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Personal Reflections from ePortfolio: AHRC New York City

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by Dominic DiBiase



My Biography: What I Am Bringing to AHRC New York City

My name is Dominic DiBiase and I am currently a junior at Pace University. I am an accounting major in the Lubin School of Business. I have participated in numerous community service events during high school and at the University. At my high school, St. Joseph by the Sea in Staten Island New York, I was part of the Holy Name Society. During the Easter and Christmas seasons students would purchase gifts for needy children who attended the school of the Immaculate Conception and we would deliver the gifts. I've participated in food pantry collections and donation collections which were sent to various organizations chosen by my high school. My hometown of Staten Island was recently hit by hurricane Sandy which wiped out a number of homes and negatively affected the lives of many individuals. After the storm I volunteered my time cleaning houses, repairing homes, and helping with food collections to assist my community in this time of despair. This semester I am looking forward to helping the students at AHRC New York City with both technical and non-technical skills. I plan on teaching the students how to use new computer technology as well as helping them with their social skills, I hope to build new relationships with the individuals I will meet through AHRC.

My Biography in Graphic Representation (Optional)



Blog (and News Story) of 2/5/13

As stated in the article Unfortunate Bullseye, by Connie Anderson, "Children with ASD are prime targets for bullying." ASD is a social disorder, which puts individuals with the disorder in a state where reading and responding in the social world, is extremely difficult. The article explains why children with ASD are targeted with bullying. Individuals with autism can have restrictive or repetitive behaviors, sensory issues, obsessive interests, and a tendency to have meltdowns concerning different situations. The article Bullying Among Adolescents With Autism Spectrum Disorders: Prevalence and Perception, by Eeske Van Roekel, Ron H.J. Scholte, and Robert Didden, describes the same characteristics for ASD; "Adolescents with ASD may be at higher risk for victimization because of characteristics related to ASD, such as their deficits in communication and their stereotyped behavior and interests. Children with ASD also have a difficult time developing friendships." Unfortunate Bullseye stated that 63% of children with ASD have been bullied at some point in their lives. Bullying Among Adolescents With Autism Spectrum Disorders: Prevalence and Perception shows a table indicating that 46% of children with ASD were bullied at least once a month while 27% were bullied at least once a week. Research from both articles indicates that a large percentage of children with ASD are bullied and they are bullied frequently.

Although children with ASD are more likely to be targeted by bullies, their actions of unknowingly bullying others might lead to them actually becoming victims. In a statement from an IAN survey, a mother mentioned, "My son doesn't realize he is bullying, he tries to get the attention of the other children so he takes their ball, he has a very set rules of behavior that he expects all others to follow, our boy wants what he wants when he wants it." In the New York Times, an article School Bullies Prey on Children with Autism, including Connie Anderson, spoke about children with ASD. "Dr. Sterzing's study also showed that children were at highest risk for bullying if they also had a diagnosis of attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. Notably, children with A.D.H.D. also were more likely to display aggressive behavior themselves". Having a social disorder, which makes you unaware of your wrongdoings in a certain situation, can cause further problems for an individual. Therefore, children with ASD can get into more trouble if they unintentionally bully other classmates.

The article Unfortunate Bullseye, stated that home schooling was a negative option when trying to avoid bullying against children with ASD. Already suffering from a social disorder, individuals with ASD will not grow stronger socially if they are surrounded with their typical peers as stated by Dr. Anderson. The article Love in a Time of Homeschooling by Laura Brodie includes a statement made by a mother named Katrina Stonoff about her son James, "After a few months that he wasn't doing anything -- he was marking his tasks as done on his chart, but not doing them. We worked with him for another quarter, but he refused to do any schoolwork. Nothing would motivate him. There was no incentive strong enough and no punishment bad enough to get him to work (in retrospect, I suspect it was about the sudden and complete loss of attention that came with the new baby sister who was disabled)." I agree with both articles that home schooling will only further hurt and disable individuals with ASD. Home schooling would not allow them to improve social skills and can potentially remove any will and desire to do schoolwork due to the out of classroom setting.

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Blog (and News Story) of 2/12/13

Earlier today I had the pleasure of meeting my partner for the semester! My partners name was Rowan. Although Rowan did not have the ability to speak I did my best to learn about his daily life and personality. The use of technology was a huge factor in allowing me to learn about Rowan. I asked him numerous questions and he responded by typing in Microsoft Word. I found out that Rowan lives in Queens along with a number of friends in a group home. Rowan enjoys bowling, watching different videos on YouTube, and eating McDonalds as well as pizza. I learned we had some things in common! I am looking forward to working with Rowan for the rest of the semester.

