



**WHEN DISABILITY SERVICE OFFICERS BECOME
STREET-LEVEL ADVOCATES IN QUEENSLAND TECHNICAL
AND FURTHER EDUCATION CONTEXTS THROUGH
ARISTOTLE'S NICOMACHEAN ETHICS**

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Abstract:

Aristotle, The Grand Master of Philosophy and Literature, developed many theories relating to inequality which remain relevant in this current millennium. This qualitative study examined the role of Disability Service Officers (DSOs) in Technical and Further Education (TAFE) and explored their approach to students with dyslexia using Aristotelian theory. This case study used semi-structured interviews in five TAFE Colleges within Australia. A foundational theory of Street-Level Advocates emerged from the DSOs interactions with adult students with dyslexia. Disability Service Officers interactions aligned with Aristotle's philosophy of Nicomachean Ethics; and knowledge, thinking, and ethics of humanity, whilst practicing good deeds. Aristotle's theory plays an integral part of this research, as he provides knowledge of good deeds, not unlike DSOs in TAFE.

Keywords: Aristotle; advocacy; good deeds; Nicomachean Ethics; Disability Service Officers; TAFE

1. Introduction

This article deals with the advocacy and autonomy that Disability Service Officers utilise in the support of adult students with dyslexia in Queensland tertiary education, Technical and Further Education (TAFE) contexts. Disability Services Officers were formerly known as Disability Officers (DOs) in TAFE. I compare the performance of DOs in TAFE with the moral philosophy in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (Books 1-6). The article reviews the role of DOs, using Good Deeds to support and provide learning strategies to dyslexic adult students, to help fill a gap in the sparse literature on the

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educational support of dyslexia (Andresen, Anmarkrud, Salmerón, & Bråten, 2019; Gilger, 2017).

During this time, the years 2013-2016, the national training organisation of TAFE had been going through systemic change (North Coast Institute of TAFE - New South Wales, 2013; Queensland Skills and Training Taskforce Committee, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c). TAFE Institutes were reducing the number of courses, lower level courses were being reduced and there was an introduction of diploma and bachelor degree programs (Wheelahan, 2011, 2015; Wheelahan, Arkoudis, Moodie, Fredman, & Bexley, 2012; Wheelahan, Moodie, Billett, & Kelly, 2009). Furthermore, these changes put DOs under pressure and made it difficult for them to provide appropriate pathways and support, to people with diverse learning requirements. In other studies, it was identified there was a lack of research in the DO role in Australian TAFE (McCabe, 2001; Tanner, 2010).

Tanner (2010) has suggested that there needs to be further investigation into the role and practices of DOs in Australia. Internationally and nationally there were limited studies in TAFE, Vocational Education and Training, or Universities on the practices and pseudo-professional role of DOs (McCabe, 2001; Tanner, 2010). This small study aimed to highlight the voices of DOs in TAFE Colleges working with students who have dyslexia.

Furthermore, DOs identified in practice, they utilise practices that align with Aristotle's Ethics. Cooper and Cooper (1975) observed that Aristotle 'insists that doing and acting [ethically and virtuously] ... is the end in itself' (1975, p.78), which provided goodwill and actions toward others (Polansky, 2014; Uslaner, 2006). These behaviours and actions reflect the ethics, morals, virtues and soul of the DO role in TAFE. Disability Officers were not administrators, but agents of change towards equity, as noted throughout this article.

The two research questions that underpin the investigation into the relationship between DOs and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, within TAFE Colleges.

2. Research Questions

- 1) What were the interactions between DOs and adult students with dyslexia?
- 2) What were the phenomena used by Aristotle that were common with the interaction of DOs in search of equitable outcomes for adults who have dyslexia?

3. TAFE Institutes and Colleges

TAFE colleges are Australia's largest public training organisation (Good Universities Guide, 2018; TAFE Queensland, 2014). In Australia, TAFE Institutes are primarily funded by State Governments (Queensland State Government Media: Creative Commons, 2018), with Federal Government funds offered for certain programs, such as DAAWES for apprentices and traineeships (Department of Industry Australian Government, 2015). There are forty-nine TAFE Institutes across Australia, with seven in Queensland, five of

which participated in this study. Each TAFE Institute has approximately four additional colleges, often on separate sites; with only one DO who may have to travel from site to site, reviewing the learning needs of the student. Disability Officers in this study have utilised good deeds and caring toward the adult student with dyslexia.

4. Literature on Essential Good Deeds

Pressman, Kraft, and Cross (2015) identified that “Paying It Forward (PIF)” was a benefit to both the giver and receiver of good deeds. In that study, it was identified that even a short time spent with the receiver of the goods (e.g. coffee, talking, and giving a gift) was positive for both the giver and receiver of that gift. Not only were the giver participants doing good, but 40 per cent of the receivers of the good-deed were also ‘Paying It Forward’ to another person. (Pressman, Kraft, & Cross, 2015). This example of good deeds is not dissimilar to those described by Aristotle (Pakaluk, 2005). For Aristotle, the focus on ethics, virtues, and good deeds was synonymous with ultimate happiness (Pakaluk, 2005, p. 2).

