengths of more traditional writing students. New teaching methods will challenge non-learning disabled students and teach them a new approach to writing, while granting learning disabled students more confidence in their ability as writers. Of course, some composition instructors will be unable to dedicate the time needed to change teaching methods, and it is fanciful to declare that a new philosophy of

teaching will completely dissolve the learning differences between students. For some composition classrooms, the overhauling of teaching practices does not make sense and should not be attempted. However, I argue that the field of composition should be aware of inclusive teaching practices which could benefit learning disabled and, ultimately, all students.

One approach to discovering new methods of composition instruction is to examine an institution which for years has found success in teaching learning disabled college writers. Landmark College in Putney, Vermont, is "the nation's only accredited college devoted exclusively to serving students with learning disabilities" (Hecker 52). This thesis will look at Landmark College as a case study, and will specifically note how Landmark's methods in the composition classroom (including the school's extensive technology program) can be used to create an inclusive environment in composition classrooms around the country.

Linda Hecker is a writing instructor at Landmark College and currently conducts workshops around the country as part of the Landmark College Institute for Research and Training. I first discovered her work, and thus Landmark College, while conducting research for two seminar papers in the spring of 2008. One paper I wrote tracked the discussion of learning disability[1] in composition and rhetoric journals, and the other encouraged new methods of writing instruction to benefit learning disabled (and ultimately all) college writers. As part of that work, I found Hecker's 1997 *English Journal* article, "Walking, Tinkertoys, and Legos: Using Movement and Manipulatives to Help Students Write." As the title suggests, Hecker uses a multimodal approach to writing instruction, and her ideas regarding "walking" an essay or "building" an argument using physical objects such as Tinkertoys were intriguing. Hecker based her instruction on multiple intelligence theory[2]—

the idea that students have different learning styles and different academic strengths. For example, walking strategies use kinesthetic intelligence and building strategies employ spatial intelligence (47). Although Hecker intended the *English Journal* article for middle school and high school English teachers, the teaching methods she describes are taken from her own college-level writing courses. Her methods were utilized only during the process of generating ideas and organizing papers, but perhaps her multimodal approach could also help generate ideas during the composing process.

Linda Hecker's article suggested something about Landmark College's unique approach to writing instruction. A few months later, I decided to visit the Landmark College campus because the school was a unique institution that seemed to employ new strategies regarding learning disabled college students and the composition classroom. My original plan was to contact Landmark and schedule a two or three day visit in October, but the school had a better idea. The Director of Admissions Ben Mitchell, my contact at Landmark, invited me to Landmark's "Professional Visit Days" in November, a monthly event in which high school counselors and college educators from all over the country come to Putney to learn more about Landmark College and its mission, its methods of instruction, and learning disabilities in general.

My visit to Landmark College confirmed the notion that the methods of writing instruction and assistive technologies used at Landmark College can provide lessons for the composition classroom. Part of Landmark's mission statement is "to transform the way students learn, educators teach, and the public thinks about education" ("Mission Statement"). Most learning disabled college students receive accommodations, which allow them to "bypass" parts of assignments or receive extra help on tests, but also stigmatizes

them in the classroom as different. Students at Landmark College do not receive accommodations because the school's unique teaching methods are directed to the strengths of their students. One of the two-year college's main goals is to provide its students with the tools and strategies they will need to be successful in a typical four-year college or university, and eighty percent of Landmark's students go on to a four-year college after receiving their Associate's degree. Lessons from Landmark College may reduce the need for controversial accommodations, and the methods of Landmark instructors like Linda Hecker may also challenge the typical college writer's (and writing instructor's) assumptions about writing.

Before describing Landmark College and its teaching practices, the next section will review the discussion of learning disability in composition studies. For the past twenty years, compositionists have regarded learning disabled college students as cognitively different; they have argued over the value of accommodations in the writing classroom, and they have reflected on the troubling identity created for learning disabled students. Only in the past few years have compositionists begun to discuss new methods of writing instruction that can benefit learning disabled (and ultimately all) college writers. A general discussion of possible methods of instruction geared to the learning disabled writer serves as an introduction to the programs and purpose of Landmark College. The context of Landmark's history as an institution, its current academic programs, and future goals are important to understand the college's unique approach to writing instruction and, specifically, its approach to technology in the classroom. After the introduction to Landmark College, the subsequent section focuses on Landmark's institutional support for assistive technology—software programs and devices created to assist people with disabilities. Landmark employs assistive technology

extensively in the composition classroom, and the major types of assistive technology used by Landmark can possibly be adapted to any college composition classroom. Finally, I will suggest three principles of instruction at Landmark College—universal design, metacognition, and flexibility—that can help define the future of inclusive composition instruction.

Review of Writing Difficulties in the College Composition Classroom: Cause, Construction, and Current Practice

The history of learning disability in higher education is long and varied, and the conversation in composition and rhetoric concerning the learning disabled college writer can generally be divided into four main topics: cause, accommodations, identity, and pedagogy. While the conversation moves over time from one topic to the next, each topic also includes articles outside of the general timeline. The first articles published connect the histories of basic writing and learning disability by focusing on the cause of writing difficulty (Rose 1988; Hunter 1990; McAlexander 1991). These articles debate whether writing difficulties can be attributed to either a "cognitive" or a "socioeconomic" cause, and they do not advance solutions or pedagogical strategies for struggling college writers. The second group of articles debates the necessity of accommodations afforded to learning disabled college students (Brueggemann et al. 2001; White 2002), following the passage of the Adults with Disabilities Act (1990), which provides extra services to learning or physically disabled college students to accommodate their disability. Common examples of accommodations include extra time on exams or a university-provided note-taker. Most of these articles agree that accommodations can both hurt and help learning disabled college students. For many students, university-approved accommodations truly do "accommodate" their disability. However, the danger of accommodations is that they label the students who use them as "disabled" and are often considered an unfair advantage by non-learning disabled students. The third subject of articles, identity, takes a position from the field of disability studies in composition by claiming that a student's "labeled" learning disabled identity is a social

construction (Gander and Strothman 2005; Lewiecki-Wilson, Dolmage, and Jurecic 2008). Disability scholars in composition claim that the non-disabled majority judges learning disabled students and creates an inferior, false identity for them. The first three topics under review diagnose learning disabled students; they stigmatize students with accommodations and label students as disabled. However, the fourth major topic of conversation in composition, pedagogy, moves beyond the arguments over cause, accommodations, and the learning disabled identity to a discussion of new methods of teaching that can benefit both learning and non-learning disabled college students (Lindblom and Dunn 2003; Barber-Fendley and Hamel 2004).

A Question of Cause

An early explanation for basic writers, popular during the influence of cognitive science in composition studies during the late 1970s and early 1980s, is that the thought process of basic writers is fundamentally different from that of so-called "normal" writers. Mike Rose, while not fully rejecting cognitive science in composition research, explores the possible dangers of a cognitive explanation for basic writing in his article "Narrowing the Mind and Page: Remedial Writers and Cognitive Reductionism." In this article, published in 1988, Rose provides an overview of four scientific theories of cognition that are often borrowed by composition scholars and applied to basic writers: cognitive style, studies of the brain and brain hemispheres, Jean Piaget's theory of stages in cognitive development, and orality/literacy theory. Rose believes that all four theories have interesting implications for the study of human cognition, but he also believes it is a mistake to apply these theories to remedial writers and their texts because they lead to a classroom hierarchy.

One theory Rose tackles is cognitive style, which refers to the manner or "style" with which a person solves a task. Rose describes the work of Herman A. Witkin, who analyzed cognitive style according to a person's "field dependence" or "field independence." A field independent person often uses "previously learned principles and rules to guide (his or her) behavior" while a field dependent person is dependent on the "surrounding context" of a problem when trying to solve it (25-26). Rose believes that cognitive style could be an interesting addition to the analysis of college writers. "Maybe the discourse of field independents would be more analytical and impersonal," Rose muses, "while field-dependent discourse would be richer in social detail" (27). Ultimately, however, Rose rejects the place of cognitive style in composition because of its inherent preference for field-independent subjects. According to Rose, "Cognitive style is not intended to be a measure of how 'smart' someone is," yet multiple studies on cognitive style "suggest that field dependence-independence significantly overlaps with measures of intelligence" (27). If cognitive style is applied to the writing classroom, field-independent students become the intelligent, "good" writers while field-dependent students automatically become the remedial, "bad" writers. Rose fights against such a classroom hierarchy, which he also sees when the studies of brain hemispheres, Jean Piaget's theory of stages in cognitive development, and orality/literacy theory are applied to the composition classroom.

The trouble with attributing writing difficulties to cognitive difference is that it reduces the amazing diversity of human intellect. Rose writes, "If I could compress this essay's investigation down to a single conceptual touchstone, it would be this: Human cognition—even at its most stymied, bungled moments—is rich and varied" (50). When compositionists attempt to define a student's difficulty with writing as a cognitive issue, they

oversimplify the workings of the human brain, and they inadvertently judge such students as intellectually inferior. At the end of "Narrowing the Mind and Page," Rose calls for all writing instructors not to privilege a cognitive hierarchy in their classrooms: "We must be vigilant that the systems of intellect we develop or adapt do not ground our students' difficulties in sweeping, essentially one-dimensional perceptual, neurophysiological, psychological, or linguistic processes, systems that drive broad cognitive wedges between those who do well in our schools and those who don't" (51). Rose's call in 1988 is just as relevant for learning disabled students today, who now suffer from the "broad cognitive wedges" that still exist in the classroom.

Since the publication of Rose's article, a cognitive explanation for basic writers is rarely mentioned anymore. Recent scholarship usually assumes that socioeconomic background is responsible for a student's level of preparedness for college. However, a discussion of cognition did not fully disappear from the pages of composition journals. With the appearance of learning disabled students on college campuses, a cognitive "cause" for writing troubles again gained prominence. Currently, many basic writing programs in universities across the country are shutting down, while the enrollment of learning disabled college students continues to rise. In this way, a cognitive cause for learning disability may actually help learning disabled college students.

As with basic writing, compositionists for a time attributed the cause of learning disability to cognitive difference. Two early articles, published in 1990 and 1991, encapsulate the argument over the "cause" of learning disability. Paul Hunter reviews three books about learning disability from three different academic disciplines in "Learning Disabilities: New Doubts, New Inquiries" and discovers that all three books question the

"neurological" cause of learning disability. Hunter chooses books by a clinical psychologist (Gerald Coles), a sociologist (James G. Carrier), and learning disability researchers (Kenneth A. Kavale and Steven R. Forness). Hunter posits that educators, parents, and even the government have made learning disability "the label of choice for our underachieving students" and concludes that learning disability research needs to move from the "deficit-driven research of the past" to "research based on the social experience of learning-disabled individuals" (93, 97). However, Patricia McAlexander, in a response to Hunter, believes he is oversimplifying the conclusions of the books he reviews. McAlexander is willing to accept that "physical brain function is not the sole factor in determining cognitive growth" and that socioeconomic factors are "equally" or even perhaps "more important" in measuring the cause of student success or struggle (225). Yet, learning disability researchers in all fields (including those from Hunter's review) are not ready to abandon a cognitive cause for learning disability. McAlexander writes that educators should try to "maintain a middle position between the two extreme reactions of defensiveness or sudden disbelief in learning disabilities" (225). Since the publication of Hunter's book review, many researchers and scholars have followed his advice. Articles on learning disability in composition journals published within the last few years ignore or sidestep the issue of "cause" altogether and move to a discussion of teaching practices and new methods of instruction.