After reading the article, Testing Autism and Air Travel, by Rachel L. Swarns I learned how individuals who suffer with autism can be intimidated while traveling by air and how new precautions are being taken in order to assist autistic individuals. Some of the programs set up to aid people with autism who are traveling by air are TSA Cares, which helps disabled passengers and their caretakers better navigate through airports, and "mock boarding" trials to allow autistic individuals to practice buying tickets, walk through typical procedures, and strap themselves into planes. This particular program is a great for any individuals who are looking to make the process of air travel a lot easier for disabled individuals as well as the people they are traveling with. I researched some airports that are following through with providing aid to autistic individuals and found that Chicago Department of Aviation (CDA) is

beginning an "Enhanced Awareness Initiative at Midway and O'Hare Airports to better serve individuals with disabilities during their travels". The articles stated the "CDA is training employees about multiple disabilities to improve awareness, understanding and accommodations, and employees will wear purple airplane pins to signify this Enhanced Awareness." Taking safety measures like CDA has done is excellent for autistic individuals and their families while they travel.

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Blog (and News Story) of 3/5/13

To start off today's class I met up with Gabriele, a student I worked with last week. I had a surprise for Gabriele, something I thought he would really appreciate. Following last week's class I learned that Gabriele's favorite basketball player was Brook Lopez, the starting center for the Brooklyn Nets. During this year's NBA All Star weekend I had the pleasure of meeting Mr. Lopez and got his autograph on an 8x10 photo. I gave the autographed photo to Gabriele and he was very happy with his gift!

During class I spent a lot of time with my in class partner Rowan. We began the day by going to the athletic facilities on the C level of 1 Pace Plaza. At the facilities Rowan and I played basketball, ran on the treadmills, and climbed the stair climber machine. Following our workout session we went to the library. Rowan chose a book about trains and we used his Dynavox speaking machine to communicate what the book was about. The speaking device is an incredible tool. Rowan is non-vocal so in order to communicate he types into the Dynavox machine and it reads aloud the words Rowan types. For the final part of class Rowan and I watched YouTube videos on trains, rollercoasters, and Christmas carols.

Through the first few weeks of the course I have learned that AHRC as well as organizations around the globe work hard to offer individuals with disabilities opportunities that are not normally presented to them. Autistic individuals are fully capable of attaining goals, holding secure jobs, and becoming well-rounded human beings. media-dis-n-dat.blogspot.com holds numerous articles, which tell successful stories regarding autism awareness in society and success stories of disabled individuals. One story, which caught my attention, was about a mother named Bonnie Brown. Bonnie is an intellectually disabled individual who was pregnant with her first child named Myra. Initially Bonnie had some fear of the unknown regarding pregnancy. Bonnie felt joy and anxiety at the same time. Working at Wendy's and raising Myra as a single mother would be an extremely tough task for any woman in today's society but Bonnie was strong enough to succeed and raise Myra. Using helpful resources such as Community Actions in Philadelphia, which provides Bonnie and Myra with services such as cooking and running errands, has given Bonnie the assistance she's needed to raise her daughter. Currently Myra is a high school student in Lansdowne, Pa and she hopes to attend Cambridge University upon her graduation. Bonnie and her daughter hold a beautiful, strong relationship with one another, just as any other mother and daughter would have. This is one of the many stories I've read about so far in which an intellectually disabled person has succeeded in life in a situation where they would normally be doubted to succeed. Bonnie has raised a wonderful young woman who will have the opportunity to attend college, and Bonnie has done so as a single mother. This story alone is great encouragement for any disabled individuals. Disabled persons should take advantage of every opportunity they have and never doubt themselves because they are fully capable of attaining their goals.

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Blog (and News Story) of 4/9/13

Autism spectrum conditions are more prevalent in males. Although numerous research has been done there is no complete explanation for this fact. Many possibilities exist and scientists are working hard to find more information as to why Autism is more common among males. Scientists have argued that it occurs because ASC is an extreme manifestation of the male brain. The extreme male brain theory, first proposed in 1977, is an extension of the Empathizing-Systemizing theory of typical sex differences that proposes that females have a stronger drive to empathize while males on average have a stronger drive to systemize. ASC is strongly based towards males with a ratio of 4:1, male to female and a ratio of 11:1 male to female ratio regarding AS.

Another theory mentioned following research is the Fetal Testosterone Theory, which shows evidence of testosterone affects on the brains lead to differences in behavior, cognition, brain structure, and function. Fetal testosterone can be measured in amniotic fluid, obtained during routine amniocentesis. A third theory is the X Chromosome theory, which states the X chromosome contains more genes expressed in the brain than any other chromosomes. More than 10% with learning difficulties show an X-linked pattern of

inheritance. The Y Chromosome Theory suggests that male-limited expression of genes on the Y chromosome can cause leaning disabilities. However the possibility has attracted very little research attention. Looking ahead, the majority of evidence has been coming from biology as well as earlier studies of physiological studies. Understanding the relationship between empathizing and systemizing will require more research. Strengthening the possibility of Fetal Testosterone and its affect on AS is underway. As of now time and research separates us from learning more about the disorder.

Today was the first day of the semester in which the weather was friendly! My partner Rowan and I took advantage of today's weather and decided to walk the Brooklyn Bridge. On the bridge Rowan and I saw magnificent views of the downtown Manhattan and Brooklyn. We enjoyed leaving the computer room and going on a little adventure with some of our other classmates and partners! Following our walk on the bridge we went to the courtyard where Rowan and I listened to some of his favorite music.

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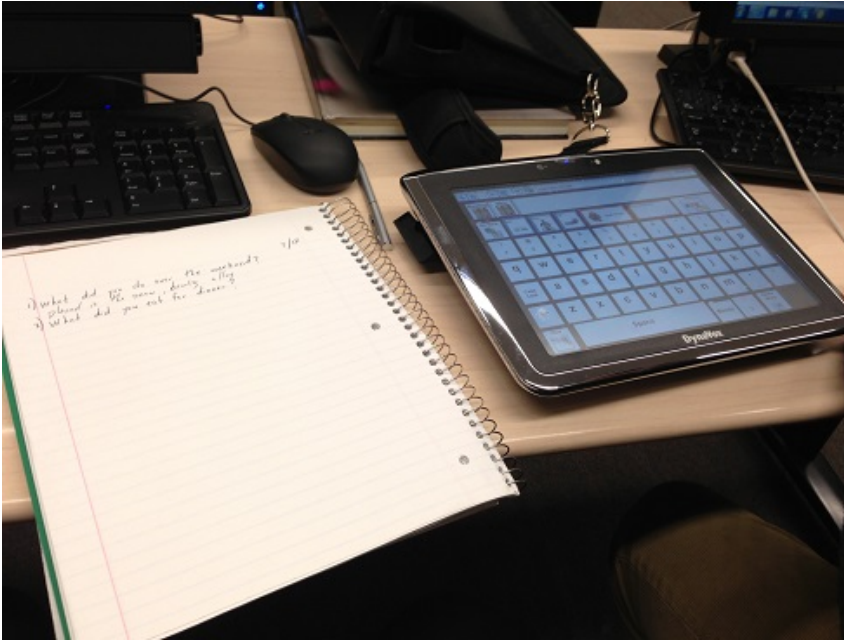
Blog (and News Story) of 4/23/13

The article "The Hidden Potential of Autistic Kids" by Rose Eveleth is a breath of fresh air for all autistic individuals and those who are against the disadvantages of these disabled individuals. The article states a growing number of scientists are turning around and looking at what autistic people can do versus diagnosing them and categorizing them based on what they cannot do. Intelligence tests such as Wechsler's Intelligence Scale of Children (WSIC), tests autistic children at a disadvantage due to their disabilities. This exam includes verbal sections, timed sections, and relies on a basis of cultural and social knowledge. On the other hand, the Raven's Progressive Matrices/ Test of Nonverbal Intelligence (TONI) shows intelligence from autistic children, which is comparable, and sometimes even higher than the results of average students. Recognizing these talents rather than pushing them aside to focus on the drawbacks of autism, could not only benefit autistic people, but everyone else as well. These studies show that autistic individuals have reasoning potential, and maybe we have to start teaching them differently and stop making the assumption that they won't learn. More and more people are starting to wonder what gems might lie hidden in the autistic brain. The results of the (TONI) exam and the talents of Rose's brothers are proof that autistic individuals do have potential.