However, the increased diagnosis of autism has recently reintroduced cognitive theory to composition studies. Generally, autism is characterized by repetitive behaviors and an inability to respond to social situations, which is very different from dyslexia or AD/HD—learning disabilities usually characterized by difficulty with reading and writing.[3] This difference may explain why Ann Jurecic argues in her recent article "Neurodiversity"

that cognitive theory might explain and assuage the writing difficulties of autistic (but not learning disabled) college writers. Much like the increase of learning disabled students attending college, the now relatively small number of college students on the autistic spectrum is expected to grow. In her article, Jurecic introduces the autistic college writer to composition instructors. Jurecic specifically spotlights Asperger's Syndrome, a high-functioning form of autism. She introduces her readers to typical Aspergian prose through examples from two writers: the fictional Christopher Boone, from the novel *The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time,* and the animal scientist Temple Grandin. Jurecic compares the writing of Grandin and Christopher Boone to "Gregory," one of her composition students who exhibits signs of Asperger's. All three writers have difficulty understanding the idea of an audience. For example, Gregory does not know to explain confusing concepts which he thoroughly understands, but which his audience might not. Jurecic does not know how to teach Gregory and spends the rest of her article attempting "to find a foothold in composition scholarship" that can help her (432). In the end, Jurecic rests on cognitive science and on Linda Flower's research tying the cognitive with composition. Jurecic understands that a reintroduction of the cognitive is dangerous, but she believes it is necessary because "the pedagogical challenge Gregory poses . . . is rooted in, and produced by, neurological difference" (432). Jurecic insists on the use of "cognitive difference," rather than the more loaded "cognitive impairment," throughout her article. Recognizing the typical explanation for both basic writers and learning disabled writers, Jurecic argues, "We will have to acknowledge that some differences are biologically as well as culturally constructed" (436). Rather than using cognitive science simply to identify difference, Jurecic believes it can be used to understand how autistic students think and thus help us realize the best way to

help them learn. Jurecic is interested in accepting a cognitive cause for writing difficulty, but she limits her acceptance to only autistic college students.

Rose, Hunter, McAlexander, and Jurecic debate the "cognitive" or "socioeconomic" cause of writing difficulty from a composition studies perspective. Learning disability scholars and researchers, on the other hand, often approach the cause of learning disability (LD) from a scientific perspective. These scholars embrace the cognitive cause of disability because it allows learning disabled students more options in their educations. Also, learning disability scholars believe a cognitive cause for learning disability does not have to equal a label and a negative social construction. MacLean Gander and Stuart Strothman, both administrators at Landmark College, are two such scholars who write from the perspective of learning disability studies in their 2005 handbook *Teaching Writing to Students with Learning Disabilities*. They write, "The current focus within the composition field on social constructivism is generally at odds with the cognitivist orientation of the LD field, and consequently the two fields disregard one another almost entirely" (2). Therefore, Gander and Strothman wish to bring the fields of composition and learning disability studies closer together, so they dedicate one chapter of their book to four major approaches to composition that may help the learning disabled college writer: expressivism, cognitive process, critical theory, and social constructivism. Not surprisingly, Gander and Strothman believe "the cognitive approach to the study of writing processes pioneered by Flower and Hayes . . . connect[s] closely with modes of inquiry characteristic of the LD field" (14). Like Mike Rose, Gander and Strothman consider human cognition to be naturally diverse, which explains why a student who struggles in English class can excel in art or math. However, unlike Rose, the Landmark authors believe that cognitive science can both explain and help

students who have difficulty writing. Although learning disability scholars like Gander and Strothman still embrace cognitive theory, and although the increase in autistic college students has brought cognition back to composition, the discussion of the cause of writing difficulty has generally fallen out of favor in composition studies. However, the next topic of discussion, accommodations, would not exist without a cognitive cause for learning disability.

Accommodations and Learning Disability

One way that a cognitive cause can help learning disabled students is by affording them accommodations in their college classrooms. In 1990, the Americans with Disabilities Act required accommodations to be given to LD students based on their disability or their cognitive difference from other college students. Since that time, many professors and administrators in higher education have criticized the accommodations granted to learning disabled students. One famous encapsulation of the argument against accommodations involves Boston University (BU) President Jon Westling and one of his former students, nicknamed "Somnolent Samantha." In 1995, then Provost Westling describes "Samantha" in a series of speeches and interviews as the typical learning disabled student relying on accommodations to achieve academic success. According to Westling, "Samantha" needs "extra time on tests, a separate room for testing, a seat in the front row, and help from her professor if she missed information because she could not help falling asleep during his lectures" (White 705). Westling uses "Samantha" to prove that accommodations "replace academic rigor with excuse," but a few years after his initial comments and after six learning disabled students successfully sued BU over Westling's anti-accommodation policies, Westling admitted that "Somnolent Samantha" never actually existed (Brueggemann et al.

376). “Samantha” is a stereotype, an extreme exaggeration of learning disabled college students and the accommodations they request. “Samantha” is also an example of the “growing learning disability backlash” apparent in higher education (Brueggemann et al. 376). Many college instructors, administrators, and students are critical of accommodations, and the Westling example proves that some of these critics will go to extreme measures to demonstrate that accommodations do not have a place in the academy.

Another major criticism of accommodations for learning disabled college students is that such accommodations are unfair to the other students. According to Patricia A. Dunn in her section of “Becoming Visible: Lessons in Disability”—a 2003 collaborative article written by Brenda Jo Brueggemann, Linda Feldmeier White, Dunn, Barbara A. Heifferon, and Johnson Cheu—administrators like Jon Westling imply that accommodations give learning disabled students “special treatment” or an “unfair advantage” in order to position “students against each other” (Brueggemann et al. 377). She writes of the “Somnolent Samantha” story, “The image of one student dozing through a lecture, only to be given a private catch-up session with the professor when she finally awoke, was designed to infuriate other students, themselves struggling to stay awake through long lectures, let alone have office-hour access to the professor” (Brueggemann et al. 377). The anger felt toward learning disabled college students increases the stigma of disability and may discourage some students from seeking the help afforded to them by the Adults with Disabilities Act (ADA). For those in higher education who support accommodations for learning disabilities, the extra help given to students is neither an “unfair advantage” nor a “special privilege” but a way to “level the playing field.” According to Kimber Barber-Fendley and Chris Hamel in “A New Visibility: An Argument for Alternative Assistance Writing Programs for Students with

Learning Disabilities," those who believe that accommodations are fair also believe that accommodations succeed in making the classroom equal for all students. Barber-Fendley and Hamel describe the debate over accommodations as "whirlwind arguments" that "form a vacuum that absorbs other LD issues to the point that most of us in rhetoric and composition are familiar with no other LD issues beyond the controversies of accommodation" (515). Most articles on learning disability in composition journals continue to mention the accommodation debate, even if they also attempt to introduce new topics of discussion.

For those who write about learning disability in composition journals, accommodations are normally described as imperfect, but necessary. At their best, accommodations can help instructors see past learning disability to appreciate the strengths of all students. However, some accommodations seem ineffective and even inappropriate for the writing classroom. Linda Feldmeier White, in her section of the collaborative article "Becoming Visible: Lessons in Disability," writes, "Reasonable accommodation for LD means questioning our definitions of intelligence and questioning how integral certain teaching and testing methods truly are to higher education" (Brueggemann et al. 372). For example, granting a learning disabled student extra time on a test seems like an ineffective accommodation for a writing course. White, in "Learning Disability, Pedagogies, and Public Discourse," questions "whether teaching practices that require accommodations are really necessary" (728). If a college instructor decides not to administer a timed test to any of his or her students, then all students, learning disabled or not, would benefit. Also, if all students received as much time as they wanted on tests, then the learning disabled student would not be labeled for receiving "special privileges."

For many compositionists writing about learning disability, the label of learning disability is the most dangerous aspect of accommodations. In order for a student to be granted accommodations, he or she needs to prove a learning disability diagnosis. Either the student will need to pay for diagnostic tests or present the results of previous testing to the college or university's disabilities office. At the end of the process, the student will receive a letter identifying him or her as learning disabled, which the student will need to present to an instructor in order to be granted accommodations. White writes, "The accommodations that have developed for students with LD often reveal features of schooling that serve to invent or increase differences among students" (728). As the authors in the following section illustrate, by calling attention to the diagnosis of learning disabled students, we are also constructing a disabled identity for them.

The Construction of a Disabled or Remedial Identity

Accommodations, while providing assistance to learning disabled students, can also harm students by labeling them as disabled. The construction of a disabled identity—and the "labeling" of basic writers by universities, other students, and even teachers— is dangerous, and often the perpetrators are unaware that they are labeling. In 2000 Linda Adler-Kassner reviews five books[4] about basic writers and evaluates recent trends in basic writing research. Adler-Kassner is quick to point out the shift in basic writing scholarship from a discussion of cause to more promising, and more critical, avenues of research. "In the books under review," she writes, "there is not a single essay or chapter focusing on what is wrong with basic writers. Instead, each of these books begins by raising questions about the social and institutions structures that have resulted in the idea of the 'basic writer'" (230). The "labeling" of basic writers provides them with a remedial identity and is dangerous and

potentially harmful to students, teachers, and universities. Yet, our acknowledgment of the construction of a "basic writing identity" is a positive step toward eliminating this label and thus dismantling classroom hierarchies.

Cynthia Lewiecki-Wilson and Jay Dolmage believe that it is also possible to construct an autistic identity that marks students as inferior. Their comment on Ann Jurecic's "Neurodiversity" article tackles the construction of a specifically autistic identity from the perspective of disability studies. According to the authors, disability studies "argues that disability is a social construction. This does not mean that disabilities are not real and embodied; it does mean that the meanings and values attributed to the disabled are enacted by cultures, not nature" (315). Labels and accommodations open the door to social construction of identity, but, according to Lewiecki-Wilson and Dolmage, attributing autism to a cognitive cause also encourages labeling and creates an inferior identity. The authors accuse Ann Jurecic of condoning the judgment of autistic students as inferior because of her defense of cognitive science. Specifically, Lewiecki-Wilson and Dolmage disagree with Jurecic's treatment of her student "Gregory." Jurecic labels "Gregory" as a student with Asperger's even though he has never been diagnosed with the disorder. The authors believe Jurecic's reintroduction of "cognitive theories" flies "against the very ethos of disability rights, pushing for an even more comprehensive labeling and deficit-based compartmentalization of autistic writing and writers and the assumption of a determinist view of difference" (317). Jurecic defends her use of cognitive theory in a response to Lewiecki-Wilson and Dolmage, claiming that a reintroduction of the cognitive does not have to equal the labeling of autistic writers as inferior. Jurecic writes, "My goal at every moment was to figure out how best to teach academic writing to students on the spectrum—not to erase their

differences, to 'cure' their writing, or to limit neurological difference in the classroom" (322). Jurecic's article and response complicate the generally negative opinion of cognitive research held by disability and composition theorists who focus on social causes of writing difficulty instead. Jurecic writes that "since the social turn in composition, the field has largely turned away from cognitive science. While we have been looking the other way, cognitive and neurosciences have entered a period of enormous growth. Rarely does a week go by that we are not informed of new insights into the workings of our brains" (323). However, although Jurecic's acceptance of cognitive science is not popular in the field of composition, it is similar to the position held by researchers and scholars in the field of learning disability.

Learning disability experts, unlike compositionists, walk a fine line between the theories of social construction and cognition. While compositionists seem to accept only one theory at a time, learning disability scholars believe that learning disability has a cognitive cause while acknowledging at the same time that the learning disabled identity is a social construction. Learning disability scholars also believe that classroom hierarchies exist because of the label of learning disability, yet do not believe that attributing a cognitive cause to learning disability automatically creates such a construction. MacLean Gander and Stuart W. Strothman, in their Landmark College handbook *Teaching Writing to Students with Learning Disabilities*, agree that the "absence of accord" between theories of social constructivism and theories of cognition make it "a particularly salient point of difficulty for those who seek to achieve a synthesis between composition theory and learning disability theory" (1). Yet, Gander and Strothman also insist:

> It is the assumption of this handbook that by looking at students developmentally . . . and by seeing learning problems as based in a complex and interconnected array of cognitive functions and processes, it is possible to avoid the sort of reductionism and simple-mindedness that the unitary label, "learning disabilities," often fosters. (11)

In other words, for Gander and Strothman—and many other learning disability scholars and researchers—cognition is not the cause of a constructed learning disabled identity, but its solution. The variety of human cognition means that all students have academic strengths and weaknesses. If writing instructors provide more opportunity for learning disabled students to work using their cognitive strengths, the negative construction of learning disability, and a learning disabled identity, may no longer be viable.

New Methods of Writing Instruction

The most recent articles on learning disability attempt to solve the problem of accommodations and the construction of a disabled identity by creating new methods of instruction. The key word for most of these new methods is *inclusiveness*. If teaching practices are tailored to the strengths of learning disabled students, then these fully accessible, inclusive practices would make accommodations, and the stigma associated with accommodations, unnecessary. For example, Patricia A. Dunn has fought for inclusive teaching practices in the classroom in both *Learning Re-Abled: The Learning Disability Controversy and Composition Studies* (1995) and *Talking Sketching Moving: Multiple Literacies in the Teaching of Writing* (2001). Dunn, in her books and many articles, asks the question, "What other talents or developed insights do people have that could help them, for example, with generating, organizing, writing and revising text?" (Lindblom and Dunn 171).

In her section of the collaborative article "Becoming Visible," Dunn points out that all college disciplines value different forms of intelligence that play to different academic strengths. "Science and technology schools may privilege mathematical or logical ways of knowing, and the arts may stress a visual or kinesthetic ability. But in English departments and composition classes, what counts is a facility for reading and writing texts" (Brueggemann et al. 379). If a learning disabled student has trouble writing an outline but excels in the fine arts, why not let the student use his or her visual ability to sketch out a draft of his paper? Dunn allows learning disabled students to use their strengths in the composition classroom, and she makes her teaching inclusive by requiring all students to use alternate forms of intelligence when they compose. In "Becoming Visible" she writes:

> We need to supplement writing-centered instruction, even in our writing classrooms, not only because people do make knowledge in different ways, but also because everyone can benefit from occasionally using nonwriting strategies to alter perspective and create the intellectual distance needed for sophisticated revising. (Brueggemann et al. 380)

A non-learning disabled college student, already comfortable with reading or writing, will be challenged by assignments that do not involve typical definitions of writing. While composing in different mediums, the non-learning disabled student may also learn to respect the strengths of the learning disabled student.

Another method of inclusive pedagogy is one that moves beyond the walls of the writing classroom. Kimber Barber-Fendley and Chris Hamel, in their article "A New Visibility," call their inclusive method "alternative assistance." They write:

> Alternative assistance differs from accommodation by being a supplementary program, complementing and enhancing first-year composition, one that offers assistance to students with LD during their entire college writing experience rather than offering accommodations to them only when their disabilities overcome their abilities. (505)

The classroom becomes an inclusive space where accommodations are not relied upon for learning disabled students to achieve success, and hence learning disabled students are not singled out for their writing difficulties or accused of accepting unfair advantages. Barber-Fendley and Hamel's alternative assistance program resides in the English department and "function[s] as an extension of the composition program" (530). Learning disabled students receive alternative assistance outside of the classroom, which can take a variety of forms. Examples of possible methods of alternative assistance include one-on-one directed study programs or group tutoring sessions. To those who argue that alternative assistance is still a "special privilege," even if it resides out of the classroom, Barber-Fendley and Hamel respond that the true "special privilege" is to "have these students within our universities, in our composition classrooms" (532). Like Patricia Dunn, Linda Feldmeier White, and many other composition scholars, Barber-Fendley and Hamel argue that learning disabled students deserve the opportunity to attend college and succeed.

In the past, compositionists have focused on the cause of writing difficulty, the accommodations afforded to learning disabled students, or the construction of a disabled identity. As Kimber Barber-Fendley and Chris Hamel describe the history of learning disability in the field of composition, "At our best, we have tried to identify students with LD without having the knowledge to do so, to remediate them by addressing their grammatical

habits, and to offer them accommodations we do not fully understand" (512). Currently the most persuasive scholarship on learning disability and composition attempts to defuse old arguments through suggesting practical methods of instruction that can help the struggling writer. Of course, even the best suggestions for new methods of instruction are not as persuasive if they have not been successfully executed. For example, Barber-Fendley and Hamel are vague about the details of alternative assistance because, at the time of their article's publication, their program was only in the pilot stages (535). An institution like Landmark College, on the other hand, has successfully implemented a pedagogy centered on learning disabled students for over twenty years.

The methods of writing instruction used at Landmark College are persuasive because they have been successful in classrooms inclusive to learning disability. Also, as noted in its mission statement, the college encourages other institutions of higher learning to learn from its history and follow its example. First, however, Landmark's methods of instruction and uses of technology in the writing classroom must be understood in the context of the institution itself.

The Programs and Purpose of Landmark College

The field of composition studies has been slow to embrace the idea that new teaching practices can positively impact the learning disabled college writer. Since its founding in 1985, however, Landmark College has been one of the first institutions to provide a high quality college education for students with learning disabilities. The history of Landmark College, details about its student population and programs, the level and amount of support offered to students, and the college's mission statement are all important to understanding Landmark's record of success with learning disabled college writers.

Landmark College occupies the former campus of Windham College, a small liberal arts college in Putney, Vermont, which operated from 1951 until 1979 and is most known for being the employer of John Irving[5] before he published his first novel. The Landmark Foundation, precursor to Landmark College, purchased the old Windham College campus in 1984. Dr. Charles Drake, a teacher and philanthropist committed to students with learning disabilities, established the Landmark Foundation in 1963. Drake was dyslexic, but he was also a Fulbright scholar, earned his doctorate in education, and published numerous books and articles on learning disability (Parks et al. 187). He once said, "If a student can't learn the way we teach, we will teach the way he learns," and this philosophy still guides Landmark College to this day (Sibley 3).

Landmark officially opened for students in October 1985, and during its early years, the college very much subscribed to the research into learning disability available at the time. For a child to be diagnosed with a learning disability, he or she needed to show a "discrepancy between aptitude and achievement" (Gander). This discrepancy could not be

due to outside factors such as hearing loss or socioeconomic background. Diagnosticians identified learning disability only if its cause seemed to be cognitive or developmental. Even in government documents—such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act Amendments of 1991—a diagnosis of learning disability is not applicable to "children who have learning problems, which are primarily the result of visual, hearing, or motor handicaps, of mental retardation, of emotional disturbance, or environmental, cultural, or economic disadvantage" (qtd. in Gander and Strothman 4). Children with different types of disability, such as those with physical handicaps, could still receive assistance from the government, but children with a disability due to environment or cultural background (those often later labeled "basic writers") could not receive such assistance. Even today, students whose learning difficulties are caused by their socioeconomic background are excluded from a learning disability diagnosis and from the institutional support provided by a diagnosis. If an economically advantaged Caucasian student has difficulty in the classroom, he or she will often receive a learning disability diagnosis because no other potential cause of his or her learning difficulty presents itself. At the same time, if a student from a disadvantaged background has a similar difficulty in the classroom, he or she may not receive a learning disability diagnosis because the home life of the student is seen as another potential cause of his or her learning difficulty. Unfortunately, the majority of students diagnosed with a learning disability continue to be middle-class or upper-class Caucasian students whose "discrepancy between aptitude and achievement" in school is due to a learning difference rather than a difference in home life (Gander).

The first students at Landmark, although benefiting from the exclusionary nature of learning disability diagnosis, often required more intensive reading and writing instruction

than today's Landmark students. According to MacLean Gander, Vice President for External Affairs and Strategic Initiatives at Landmark College, the severe reading and writing difficulties of Landmark's early students may have been due to special education programs in public schools. "In the 1980's," Gander said in a November 20, 2008 lecture detailing Landmark's history and its mission, special education focused on "resources and pullout, rather than the mainstream efforts [of] the 1990's." The public school system pulled learning disabled students from their classrooms and placed them into resource rooms and special education classrooms, with no hope of mainstreaming. Landmark College, although dedicated to its early students, unintentionally forwarded this judgmental and exclusionary model of learning disability education during its first few years of existence. For example, Gander described the first education model of Landmark College as a "deficit model": "We really identified students by what was wrong with them, not by what was right with them. And that is a problem for us still; we have been working very hard to move toward a more strength-based model. Of course, if [students] have really significant challenges, [it becomes] kind of a philosophical challenge for us." Although Landmark College initially promoted an exclusionary and deficit-based educational model, the college also attempted to change the typical approach to learning disabled students in college.

Most learning disabled students who made it to college in the 1980's encountered a "bypass" model of education, very similar to the accommodations provided by the Americans with Disabilities Act in 1990. Gander explained, for example, that "if you [a student] had problems taking notes because of auditory processing, you [received] a note taker, or books on tape, that sort of thing." In other words, this model allowed students to bypass or skip assignments or tasks that were difficult for them. Landmark did not follow the

bypass method which, like current postsecondary reliance on accommodations, helped the learning disabled student only in the short term, without providing strategies to help the student cope later in life. Landmark instead used a "remedial" model, which taught learning disabled students strategies for finishing tough assignments without changing the assignment or allowing the student to miss the assignment. Although the term remedial usually reflects a negative connotation and the stigma of a remedial identity in the classroom, in this case remedial refers to a teaching strategy much more effective than the bypass method of accommodations. In the almost twenty-five years since Landmark opened, the college has "never abandoned the idea" of the remedial model even though it has enthusiastically altered the model over the past twenty-three years (Gander).

Landmark College's early atmosphere and curriculum was militaristic and, in the end, unsustainable. Lynda J. Katz, the President of Landmark College since 1994, described the college in its first year of inception as "a boot camp for students with significant learning problems" (Sherwood 19). MacLean Gander also described the early Landmark College as having a "boot camp" atmosphere, and further explained, "One [reason] was that we were coming out of a prep school model, trying to improve and plant that into a post-secondary environment with adults, and that was really complicated." Landmark College always intended to set an example for other higher learning institutions and prove that learning disabled students could also be successful college students. However, the programs and services offered by Landmark in its first years of operation were far too expensive to be copied by other colleges or universities. Gander explained during his lecture:

> Every student had a full-time one-on-one tutorial. The average class size was five or six. The cost of the institution was extraordinarily high . . . at the time

> we were substantially more than any other college in the country, whereas now our tuition is like that of other elite selective private colleges. At the same time, while we were the most expensive college in the country, average faculty pay when I started here in 1987 [was] $11,000 for a year of full-time work. So there was this real discrepancy in the model that made it very hard to sustain.