Today was our class trip to The Museum of Natural History with our partners from AHRC! Rowan had been talking to me about this day since we first met and he was really looking forward to going to the museum. I was happy to spend my morning with Rowan and learn about some of the natural history he was interested in. To begin the trip Rowan and I visited the Ocean Hall. In the Ocean Hall section of the museum there were magnificent structures of various oceanic environment that were brought to life. There were examples of plant life, rock formations, and different sponges and seaweed on display. Rowan and I learn about the different types of fish in the sea; Rowans favorite part of the Ocean Hall was the huge whale structure that took up the whole width of the ceiling in one room! After Ocean Hall, Rowan and I visited the earth section. In this section of the museum we learned about the different layers of the earth. Rowan and I took a photo next to a golden colored globe that was on display. Finally, we made it to the section we were both anticipating the most, the dinosaur fossil section of the museum. Rowan and I learned how fossils formed over time and how scientist carefully dug up and discovered these magnificent pieces of history. We took pictures with some awesome fossils like a Tyrannosaurus-Rex skull, and the earliest forms of alligators. One part of the fossil section held a huge piece of fossils all condensed into one structure. I read the description and learned that it was made from the bones of many creatures that had died during a dry spell and when it eventually rained, all of the bones were washed into a slow moving part of the river where they formed a fossil. Both Rowan and I learned a lot of interesting things this during our museum visit today, we wished we had more time to search the other sections!



Question and answer session between me and Rowan, using his Dynavox speech communicator 3/12



My Mid-Term Reflection Journal on [Book] Miracle Boy and Project

The word disability in today's day in age has grown in recognition to society. Disability has brought about new practices, overall change, and new meaning to life for individuals affected by certain disabilities around the globe. Ben Mattlin is the author of *Miracle Boy Grows Up*, a biography in which Mattlin gives readers an insight on his life, which coincides with the rise of the disability rights movement, and how he grew up as a disabled individual. In 1962 Ben was born with a rare condition called spinal muscular atrophy. Ben's disease is a form of muscular dystrophy, which did not give him the ability to use and develop muscular strength. Through the book we learn that the "Miracle Boy," the nickname which Ben's aunt used to call him, lived a life not being bitter about his disability but finding humor in the struggles of his life. Ben mentions a quote by Paul Stoppard in the very beginning of his book, "I am not my body; my body is nothing without me,"¹ Ben lives his life through this quote and he does not allow his disability to stop him from succeeding in life. Ben does all it takes to stay alive and succeed while taking care of his family, supporting those with disabilities, and fighting for the rights he believed disabled persons deserve. Mattlin's life story, *Miracle Boy Grows Up*, ties into our class studies and is an influential book not only for disabled individuals but also for anyone who has read it.

Ben Mattlin overcame the fact that he had a disability and has become an extremely successful individual. As mentioned in chapter 1 by Mattlin, "To live with this dichotomy between upwardly mobile overachiever and delicate flower with what today is foolishly called "special needs"-to live with myself- I'll have to learn to navigate between or, better yet, balance, redefine, and integrate these two discrepant identities and potential destinies. It's a struggle that continues for the rest of my life."²Ben follows through with the daily struggles he knows he will have to face as a disabled individual and ultimately achieves numerous goals in his life.

Ben's first obstacle was initially living through the first few years of his life with the illness in which he was born. Half of the children born with spinal muscular dystrophy in infancy die before they could reach the age of two; this was already a huge leap for Mattlin. Prior to his school years, Mattlin was confined to a sofa surrounded by pillows, which kept him from falling, in the arms of his parents, or in a seat with a seat belt that held in place. Ben grew a few years older and went on to his first school at Riverside Church, which he mentions was the only regular nursery school in New York City that accepted handicapped students; Mattlin began living life in a wheel chair during this time. Mattlin goes on to succeed at well-known private schools throughout the city until college was his next step in life. Mattlin went on to attend Harvard University and was one of the first disabled individuals to accomplish this feat. At the time Ben graduated from college in 1984, discriminating against disabled individuals was still legal; Mattlin set out to have his voice heard and fight for the rights of all disabled persons. Ben went on to attain jobs as a commentator for NPR, as well as writing in a number of financial magazines. Ben has also written about the rights of the disabled and his work has been featured in a number of

newspapers such as the New York Times. Aside from his passion of writing, Ben has extended his support for the rights of disabled people on numerous television shows including CNN. Even more impressive than his success in school and in the work force, Mattlin married and has two daughters named Paula and Miranda. Overall, Ben Mattlin has defied the odds and has accomplished what even many individuals without disabilities do not accomplish in their lives.