The extremely high cost of tuition meant that only the most socioeconomically advantaged students could attend Landmark, and the college wanted more diversity in its student population. Also, if Landmark wanted to influence other institutions of higher learning in the education of learning disabled college students, then its model needed to be more affordable and more replicable. Luckily, learning disability research of the late 1980's and early 1990's gave Landmark College a reason to change course.

The first students of Landmark College, according to Katz, "came [to Landmark] as a last resort." Katz believes that the "sole purpose" of the early Landmark students was "to get into a 'real college' as soon as possible." It has been Katz's goal to make Landmark "a vibrant, vital place, not a college of last resort" (Sherwood 19). While Katz, in her fifteen year tenure at Landmark, has seen her school grow into a school of "choice" rather than "last resort," many current Landmark students have the same dream as the first Landmark students: to attend and graduate from a four-year college. Landmark College is, and always has been, a two-year institution. In the twenty three years of its operation, there has been talk of making the transition to a four-year program; Gander stated, "When (Charles) Drake founded us, he always intended for us to become a four-year college, it was written into our initial mission statement." However, that option is currently not viable. One reason the

transition to a four-year program may not be viable is the attitude of the Landmark students. If Landmark began offering a few specific four-year degrees, it is not apparent whether current students would want to earn a Bachelor's degree from Landmark or whether the vast majority would continue to transfer to four-year institutions after receiving their Associates degree. Most students are excited about the strategies they have learned and the growth they have experienced at Landmark and wish to test their new-found confidence at more traditional colleges and universities. Currently, about eight out of ten Landmark students pursue a four-year degree after leaving Landmark (*High School Student Profile*).[6]

Current Landmark students are very different from the students who first attended Landmark. The current Landmark student population reflects the school's identity as a college of "choice" than of "last resort." These students are often happy to attend Landmark even if they complete their college careers at another institution. The first Landmark students were older than the average college student, including "thirty year olds who couldn't read at all, or were third grade readers" (Gander). Although some students still come to Landmark with significant reading and writing difficulties, those students make up a very small percentage of the Landmark population. The current average age of a Landmark student is 20.3, which reflects the large portion of students who transfer into Landmark after one or two years at another university or college. Landmark functions as a "bridge program" for these students "who are struggling where they are and need intensive help before returning to receive their B.A. degrees" (Sherwood 19). The average high school GPA of Landmark students is 2.74, while the average GPA of students entering Landmark from another college or university is 2.13 (*High School Student Profile*). The change in GPA reflects the difficulty learning disabled students, often successful in high school, face once they get to college.

Oftentimes, a student with a learning disability discovers the true extent of his or her academic difficulties only after being separated from the supporting structure of high school and parental advocacy. Landmark also offers a summer program for students who attend other colleges but need help with study skills and learning strategies. However, according to Katz, Landmark is "focusing on attracting students who will stay and get their A.A. degree, so that their next college is one of choice rather than where they happen to get accepted" (Sherwood 19). In addition, Landmark heavily recruits students directly out of high school, and 54% of the current student population is made up of first-time college students (Mitchell, "What You Need to Know"). While Landmark still intends to serve older students who have struggled with college in the past, the school hopes to attract a larger number of students directly out of high school.

Landmark has also improved in both socioeconomic and ethnic diversity since the college first opened. The first Landmark students came from privileged backgrounds and were primarily Caucasian. Today, the financial aid office awards over three million dollars in scholarship aid to students each year (*High School Student Profile*). In addition, minority students now make up 15% of the Landmark population, and that number should only continue to grow (Mitchell, "What You Need to Know"). Another number that Landmark College would like to see grow is the number of female students. In 2007-2008, the student body was 70% male and 30% female. However, female students at Landmark form a close-knit group, and the college offers activities like movie nights and weekend trips just for the female students.

Although Landmark College is a two-year school, in many ways it can be compared to a small liberal arts university. Landmark does not primarily draw students from the local

population; the school currently draws students from 30 states and nine countries (Mitchell, "What You Need to Know"). Most students come to Landmark from populous states like New York, California, and Texas, and student housing is mandatory. Unlike many two-year schools, the college boasts competitive athletic teams in men and women's soccer, basketball, and cross country, among others. In addition, students can compete in various intramural athletic events, play tennis on the lighted tennis court, or climb the rock wall. The Campus Activities Board (CAB) organizes special events on and off campus, including day trips to Boston or New York City. Landmark College is also home to a chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, the international honor society for two-year colleges. Many learning disabled students have never been recognized for their intelligence and academic capabilities before attending Landmark. Induction to Phi Theta Kappa is considered the "greatest recognition of student academic achievement" at the school (*High School Student Profile*).

The application and admissions process attempts to find students who are willing to work hard in order to achieve academic success. Landmark College enforces an enrollment cap of 500 students, and it consistently operates at capacity. Obviously, every potential Landmark student needs a learning disability diagnosis. Currently, the highest percentage of Landmark students (67%) are diagnosed with AD/HD; this number includes students who may be diagnosed with both AD/HD and a related learning disability like dyslexia. The second-largest group of students (23%) are diagnosed with a non-AD/HD learning disability. The least common diagnosis at Landmark is that of spectrum disorders like autism or Asperger's Syndrome (4.2%), but that number is expected to grow over time, much like the growth of AD/HD in the early 1990s (Mitchell, "What You Need to Know"). In addition to a LD diagnosis, potential Landmark students also need to take a cognitive and an achievement

test to determine their current skill level and their potential for improvement while at Landmark. However, SAT or ACT test scores are not required for acceptance. For the small number of students whose reading skills are not up to a normal college level, Landmark provides a Language Intensive Curriculum. Besides the normal teacher recommendations, a potential Landmark student also needs a guidance counselor recommendation. Finally, every potential student is interviewed by admissions staff before being accepted into Landmark. The admissions process may be daunting, but the Landmark admissions staff ensures that all new students will be committed to their education.

Required courses in English and a first-year course teach students to be conscious of their strengths and weaknesses in the classroom. The first-year course at Landmark focuses on "greater understanding of learning disabilities in a broad framework" and includes "theories of cognition and learning to practice academic skills" (Mitchell, "Academic Program Overview"). President Katz, in a 2005 interview, titled the first-year course "Cognition, Learning, and Self" and described the work of the course: "Students learn what ADD is, what a learning disability is . . . and how their condition affects learning" (Sherwood 19). The "Self" in the title of the first-year course refers to an important aspect of a Landmark College education. One goal for all Landmark students is to become more self-aware: aware of the way they think and act, aware of their strengths and weaknesses as a student, and aware of what they need in order to achieve academic success. Gander believes that a successful Landmark student is also a successful self-advocate. He said, "People who self-advocate without self-understanding are a pain in the neck, who advocate for something they don't need." However, Landmark students "have a pretty clear understanding of what their learning needs are, and they can articulate [them]" (Gander). Self-awareness is an

important tool for any first-year college student, and it assists Landmark students both in and out of the classroom.

Landmark also instructs its new students, especially those entering from another college, in strategies to help them order their responsibilities. For students entering Landmark from another college, and who have already taken an English class for college credit, the first semester requirements are a little different. Instead of taking a first-year course, the student takes a one-hour Executive Function course in which "students identify and use resources for time management, organization, and work completion" (Mitchell, "Academic Program Overview"). Executive function, a psychological term, is "the cognitive process that regulates an individual's ability to organize thoughts and activities, prioritize tasks, manage time efficiently, and make decisions" (Boutelle). Although a lot of Landmark students have trouble with executive function, most non-learning disabled college students also have trouble with organization and keeping priorities straight. Landmark provides an optional coaching program for students who need help with executive function. The coaching program "helps students identify, practice and internalize skills for independent self-regulation (and) helps students develop their proficiency with self-regulation as they begin to coach themselves" (Boutelle). Students and coaches try to meet once a week for a one-on-one session. During their first semester, students are also expected to meet with their academic advisor once a week. Gander joked during his lecture, "We walk a narrow balance between being aware of students and staying in touch with them, and trying not to be in surveillance mode." Landmark maintains an impressive 5:1 student to faculty ratio, which means that students have the opportunity to receive an unusual amount of individualized instruction and assistance. Additional support services for students include the Center for

Academic Support (CAS) where "students receive support in writing, reading, and study skills, math, science, and coursework completion." The CAS is much like the math labs or writing labs available at most colleges or universities. Also, like most universities, Landmark College has a Counseling Center, whose services include "individual and group counseling, support groups, education programs, consultation, and referral services" (*High School Student Profile*).

Landmark is a fluid institution that can, and often does, change its educational model to reflect new developments in the field of learning disability; other institutions could benefit by changing their model according to trends in learning disability research. Within the past few years, Landmark has also changed its mission statement to acknowledge its dual purpose as educational institution and research facility. Gander compared Landmark College to a hospital "that also does research and teaching." He continued, "We are based on investigating what the answers might be for challenges that are very deep and that other environments don't have the resources to investigate in the same way that we do." In other words, Landmark wants and expects its research into learning disability, and its instructional practices, to influence other colleges and universities. As Gander stated:

> Part of our goal is not simply to just have an impact on the students here at Landmark, but also to have impact on how education happens in other places, through training, through consultation, through program development, and shared program development and so on. Our core focus from that dimension is to develop programs, curricula and teaching practices and support systems that are replicable in other contexts, but that are here within a comprehensive context.

The current Landmark mission statement, approved in 2007, echoes Gander's words and also mentions the college's outreach efforts:

> Landmark College's mission is to transform the way students learn, educators teach and the public thinks about education. We provide highly accessible approaches to learning that empower individuals who learn differently to exceed their aspirations and to achieve their greatest potential. Through the Landmark College Institute for Research and Training, the College aims to extend its mission across the nation and throughout the world. ("Mission Statement")

Instructors and administrators at Landmark College want outside institutions to learn from them and adopt what they have learned and the teaching practices they have developed. They intend their strategies to work for other people.

One area in which Landmark can serve as an example for the writing classroom is through its exemplary use of assistive technologies, or programs that assist students with disabilities. Recently, Landmark's Technology Learning Services department began an outreach program with schools interested in the options regarding assistive technology. The next section will introduce assistive technologies, detail Landmark's institutional support for technology, examine the specific assistive programs in use at Landmark College, and suggest possible adaptations of assistive technology for the composition classroom.

Assistive Technologies at Landmark College and Possible uses for the Composition Classroom

Part of the Landmark College mission is to share resources and knowledge about learning disabilities with other institutions around the country. While Landmark is committed to outreach programs to educate others about learning disability and scientific research to learn more about learning disability, one of the most beneficial aspects of Landmark are instructional methods and technologies that can be brought into any college classroom. The 2006 CCCC position statement on disability recommends that educators should make "writing classrooms and curricula inclusive and accessible to those with disabilities" ("A Policy on Disability"). Assistive technology in the writing classroom is "inclusive and accessible" because it helps learning disabled students become better writers without separating them from the other students. If assistive technology is required in the composition classroom, it also becomes fully inclusive and accessible because it requires all students to use the same technology to complete the assignment. The field of composition has already explored some of the possible uses of assistive technology, and later in this section I will detail the current success some compositionists have found in joining assistive technology to the writing classroom.

The primary goal of assistive technology is "to provide the learner with whatever is necessary to ensure performance and learning success with a minimum of support from other people" (Jeffs 67). However, there are two competing philosophies regarding the nature and goal of assistive technology. Much like the "remedial" educational approach adopted by most special education programs in public schools and the "bypass" approach adopted by most

colleges and universities, there are also remedial and bypass approaches to assistive technologies. Elizabeth Burns, in a chapter from *Understanding Learning Disabilities*, writes that the remedial approach to assistive technology "is used to directly address skill deficits," while a bypass approach "circumvents" such deficits (178). Obviously, Landmark College is more receptive to the remedial model of assistive technology, as it has already adopted the remedial approach in its educational model and in areas of instruction. Gander defended Landmark's use of technology as "not bypass" and calls "learning how to use these tools" a "core strategy for many students." Information Technology Services at Landmark also defends the use of assistive technology for Landmark Students: "The focus on integrating technology into the curriculum is founded on the principles that technology should enhance, not bypass, essential strategic and skill development" ("The Student Guide" 1).

A remedial approach to assistive technologies can be considered an alternate method of accommodation for a learning disability. Rena B. Lewis believes that assistive technologies "can augment an individual's strengths so that his or her abilities counterbalance the efforts of any disabilities" (qtd. in Jeffs 68). As long as a learning disabled student uses the technology to develop new skills or "augment" existing skills, rather than to bypass parts of the assignment, he or she can avoid the stigma of accommodations. In fact, assistive technologies easily fit into the definition of "universal design," a philosophy key to both learning and physical disability studies. Elizabeth Burns defines universal design as "the idea of designing ways to teach and learn that are universal to all [which] is borrowed from the architectural concept of constructing buildings to be accessible by all" (179). An obvious example of universal design in building construction would be replacing stairs and escalators with ramps and elevators: the design is universal

because both physically disabled and non-disabled visitors to the building would have equal access to all parts of the building. In recent years, universal design has become a solution for scholars and researchers who advocate an alternate method of college accommodation for learning disability. Instead of college instructors giving learning disabled students more time on tests or different requirements for class papers, learning disabled students could use assistive technologies to produce the same paper assigned to non-learning disabled students. Or, college instructors could require the entire class to be trained in different assistive technologies. Either way, there is a potential benefit for everyone in the class.

When assistive technologies help learning disabled students construct an idea, read an assignment, or write a fluid argument, students often produce high-quality, college-level work. Thomas M. Duffy and Donald J. Cunningham believe, "One impact that technology may have on learning is that it can lighten the cognitive load of the learner by allowing the learner to attend to higher-level thinking skills by 'off-loading' basic cognitive demands" (qtd. in Jeffs 65). However, there are some negative aspects and stigmas connected to assistive technologies. One potential drawback to assistive technology is that it is always growing and advancing. Elizabeth Burns calls the instability of technology "both a strength and a weakness" (193). It is hard for a student to commit to purchasing an expensive computer and the necessary assistive software when he or she knows that the technology will quickly become out-of-date. However, Burns believes the "advantage of these powerful tools far outweigh the complications of continual upgrades" (193). The lack of availability of assistive technology on college campuses is also a potential barrier for learning disabled students. Elizabeth Burns explains:

> Not all colleges provide access to assistive technology labs. Many students must absorb the cost of investing in a high-processing computer with additional hardware such as a scanner, headphones, printer, etc. It is important to remember, however, that this cost is not unlike the cost many college students choose to invest in their academic independence and success. (193)

A variety of assistive technology is widely available to Landmark students. However, the majority of Landmark students transfer to four-year institutions after receiving their Associate's degree, and these students may be surprised to discover that their new college or university does not have the same level of support for assistive technologies. These students still have an automatic advantage over learning disabled high school students who move straight to a four-year university with no assistive technologies: Landmark students are required to own a laptop computer and several assistive software programs while at Landmark, and these students can bring these assistive technologies with them to their next university.

Even assistive technology can have a bit of negative stigma for students with learning disabilities. Landmark College, according to Kathy Burris of Information Technology Services, often refers to assistive technology as "active tools," or AT, "because stigma, even in a school like this, that can be a difficulty" (Nieckoski and Burris). Elizabeth Burns writes, "The versatility of assistive technology evens the educational playing field " (Burns 195). Yet, some ill-informed college institutions or non-learning disabled students see assistive technology as an unfair advantage to learning disabled students, in the same manner as accommodations or the bypass method of instruction. An anonymous learning disabled college student, however, defends her use of assistive technologies. In a study published in

Reading and Writing Quarterly, "Joan" writes, "These tools don't change the fact that we have to proofread, decide what it is we are trying to say, and say it clearly, but they change the process of working with ideas and allow us to concentrate on the quality of the expression of our ideas instead" (qtd. in Burns 180). It is hard to argue against the potential of assistive technologies in the college classroom, and the impressive utilization of these technologies at Landmark College can serve as an example for institutions interested in pursuing alternate methods of accommodation or universal design in the classroom.

Technology Learning Services at Landmark College

Technology at Landmark College moves above and beyond the level of institutional support for technology seen at most colleges and universities. The school has a department solely responsible for all aspects of the college's assistive technology program. Michael Nieckoski and Kathy Burris both work for this department, called Technology Learning Services (TLS), and in a November 21st 2008 lecture at Landmark College, Nieckoski and Burris described the capabilities of assistive technology and its use at Landmark College. One of the main objectives of TLS is to provide training to both Landmark students and instructors. In his lecture with Burris, Nieckoski detailed the types of training available through TLS, which include classroom visits, workshops, one-on-one training, and online training. Visitors to the TLS website can print handouts with detailed instructions for specific assistive software programs, or they can watch "little mini-tutorials that show individual bits and pieces of the different programs" (Nieckoski and Burris). The requirement that all students own a laptop is another example of the extensive use of technology at Landmark College. New students can bring a laptop they already own, or they can buy a new laptop from Technical Support Services, a subsection of Landmark's Information Technology

department. Technical Support "offers students typically two notebook computer options each semester at significantly discounted prices" ("The Student Guide" 7). If students buy their computer through the college, they also get free technical support and a "loaner computer" if repairs are necessary. Students who come to campus already owning a laptop are "entitled to all of the support services available through the Help Desk except computer hardware repair and access to loaner computers" ("The Student Guide" 8). In addition to a laptop, students are required to purchase certain "therapeutical software" that fits under the category of "assistive technology." Landmark requires all students to install Kurzweil 3000 (a screen reader/synthesized speech program), Inspiration (an outlining/semantic webbing program), and Microsoft Word onto their laptops and offers the three in a "software bundle" for a reduced cost. A fourth program, Dragon Naturally Speaking (a voice recognition program), is required by some Landmark courses and recommended by most others; Landmark also offers a discount on this software.

Landmark College is "unique in the depth to which [it seeks] to integrate information technology directly into our curriculum" ("The Student Guide" 1). The college is a member of EDUCAUSE, a "nonprofit association whose mission is to advance higher education by promoting the intelligent use of information technology" ("What is EDUCAUSE?"). EDUCAUSE developed a "Student Guide to Evaluating Information Technology on Campus" with over 40 questions potential students should ask prospective colleges about such subjects as the use of technology in coursework, the availability of computer labs and assistive technology labs on campus, and required student fees for technology. In a document posted on the Landmark website, Information Technology Services answers every question from the EDUCAUSE Student Guide, line by line. The far-reaching support offered by the

different facets of Technology Services, the interactivity of the college website, and the knowledge of current and upcoming assistive technology programs by Technology Learning Services staff all make Landmark College an incredibly tech-savvy institution.

According to Elizabeth Burns, two vital elements of institutional support for assistive technologies are computer labs and technology training:

> Labs are ideal for students who are not familiar with assistive technology and its various potentials, because they allow student to "try out" different programs and tools. In addition to giving students the opportunity to experiment, assistive technology labs often provide training, which is a crucial component in order for students with learning disabilities to maximize the benefits of the technology. (194)

Landmark's Technology Learning Services staff devotes much of their time to training students and staff and to maintaining assistive technology labs. The staff also researches new assistive technology programs as they are released and experiment with the usability and usefulness of new programs.

One major application of assistive technology is in the writing classroom. There has been some study into the potential of assistive technologies by the field of composition, but Landmark College is an excellent example of using technology in the composition classroom to make all students better writers. Most Landmark students use assistive technologies to help them write even after they have moved to a four-year college or university.

Specific Assistive Technology in the Composition Classroom

In the relatively short history of assistive technologies, the computer has been the most helpful tool for learning disabled students of all ages. Applications like word processing

and spell checking are now taken for granted by our technology-enriched society and have significantly eased the difficulty many learning disabled adults have faced with writing. Andrea Freud Lowenstein, a successful author, professor, and direct descendent of Sigmund Freud, writes about her experiences as an adult with a learning disability in "My Learning Disability: A (Digressive) Essay" (2004). Lowenstein praises "the scientists and the businessmen, whatever their motivation, who have been and are responsible for the technical innovations that have made life, especially writing, so much easier for me by developing those machines that have saved me countless hours" (590). Unlike Lowenstein, who only encountered the assistive capabilities of computers as an adult, most college students have been around computers their entire lives. Learning disabled students are very familiar with word processors and spell-checkers but can still benefit from additional, newer assistive technology programs adopted by Landmark.

The three major types of assistive technologies used at Landmark College are screen reader/synthesized speech programs, voice recognition programs, and outlining/semantic webbing programs (Burns 181). Through research and experimentation, Technology Learning Services has determined the best software to fit the needs of Landmark College students: Kurzweil 3000, Dragon Naturally Speaking, and Inspiration. These three programs are essential to a Landmark College education, and their assistive properties help Landmark students improve their writing skills even after they have moved on to a four-year college or university.

The main purpose of Kurzweil 3000 is to turn digital text into synthetic speech, but the program also contains several other helpful features. Elizabeth Burns writes that screen reader programs "were originally designed for the visually impaired" but "as this type of

technology has become more sophisticated and affordable, it has been marketed to a larger population, including students both with and without learning disabilities" (189). Of the three main types of assistive technology used at Landmark, the screen reader program Kurzweil is probably the one used and discussed the most by Landmark students and faculty. Every Landmark student is required to purchase Kurzweil because it helps students with a variety of learning difficulties; the program is helpful to any student who has difficulties with reading or concentration, and it can be utilized in all types of college courses. In addition to having digital text read to them, students can highlight important passages as they hear them, and they can use a variety of colors to codify main ideas. Students can make notes in the margins of the digital text or leave themselves a voicemail as a reminder of important thoughts or ideas, both of which are methods of active note taking. Also, the notes and annotations students make from the text can be extracted into a word document, which can be important when studying for a test or constructing a paper. Elizabeth Burns writes, "Comprehension skills are also enhanced with screen readers. Reading research over the past 20 years indicates that one must be an active reader to fully understand the text" (190). In addition to highlighters and the ability to make notes in the margins, Kurzweil includes a dictionary, a thesaurus, and the ability to sound out the syllables or letters in an unfamiliar word. "When using such active reading tools, students with learning disabilities are engaged in the material rather than passively listening to a taped book, or struggling with decoding rather than comprehending" (Burns 190). The multimodality of Kurzweil 3000 and the constant student interaction with the text keep students reading for longer periods of time and increase their command of the material.

One inconvenient aspect of Kurzweil 3000 is that it will read only digital text, which is not universally available. Printed text needs to be scanned into Kurzweil, using a Kurzweil approved scanner, before it can be read. Landmark College employs one person in Digital Text Services, who spends hours throughout the semester scanning texts into Kurzweil 3000. All Landmark textbooks are either purchased as digital text or are scanned by Digital Text Services. In a blog entry, Candace Brown, the Digital Text Services coordinator, describes the scanning process:

> Since Landmark College offers our students the availability of every required course text in Kurzweil format, the beginning of every semester finds me sequestered in my office with a fabulous Canon DR 7580 high speed scanner . . . The students are required to purchase a hard copy of the text from the bookstore before they are given the digital access rights. That amounts to 50-60 books, which doesn't sound too bad, except some of the books have more than 1200 pages, some books have text on colored paper or in colored boxes, some books have very shiny, slippery paper, and they all need to be done ASAP.