Ben Mattlin is a role model for my class partner Rowan. Rowan is a non-verbal young man who has abundant computer skills and plenty of potential in life. Mattlin's story is extremely beneficial to disabled individuals like Rowan because it shows him that he is not alone, and he can in fact succeed and follow through with his dreams in life. Rowan aspires to hold a position for the MTA where he can work with his passion for trains. Along with being a role model for disabled individuals, Mattlin has helped with technological advancements, as well as societies aid and recognition concerning disabled persons. Rowan's DynaVox communication machine, for example, was created to allow Rowan to have a voice and communicate with his friends and family. Wheelchair accessible means of transportation and ramps serve to assist disabled individuals in public with their everyday lives. Ben Mattlin is a role model to Rowan not only for showing him he is capable of thriving but also strengthening, and making the voice of the disabled community heard in society. After reading, *Miracle Boy Grows Up*, by Ben Mattlin, I am further interested in assisting Rowan and providing him with opportunities along with AHRC which are not normally presented to disabled individuals like him. Like Ben Mattlin, I will plan to serve as a role model to Rowan, being as helpful as possible, and leaving a positive mark on his life that will help in the future.

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My Final Reflection Journal on Impacts of Semester

This semester I had enrolled for CIS 102 W because an AOK 1 course was needed to complete my course curriculum worksheet for the Lubin School of Business. Little did I know I had registered for my favorite class that I had ever taken at Pace University! This semester, Professor Lawler and his course introduced me to new people, allowed me to gain lots of new friends, made me give back to my community, and ultimately learn more about myself.

On February 22 I met my in class partner Rowan for the first time. Initially I was thrown off guard because Rowan is non-vocal. A big part of the semester was learning how to communicate with Rowan through his DynaVox speech communicator. In order to communicate I would speak aloud to Rowan asking him questions and making statements, and Rowan would respond by typing his full response into the DynaVox speech communicator machine and then play it out loud. Rowan and I learned a lot about one another. I learned that Rowan lives in Queens along with friends in a group home. Some of his hobbies consisted of bowling, listening to Classical Opera and Christmas music, and watching YouTube videos. Rowan told me about his passion for trains and how he aspires to be a train conductor one day. Rowan's favorite foods are McDonald's, pizza, and candy. Ultimately, I gained a friend in Rowan; we enjoyed our time together.

Having the opportunity to give back to the community, specifically to the students from AHRC High School, meant a lot to me. I took pride in spending time with these high school students and putting smiles on their faces any way possible. Our activities on Tuesdays consisted of going to the gym to lift weights and play basketball, going on adventures in downtown Manhattan, and grabbing snacks the students liked to eat from the cafeteria. One day Rowan, our fellow classmates, and myself went for a walk across the Brooklyn Bridge. On the bridge we read tablets that told us about the bridge's history and saw amazing views of downtown Manhattan. Our favorite class day was our trip to the Museum of Natural History. At the museum Rowan and I learned about the ocean's environment and different fish species, dinosaur fossils and how they were formed millions of years ago, and the earth's natural structure. Aside from presenting opportunities to my AHRC classmates and spending quality time with them, I learned a lot this semester. I learned that AHRC is an amazing Non-Profit Organization, which presents numerous opportunities to disabled individuals. Without programs like AHRC, disabled individuals would not nearly be recognized as much and they would not be given the opportunities like those that AHRC presents them with. I also learned that I have a special place in my heart for helping others. Having this course opened me up to a whole new world, a world which showed me that community service and helping others is necessary and should be something I normally partake in. For example, in the beginning of the semester I met an AHRC student named Gabriel. After speaking to Gabriel I learned that he was a huge Brooklyn Nets fan like myself. I brought in an autographed 8x10 Brook Lopez photograph for Gabriel to frame and hang up in his room. Giving this piece of sports memorabilia to Gabriel made me feel great; knowing that I made someone else's day was very special. Every Tuesday Gabriel and I would converse about the status of the Nets and the NBA; Gabriel was one of the many friends I made this semester through CIS 102 W.

Overall, I had an excellent experience working in this course and I would recommend it to any student at the university.