Landmark Students have the benefit of Digital Text Services, but students who use Kurzweil at a college without support for assistive technologies may run into difficulty. Scanning a book into Kurzweil is a long process, and students outside of Landmark may not have easy access to a scanner. However, according to Burns, "The good news is that many college and university publishers are moving toward web-based textbooks. Soon this accessibility to digital texts will be the standard, making screen readers an essential tool for many students" (Burns 190). Publishers like W.W. Norton are offering some of their textbooks in digital

format, often for a reduced cost. At bookshare.org, thousands of digital books are offered for free to anyone with a print disability. Burris explains, "As long as a person or a student has a form from an administrator like a psychiatrist or a medical doctor saying that they've had a learning disability, they can get a free subscription to the service" (Nieckoski and Burris).

Kurzweil 3000 can be an especially helpful tool during the revision or proofreading stages of writing. Because Kurzweil can read any digital text, it can also read student-created texts, which means that students can "hear" what they have written. Kurzweil also includes an "audible spell checker" or a spell checker that "underlines misspelled words in red," much like in Microsoft Word ("Kurzweil 3000"). During a personal interview, Sarah Glennon, an Associate Professor of English and former Department Chair at Landmark College, spoke of her experiences teaching with assistive technology. Glennon most often encourages her students to use Kurzweil 3000 as a proofreading device, and she described the moment when her students "hear" their own paper and exclaim, "Wait, that's not what I meant!" Proofreading is also the most obvious application of Kurzweil 3000 in the composition classroom. Publications from writing centers already espouse the benefits of reading a paper aloud during the revision process. In a 1987 *CCC* article, Jeanette Harris writes that students often cannot see the errors in their writing because they "see what they mean rather than what they write" (464). A good proofreader, according to Harris, looks "specifically at each word and mark of punctuation, carefully noting not only what is there, but also what is not there" (464). Harris recommends that students read their papers aloud in order to pay attention to every word. Kim M. Baker, in an article for *The Writing Lab Newsletter*, also recommends that students read their writing aloud in order to catch errors and awkward passages. However, Baker notices from her experiences in the writing lab that a student reading aloud

may still “read the words he/she hears in his/her head instead of the actual words on the page” (13). Kurzweil 3000, and other screen reader/synthesized speech programs, are more effective proofreaders because they do not predicate text. Kurzweil will read a student text exactly as written, yet it still requires the student to actively listen and identify errors.

Kurzweil 3000 is the most expensive form of assistive technology at Landmark College because of the time and cost needed to scan documents. One copy of the software with scanning capabilities costs $1095, although Kurzweil offers price breaks to institutions who wish to purchase a license agreement for multiple computers (“Kurzweil Educational Pricing”). However, with the increase in available digital text, screen reading technology is likely to become more easily available on college campuses. Burris believes that assistive technology programs will not face the stigma of “accommodations” or of “bypass” if the non-learning disabled realize that these programs can help every type of learner. Burris has Kurzweil 3000 on her office computer, and she finds that programs like Kurzweil “increase the efficiency and quality” of her own work (Nieckoski and Burris). She further explained: “I sometimes at the end of the day sit back and let Kurzweil read to me . . . read something that I don’t want to read but I have to, while taking notes and then extracting my notes so that I can have something intelligent to say the next day. Many students that don’t have a reading difficulty actually find it useful” (Nieckoski and Burris). Currently, reader/synthesized speech technology has limited uses in the writing classroom, partially because knowledge of the program is mostly limited to learning disability circles. However, once the operating cost of programs like Kurzweil 3000 decreases, the program should become more familiar and accessible.

The second most discussed assistive technology software at Landmark College is Dragon Naturally Speaking, a voice recognition program. The basic operation of Dragon is diametrically opposite of Kurzweil 3000: Kurzweil turns digital text into speech while Dragon transforms speech into text. Tara Jeffs, citing a study for *Learning Disabilities Quarterly* by Susan De La Paz, writes, “Voice recognition software has the potential to allow individuals with disabilities to focus on high-level planning and organizing of content generation rather than on mechanics and physical writing” (73). To operate Dragon, a student dictates into a microphone and watches the text flow across the screen. But while the process seems easy, training is necessary for the program to understand certain words, and early sessions may be frustrating if a lot of time is needed to correct errors. However, the accuracy of voice recognition programs like Dragon has improved dramatically in the past few years. The most recent version of Dragon, released in August of 2008, promises a 99% accuracy reading “right out of the box” (McEvoy 70). Aoife M. McEvoy, a writer from *PC World* magazine, tested this claim and found that after dictating about a thousand words, her accuracy reading was 97.7%. After several more sessions with the Dragon software, McEvoy managed a 98.1% accuracy rating, and was generally impressed, even if she could not achieve the guaranteed 99%. She notes that some of the more interesting mistakes from her sessions included "hurt Pfizer" instead of "her advisor" and "come robbery" instead of "camaraderie" (McEvoy 70). Heavy accents have also affected Dragon’s accuracy in the past, but the newest version of Dragon has a setting for identifying such accents as a Southern or Midwestern accent.

Learning disabled students with strong speaking skills often produce high-quality, college-level writing using the Dragon program, but students can also use Dragon just to

construct an outline. Kathy Burris said that most Landmark students only want to use Dragon to talk out their ideas and "get a sketch down," but she specifically remembers one student who, in his first session, was able to write a six-page paper in an hour and a half (Nieckoski and Burris). For learning disabled college writers, voice recognition software like Dragon "will most benefit students whose oral language skills are superior to their written skills" (Burns 187). Dragon is also useful for learning disabled students who have spelling difficulties or who are "fast processors and lose their ideas before they get them out on paper" (Burns 187-88). As for the non-learning disabled college writer, voice recognition technology seems the most popular assistive technology discussed by composition scholars. Charles Lowe recommends voice recognition technology for the early stages of writing in a 2001 *Currents in Electronic Literacy* article. Lowe invents the term "freespeaking" to describe the use of voice recognition software during the invention process. "Freespeaking," which combines "the concepts of freewriting to the generation of text with speech recognition" may "give students that extra freedom to generate content, a liberation from the restrictions imposed by years of structural approaches to composition based upon print literate strategies" (Lowe). Any writing student who has trouble generating text without a specific purpose or who is easily frustrated by the early stages of writing may appreciate the freeing aspects of voice recognition software.

Dunn often requires her students to compose through speech so that they rely on an alternate form of intelligence. There are many writing students, learning disabled and non-learning disabled, who are more confident when talking in class than when writing. Dunn encourages these students to use their strength in talking and also challenges students who are comfortable with writing, by asking them to compose using speech. In a 2002 *Kairos*

article with Kathleen Dunn De Mers, Dunn describes assignments she has used that require students to compose with their voice. Dunn and Dunn De Mers call one of these assignments a "voice-mail reading log." The day before class, all students are expected to call the instructor's voice mail and respond extemporaneously to class readings for one to two minutes. The next day, the class listens to the voicemails and discusses the readings. Dunn and Dunn De Mers mention the benefits of voice recognition software, like Dragon Naturally Speaking, but their classes do not have access to this technology, so the authors attempt to achieve the same results through older methods, like dictation. However, the authors believe that voice recognition technology could revolutionize the writing classroom and the field of composition. They write, "If you don't need a pencil and paper, or a dictation machine and a transcriber, or a keyboard, to get your thoughts down for posterity, or even just for yourself, then the written word is really not so different from the spoken word. How will this change our writing? How will this change our books? How many more people will become writers?" (Dunn and Dunn De Mers). The addition of voice recognition technology in the writing classroom could expand definitions of writing and make the task of writing easier and more generative for many college students.

More than any other form of assistive technology, both composition and learning disability scholars connect voice recognition programs to the future of the written word. Burns makes an interesting claim about the expectations of voice recognition programs when she writes, "As the rapid pace of technology continues to accelerate, it is likely that voice recognition will replace the use of the keyboard much as the keyboard has replaced the pencil in many ways" (188). Lowe predicts "that it won't be long before speech recognition software comes free of charge on every new Dell, Gateway, or Compaq sold in an effort to

inculcate a new consumer base who will be partially or completely dependent on speech recognition for textual generation." While these claims seem a little premature, it is true that programs like Dragon Naturally Speaking have a lot of uses for every kind of writer. Individuals with and without learning disabilities may discover the freedom and ease of dictating writing assignments or even just creating a to-do list or talking through an intellectual problem. The newest version of Dragon also allows the user to surf the internet or search through files on the computer by giving the computer verbal directions. McEvoy, in her experiments with Dragon Naturally Speaking, used the program to successfully search for "Earnest Shackleton" on Wikipedia and for an "iPod Nano" on Ebay and, in the end, calls Dragon "a keeper" (70). Dragon Naturally Speaking is also more accessible and affordable than programs like Kurzweil 3000. An individual interested in the possibilities of screen reader technology like Kurzweil 3000 would need to invest over $1,000 for the software and several hundred dollars for the necessary scanner. An individual interested in voice recognition software, however, could purchase a copy of the newest version of "Dragon Naturally Speaking Standard" for under one hundred dollars. The "Preferred" and "Professional" versions of Dragon Naturally Speaking include extra features and increase the price by several hundred dollars, although every version of Dragon includes a headset microphone ("Dragon Naturally Speaking").

Inspiration, the third type of assistive technology utilized by Landmark College, is a content mapping program that allows students to outline ideas using both words and images. Burris reminded participants, "Many of you may have heard of content mapping because it is often used in the elementary school grades, but it helps people map out ideas either for a lecture or for a paper visually, and the program creates an outline for them" (Nieckoski and

Burris). Burns sees a lot of benefit to mapping software because "for many students with learning disabilities, one of the most difficult steps of the writing process is getting started. Generating ideas in their heads may not pose a problem, but somehow getting those ideas out on paper and then organizing them into some order can feel like an insurmountable task" (188). A session with Inspiration starts with the user diagramming or outlining the main ideas of a course reading, a lecture, or any type of an assignment. The user can then search Inspiration's library of images and find images that represent the main ideas. The user then manipulates the images, connecting ideas visually until he or she has a part text, part image outline or diagram. Inspiration also provides lots of visual options, including varieties of links, pictures, and colors students can use to tie their ideas together. Burris said that when she trains students, "after about five minutes of telling them all the things they can do they say, 'Stop! Don't tell me more! Too much!'" (Nieckoski and Burris). After Inspiration users are finished with their outline or web map, they can use the visual representation of their idea to write their paper, or they can use the "transfer tool" to move a text-only version of their map to Microsoft Word ("Quick Tour").

Dunn discusses a visual strategy for writing organization in her book *Talking Sketching Moving*. Although Dunn does not use mapping software, her "sketching" assignments have many of the same benefits. She writes, "Sketching, drawing, or graphing developing ideas gives students who can visualize images an opportunity to use that talent productively. It forces those comfortable with words to see their text through a different perspective" (66). If a student is a visual learner, he or she may find that Dunn's "sketching" assignment or Inspiration software is the key to a productive writing process. Elizabeth Burns, writing from the perspective of learning disability studies, agrees:

"Brainstorming/semantic mapping software can be useful for many types of learning profiles. Since semantic mapping software maximizes the visual-graphic aspects of arranging ideas, this type of program is well suited to visual learners who need to see ideas mapped out—literally" (188). Students using these forms of assistive technology are required to compose with images, which can be a comfort to some students and a challenge for others. Yet, for students who normally have no trouble constructing an outline or who write without needing an outline or a map, an assignment on Inspiration might take them out of their comfort zone and change the way they define "writing." Dunn and Dunn De Mers often require their students to compose through drawing or sketching, but admit in their *Kairos* article, "It takes a while, especially with English majors, to get them thinking visually." At the same time, students with learning difficulties or students who are skilled visually but not verbally can tackle an assignment using Inspiration with pleasure and gain confidence in their individual skills. One additional advantage to Inspiration is that it is the most accessible form of assistive technology of the three main types employed by Landmark. The price of Inspiration is comparable to the cheapest version of Dragon Naturally Speaking, and Inspiration does not require any additional equipment to operate, like Kurzweil's scanner. Content mapping programs like Inspiration could be an easy and helpful addition to any college writing classroom.

The assistive technology industry is fast-growing, and new and upgraded products are introduced every day. While Landmark College currently recommends Kurzweil 3000, Dragon Naturally Speaking, and Inspiration, the Technology Learning Services department is constantly researching the benefits of new assistive technology programs. The department even has a computer dedicated solely "to all kinds of software not regularly used" (Nieckoski

and Burris). TLS is happy for students to experiment on their computer with different assistive technology programs, and in fact, student opinions may affect the software Landmark recommends in the future. Among the additional software programs suggested by TLS is Wordtalk, a screen reader and free add-on to Microsoft Word that can read any Word document aloud. Burris recommends Wordtalk to any writers who would like to "hear the tone" of their own paper (Nieckoski and Burris). Another screen reader program is Read and Write Gold, a program that can read PDF files and allow the reader to highlight, much like Kurzweil. TLS calls Read and White Gold a "good product" and "something that students can take to any school" (Nieckoski and Burris).

One final assistive technology program with potential applications in the writing classroom is Audacity, a program for recording messages as an MP3 file. Audacity can be used by students as a note-taking system, or instructors can use the program to send audio feedback to students. Audacity is free and, according to Burris, the program is very easy to learn and to use: "It's a one-click record, start recording. The program uses the laptop microphone, so there's no extra equipment. And [students] can easily click to very specific parts of the lecture and edit it easily. So many of our students who have note taking issues are using this program" (Nieckoski and Burris). Glennon has used Audacity to leave audio comments on student papers with successful results. In a personal interview, Glennon explained her reasoning: "I experimented with audio comments because I knew that even if [the students] could decode my [written] comments, or even if they could listen to them in Kurzweil, I wasn't really sure they were going to get my point in terms of my tone." Glennon said that her students "loved" the audio comments: "They said, 'This is great; I felt like I was in office hours with you. I understood what you liked and what you didn't like.'" Audacity is

free and easy to use, and there are definite benefits to composition instructors recording audio comments for their writing students.

There has also been additional work in the field of composition connecting other forms of assistive technology (screen reader/synthesized speech technology and voice recognition software) to instructor comments. Stephen Carmichael and Peg Alden, both instructors at Landmark College, defend the use of electronic comments in a 2006 article for *Composition Studies*. Carmichael and Alden write that one reason electronic comments (like those accessed through the Review Toolbar in Microsoft Word) help learning disabled students is because students can plug the comments into screen reading technology like Kurzweil 3000. Another more obvious benefit of electronic comments is that they are easier to read and understand than handwritten comments. Of course, electronic comments on programs like Word are extremely accessible and already used widely in composition courses. Thomas Batt and Sandip Wilson, in a 2008 *Computers and Composition* article, test voice recognition software as a method of teacher response. The authors set up an experiment where a composition instructor composed an endnote using Dragon Naturally Speaking for half of his student papers and a keyboard for the other half of his papers. After analyzing the quality of the instructor's comments and the response from students on the comments, the authors conclude:

> When used to compose comments or elements of comments that the instructor was able to dictate fluently, the VRT [voice recognition technology] was a faster modality that silent writing; used as a tool to edit or revise comments, or to compose comments that required recursive drafting methods, the VRT did not represent an efficient means of teacher response. (180)

Audio comments through Audacity and dictated comments through Dragon Naturally Speaking both require instructors to compose through speech. Glennon found composing her comments for Audacity "time consuming," but she admitted, "some people might be more casual about it and actually find that it's quicker than writing comments." The instructor from the study by Batt and Wilson could compose his comments on Dragon Naturally Speaking very easily and found that only editing and revising his dictated comments took extra time. These studies and analyses show that the potential for including assistive technologies into the assessment stage of writing exists but that the success of such technologies will depend on instructor preference.

Most college campuses commonly employ several forms of technology and already demonstrate the benefits of using technology in the classroom. In addition to the previously discussed assistive technologies, Landmark College utilizes technology already common at most four-year colleges. All Landmark classrooms have "wireless network access and video projection systems at a minimum. Some classrooms have more advanced technology including sound systems, document cameras, DVD systems, interactive tablet displays, and more" ("The Student Guide" 1). Landmark students can use "multi-media technologies" in the multi-media lab, the language learning lab, one of several computer labs, and the library. Multi-media technologies are also used widely in web design, art, film, and communications courses ("The Student Guide" 2). Landmark students use a course management system called Moodle (similar to course management programs employed at other universities, like Blackboard or eCollege) to stay connected to courses and course requirements; students can also "use collaboration tools, such as wikis, forums, and chats, through the Moodle course management system as well as e-mail to communicate and work with each other and

instructors" ("The Student Guide" 1). Landmark students, like most college students, can check their grades, order transcripts, and pay tuition bills online on the Internet Student Information System. Most colleges and universities are already experimenting with technologies that can help learning disabled students. The field of composition has successfully incorporated some technology into the classroom, but it needs to be more open and experiment with other forms of assistive technology. We already know that technologies can aid the writing classroom and that these technologies help learning disabled students. An expanded list of technologies in the writing classroom should add additional benefit to learning disabled and non-learning disabled college writers.

In the past, the discussion of learning disabled writing students focused on the cause of disability, the accommodations granted to learning disabled students, or the construction of a learning disabled identity. More recently, the conversation has called for new methods of writing instruction, exemplified by the current programs and purpose of Landmark College. Also, the present position of technology programs at Landmark College demonstrate the effectiveness of assistive technology as a method of writing instruction. Finally, three principles of instruction discovered at Landmark College have the potential to affect the future of the writing classroom.

Principles for the Future Composition Classroom: Universal Design, Metacognition, and Flexibility

Universal design, metacognition, and flexibility guide Landmark's approach to learning disabled pedagogy. Universal design, which originally served as an architectural term that advocated complete accessibility in all public buildings, becomes the principle that all classrooms should be fully accessible to disabled students when applied to education. As the population of learning disabled college students increases, a universal design approach is the means to making the composition classroom an equal, inclusive space. The second principle for future composition classrooms is metacognition, which can be easily defined as self-awareness. Students at Landmark College are encouraged to be aware of their learning disability and how it affects them in the classroom, but it can be applied specifically to composition by asking students to reflect on their own writing process. Third, flexibility means flexibility in the definition of writing and is also connected to universal design. Flexibility encompasses both the multimodal and technology-driven pedagogy at Landmark College and compositionists' recent interest in multiple intelligences, composing with the visual, and technology.

The principles of universal design, metacognition, and flexibility, as shown below, have been effective at Landmark College and have also been used as successful teaching methods in other composition classrooms. The CCCC position statement on disability recommends, "Educators should ensure that alternatives for those with disabilities are built into physical and intellectual spaces, rather than 'added on' in ways that segregate and stigmatize those with disabilities." It seems these principles work best, as the CCCC

recommends, when they are "built into" the course, rather than "added on" later. Of course, it may not be worthwhile for many composition instructors to totally redesign their pedagogy in order to create a course friendlier to learning disabled students, and it almost seems unfair to ask instructors to sacrifice their time in order to achieve a more inclusive and accessible classroom. However, the instructors aware of the potential benefits may change the future of the field of composition.

Universal Design

Universal design began as an architectural concept, meant to promote equal access in public spaces, but the concept soon expanded to promote inclusion and accessibility in all aspects of society, including education. According to Christina Herbert in *Promoting Academic Success for Students with Learning Disabilities*, one architectural example of universal design would be "elevators providing access to all points of a building [that] could be used by those with mobility impairments, as well as parents pushing strollers, or people with large packages to carry" (3). Oftentimes, universal design in buildings is easier and less expensive than attempting to satisfy two groups of people. Why build a ramp and stairs when a ramp will service everyone? The same is true in the classroom: if we can build ramps that ultimately accommodate all students, then we should be able to build pedagogies that ultimately benefit not only learning disabled students but all students as well.

Universal design also promotes equal access in the composition classroom. Glennon considers universal design the essential work of Landmark College. In a personal interview, Glennon elaborated on the positives of applying universal design principles to any education setting: "Just because I provide an accommodation for one student on the side doesn't mean that everyone might benefit from that accommodation. The idea is presenting information in

enough different ways so that I don't have to do something special for these few students who are learning disabled." Of course, Landmark College is different than most institutions of higher learning, and Glennon admitted in her interview that "we have a luxury in some ways because [at Landmark] every student has a learning disability, so I'm not doing something special for my students on the side. I'm teaching the whole class and even though everyone has a learning disability they are still incredibly different." Landmark College may have the "luxury" of using universal design in all of their composition classrooms, but universal design has already made its way into other classrooms. For example, Patricia McAlexander, a compositionist who first wrote on learning disability in 1991, advocates a pedagogy very similar to Glennon's in her 2003 book chapter "Using Principles of Universal Design in College Composition Courses." McAlexander agrees with Glennon that one method of applying universal design to the composition classroom is to present information in a variety of ways. An instructor in a universally designed composition classroom might give "a choice of writing topics," "offer alternate essay formats," or "accept varying writing styles" (McAlexander 110-111). Although offering individualization, McAlexander's methods also do not single out students. McAlexander, like Sarah Glennon, makes the composition classroom fully inclusive and accessible by teaching with the principles of universal design.

Dunn and Dunn De Mers connect universal design to the composition classroom in their 2002 *Kairos* article "Reversing Notions of Disability and Accommodation: Embracing Universal Design in Writing Pedagogy and Web Space." Dunn and Dunn De Mers believe that universal design in the composition classroom opens the door to multimodal assignments and assistive technologies, detailed in the flexibility section below. The authors also believe

that any course using universal design needs to be designed as inclusive and accessible from the beginning and not "retrofitted" like an old building. Of course, it will require hard work for composition instructors who wish to use universal design to rebuild their courses from the ground up. In fact, one of the main critiques of universal design is that so much time, planning, and research is required to produce one fully inclusive, accessible course. Universal design requires a commitment that is unfeasible for writing instructors who teach many classes. Also, composition instructors who give their students options in the topic or format of the assignment, like Patricia McAlexander, will probably spend extra time grading and meeting with students. Universal design principles can "make a college classroom a more welcoming and conducive learning environment for students with learning disabilities [and] can improve clarity of instruction for any student" (Herbert 5). It is ultimately the choice of the composition instructor to determine whether a pedagogy based on universal design will be worth the extensive work required to implement it. But the fact that both Landmark composition instructors and other composition instructors have already successfully included universal design in their classrooms signifies that it is a principle which should be considered in future composition research.

Metacognition

A range of disciplines define the second principle that guides pedagogy at Landmark College, metacognition, in multiple ways. One possible definition of metacognition in the field of composition is "reflection." Linda Flower, in her 1994 book *The Construction of Negotiated Meaning: A Social Cognitive Theory of Writing*, calls her "form of metacognition" a "complex, intentional, time-taking act of reflection" (228). Sarah Glennon at Landmark College has a similar definition of metacognition. "We ask students all the time

to reflect," Glennon observes, "and we ask: what was that like for you, that writing assignment or that activity? Was that really difficult for you? Or was that really easy? And constantly we get the students to step back and ask, 'Why am I having problems here, or why was that a really easy paper to write?'" Like Glennon, Flower finds reflection to be the best exercise to promote metacognition while writing. Flower notes that a student could use reflection "to think about the assumptions, values, goals, and strategies that are informing her present act of composing" (228). Other composition scholars, while not overtly mentioning metacognition, write about the value of reflection in the writing classroom (Yancey 1998; Berthoff 1981). Pat Belanoff's definition of reflection in a 2001 *CCC* article is very similar to the definition of metacognition at Landmark College. Belanoff connects reflection to the concepts of "meditation," "contemplation," and "metacognition." Through reflection, Belanoff writes, "we become mirrors that turn things back on ourselves," much like the writing students at Landmark College who are expected to turn the mirror back on their own writing (405). Metacognition can function as a method of writing instruction through a verbal assessment during class discussion, a written expression shared with the instructor, or a silent reflection.

Beyond the composition classroom, Landmark College's use of the term can generally be defined as "self-awareness." Landmark forces students to be aware of their strengths and weaknesses as students, and the concept is taught from the very first required course. The first-year course asks new Landmark students to take stock of themselves and of their learning disability. Because the majority of Landmark students attend four-year colleges after receiving their Associate's degree, it is important for students to learn strategies that can help them cope with their disabilities, and these strategies depend on metacognition. It is one

reason the Landmark College library has the largest collection of material on learning disability in the country: all students are required to learn about their own disability. Guy Trainin and H. Lee Swanson, in an article titled "Cognition, Metacognition, and Achievement of College Students with Learning Disabilities," measure the effect of metacognition on the achievement of learning disabled college students and hypothesize that "use of metacognitive strategies may be linked to efficient ways to improve performance in academic and work environments" (262). Metacognitive strategies help Landmark students in all of their classes, but they especially help learning disabled students improve their writing.

Metacognition encourages all students to learn from their writing experience, and metacognitive strategies can help students throughout their college careers. Glennon is often amazed by how well metacognition works in her writing classroom and how her students become "so self aware, so quickly." Compositionists should be aware that self-awareness and reflection, the two parts of Landmark College's definition of metacognition, have the potential to improve the writing abilities of all students.

Flexibility

Flexibility in composition often refers to a flexible definition of writing in assignments. Because many college students have trouble with writing, but are often skilled oral communicators or visual artists, flexibility in composition allows these students to compose with their strengths. For over ten years, Dunn has encouraged composition instructors to broaden their definition of writing. In *Learning Re-Abled*, her first book, Dunn writes about the learning disabled college writer:

> As educators, we must stop insisting that all people educate themselves almost exclusively by the means that we find most convenient: reading and writing. Students . . . can help those of us locked into traditional ways of knowing and learning to imagine a different way to teach, to consider multi-modal classrooms. (119-120)

In other words, a flexible definition of writing can also help expand the knowledge of writing instructors and of non-learning disabled students. Flexibility in the composition classroom eases the demands on learning disabled students and challenges the other students—benefiting everyone in the class.

Just one example of the flexible assignments Dunn uses in her composition classes is her multimodal reading logs. Students are required to compose a response to the day's reading but are allowed to use a variety of modes when they compose. They can send the teacher a one to two minute voice mail, they can sketch or graph a response using poster board or a computer, or they can write a conventional 250 word response. Students can even create a "3D log" out of multiple materials, including Tinkertoys, pipe cleaners, or yarn (Dunn and Dunn De Mers). Because Dunn and Dunn De Mers allow their students to pick their method of composition, all students have the chance to work in their strongest medium. Often, flexible multimodal assignments are required only for the invention or brainstorming stages of writing. The instructors who are eager to expand the definition of writing still require students to complete traditional writing assignments. Dunn and Dunn De Mers write that flexible pedagogies can be used to "invent, organize, and revise conventional texts."

The concept of flexibility at Landmark College has a lot of different names. Some call it "flexible assessment," others "flexible teaching practices" or "flexibility in use."[7]

However, the basis of flexibility as a principle of instruction at Landmark College is the same: it allows "students to demonstrate what they know or understand in a variety of different ways" (Herbert 23). The "3D log" used by Dunn and Dunn De Mers is very similar to the strategies of Linda Hecker, a writing instructor at Landmark, who also encourages students to compose arguments using Tinkertoys and Legos. According the Hecker, students use the materials to "build" an argument that shows "how ideas relate to each other" (47). Assistive technology at Landmark College can also be considered part of the principle of flexibility because it also demands a broader definition of what constitutes writing. Burns writes, "Unlike other technologies, computers allow learners to customize and adapt what was a rigid environment for learning—text. The versatility of assistive technology evens the educational playing field" (195). When students use Dragon Naturally Speaking to write a paper, they are composing with their voice—much in the same way that Dunn and Dunn De Mers' students compose when they leave a reading response on voice mail.

The benefits of multimodal assignments make it easy to assume that their popularity will continue to grow in the writing classroom. Assistive technologies and multimodal assignments make writing easier for the learning disabled college student. Non-learning disabled students may also find such a flexible definition of writing beneficial, or they may be challenged if writing conventional text is their strength. Either way, flexibility in the composition classroom is another lesson from Landmark College which could add to the discussion of learning disability in the field of composition.

Conclusions

The growing discussion of learning disability in the field of composition is an opportunity to move away from stigmatizing accommodations and to introduce pedagogy

that is more open to learning differences. As written in the CCCC position statement on disability studies, "Committing to full access and inclusion guarantees the rights of those with disabilities in our profession and classrooms and has the potential to energize practical and intellectual discussions regarding the spaces and places of CCCC." In past conversations about learning disability, compositionists discussed the cause of writing difficulties, the benefits (but mostly the negative aspects) of accommodations, and the remedial identity often constructed for learning disabled students. Recently, however, the conversation turned to a discussion of possible methods of instruction that create "full access and inclusion" in the classroom. This turn is a positive change in the direction of the conversation because it makes compositionists aware of the benefits an inclusive pedagogy may have on learning disabled students. Through assessing these inclusive methods at an institution like Landmark College—an institution which has successfully taught learning disabled students for over twenty years—compositionists can determine how the field should continue to discuss a pedagogy more inclusive to learning disabled college writers.

Of course, the uniqueness of Landmark College as an institution makes my argument for compositionists to adopt its teaching practices difficult. The college enrolls only 500 students a semester, maintains an impressive 5:1 student-teacher ratio, and (despite recent efforts) the majority of the student body continues to be economically advantaged and Caucasian. However, while Landmark understands that it is unique, it is also dedicated to helping learning disabled college students across the country. Landmark College believes that its teaching practices can be adapted to other colleges and universities, and through programs like Professional Visit Days (which I attended), the college attempts to promote the possible success all learning disabled students can achieve, no matter where they attend

school. Landmark's impressive support for assistive technology demonstrates the potential of bringing additional forms of technology to the writing classroom. In fact, programs and techniques using voice recognition and content mapping have already been successfully employed in a few composition classrooms. Landmark's assistive technology program is just one potential avenue for further research, however. The principles of universal design, metacognition, and flexibility also have a foothold in the field of composition and could also serve as an entrance point to instructors and scholars interested in learning more about learning disability in the college writing classroom.

Gander, who has been dedicated to Landmark for almost its entire 25 year existence, said in his lecture, "I'd like to think of Landmark as a teaching-learning laboratory. I've really felt that we have informative systems and practices. We're interested in not just educating students, but to achieve a kind of transformational change in terms of how they regard themselves, their self-advocacy, and their sense of potential." Landmark has a record of success with learning disabled college students. The probable benefit in using Landmark's methods of instruction, however, applies ultimately to all college writers. For those writing instructors willing to learn about a more inclusive and accessible composition classroom, the reward lies in the knowledge that such pedagogies encourage and challenge the learning disabled and non-learning disabled college writer alike.

Notes

[1] According to the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA), "The term 'specific learning disability' means a disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which . . . may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations" ("Sec. 602 Definitions").

[2] Howard Gardener's theory of multiple intelligences comes from his book *Frames of Mind* (1983). Gardner's seven intelligences are linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, interpersonal, and intrapersonal (Smith).

[3] Autism, according to the National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke, "is the most common condition in a group of developmental disorders known as the autism spectrum disorders (ASDs). Autism is characterized by impaired social interaction, problems with verbal and nonverbal communication, and unusual, repetitive, or severely limited activities and interests" ("Autism Fact Sheet").

[4] Adler-Kassner reviews *Pedagogy of Freedom: Ethics, Democracy, and Civic Courage* (1998) by Paolo Freire, *The Journal Book for Teachers of At-Risk College Writers* (1999) by Susan Gardner and Toby Fulwiler, *Rethinking Basic Writing: Exploring Identity, Politics, and Community in Interaction* (2000) by Laura Gray-Rosendale, *Attending to the Margins* (1999) edited by Michelle Hall Kells and Valerie Balester, and *Amid the Fall, Dreaming of Eden: Du Bois, King, Malcolm X, and Emancipatory Composition* (1999) by Bradford T. Stull.

[5] Irving, American novelist and author of *The World According to Garp* and *The Cider House Rules*, taught English at Windham College while he wrote his first book, *Setting Free the Bears* (published 1968). According to *Time*, Windham College once boasted an enrollment of 1,000 students, a number higher than Landmark's current enrollment cap, but closed its doors once enrollment dropped and a budget deficit forced the college to declare bankruptcy ("Private Colleges Cry 'Help!'").

[6] Although 80% of Landmark graduates transfer to a four-year college or university after receiving their Associate's degree, Landmark does not provide statistics on how many former students ultimately earn their Bachelor's degree.

[7] Christina Herbert calls for "flexible assessment" in her book chapter "Making College Classrooms Accessible to Students with and without Learning Disabilities." Sarah Glennon advocated "flexible teaching practices" during her November 20, 2008 personal interview. MacLean Gander defined "flexibility in use" as one of the principles of universal design in his November 20, 2008 lecture "Landmark's Comprehensive Mission in an Evolving Field."

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ABSTRACT

LEARNING DISABLED STUDENTS IN THE COMPOSITION CLASSROOM: TECHNOLOGY, PEDAGOGY, AND LESSONS FROM LANDMARK COLLEGE

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Learning disabled college writers may not have traditional academic skills, but they still have strengths that can be nurtured in the composition classroom. This thesis attempts to make composition scholars aware of a pedagogy geared to the strengths of learning disabled students—a pedagogy which could ultimately provide a more inclusive classroom space. One way to assess the potential benefits of inclusive teaching methods is to examine an institution that has successfully taught generations of learning disabled college students. Landmark College in Putney, Vermont, solely accepts learning disabled students. The teaching methods and assistive technology utilized in the Landmark composition classroom are valuable examples for interested composition scholars.