Many DOs in TAFE colleges who did adhere to the strict administrative role, utilised ethics, morals, and virtuous deeds while using discretionary practices. Disability Officers were also advocating for adult students with dyslexia. These good deeds only came about due to the good-will of DOs and the ethical contributions made for adult students with have dyslexia, who had previously been marginalised in educational, family and social contexts (Caskey, 2017; Caskey, Innes, & Lovell, 2018).

5. Research Design

The research design of this study involves a qualitative research paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), utilising various approaches. A paradigm is the way in which a study is managed, in this instance, an interpretive focus was taken to analyse the findings throughout the research process (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2005).

Table 2: Research Design

Ontology and Epistemology	Social Constructionism	Gergen, (2009, 2005) Merriam, (2009)
Methodology	Case Study	Yin, (2004, 2009) Merriam, (1998)
Theory	Hyphenated-Self Relational Being Street-Level Bureaucracy <i>Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics</i> (Books 1-6)	Fine and Sirin (2007) Gergen, (2010) Lipsky (1998, 2010) Pakaluk, (2005)
Methods	Semi-Structured Interview Questions	Bryman, (2007,2012)

Social constructionism (Gergen, 1985, 2005) was the epistemology and ontology that explored the work done by DOs within their workplaces in Queensland TAFE Colleges.

Case study methodology was used to compare the commonalities and differences between DOs and the colleges (see Table 2) (Yin, 2003, 2009).

The methodology utilised multiple case study methodology (Sanotos & Eisenhardt, 2004; Yin, 2009), where semi-structured one-on-one interviews were conducted with participants to access emerging data. Participants included 22 adult students with dyslexia and six DOs spread across five TAFE Institutes. The six DOs interviewed for this study provided support strategies for students with disabilities, enrolled in Vocational Educational and Training (VET) programs in TAFE Colleges. TAFE Institutes in this study were situated in regional and metropolitan contexts within Queensland, Australia.

This study was secured using modern theories: Street-Level Bureaucracy (Lipsky, 1983a, 2010), despite this study developing Street-Level Advocacy. A foundational theory, Relational: Hyphenated-Self (Fine & Sirin, 2007; Gergen, 2010) was utilised in this study. These theoretical notions were compared to the classical philosophies of Aristotle (Cooper & Cooper, 1975; Heinaman, 2017; Hursthouse, 1986; Polansky, 2014). The following section relates to the literature of Aristotle, and the relationship between his criteria of ethics and DOs as practitioners in TAFE.

6. Literature and Results of the Relationship between Disability Officers, Aristotle, And Adult Students with Dyslexia

The guidelines for TAFE DOs role, was updated in 2017 and defined an administrative pathway for the DO; not allowing them to use discretion in their practice (ADCET, 2017). The 2014 guidelines had allowed for some Aristotelian discretionary 'good deeds' in practice, yet some decoupled the system role (Caskey, 2017). Decoupling is the process that individuals take to change the existing procedures of an organisations' rules and guidelines (Fried, Gey, Pretorius, & Günther, 2013; Meyer, 2010; Meyer & Rowan, 1977), which enables discretionary practices (Lipsky, 1983b, 2010). TAFE Disability Officers were discretionary and utilised 'good deeds' in their new 'professional role' (Caskey, 2017; Caskey & Spinks, 2019).

In this article, good deeds of Aristotle are compared with the new professional role of DOs in TAFE Colleges. Pakaluk (2005) describes both Aristotle and Plato's definition of what it means to be 'good'. Aristotles meaning of good is the following:

- 1) *"Goodness is uniform: all good things are good in the same way;*
- 2) *There is a separately existing Form of Goodness: which is Goodness Itself;*
- 3) *Expertise in goodness involves intellectually perceiving this Form of Goodness"* (Pakaluk, 2005, p. 58).

Aristotle's 'good-deeds' clearly demonstrate function. In comparison, Plato suggests that all things and persons can be good. Little is mentioned about virtues and

morality in Plato's work (Etzioni, 2014). Plato, unlike Aristotle, only sees moral judgment in the behaviours of oneself or the other (Waterlow, 1972, p. 19).

In comparison, Aristotle argues that good-deeds are the actions of every day – the first of the character-related virtues that unite with the soul (Pakaluk, 2005). However, the virtue of humans can be separated and levelled at different parts of the body that unite with the soul, our feeling, emotion, happiness, sadness, and our thoughts (Pakaluk, 2005).

In TAFE, DOs were performing good-deeds toward adult students with dyslexia in their educational programs, this ultimately was presented in the caring and mentoring of the student (using feelings and sadness to facilitate good). Disability Officers even felt poorly about themselves if they were not performing these good deeds in practice:

"We're trying to build skills in the students that we can gradually step back and back ... eventually, the students will be independent of their technology and then in the class ..."
(Emmy, Cityview College)

"I've been able to have some students properly assessed, having a psychometric educational assessment. In addition, we've been able to get VDSS to approve some Irlen assessments ... two students with Dyslexia required Irlen glasses which they could not afford. I approached Centrelink, and St Vincent De Paul and funding was provided to purchase glasses for two students ... and I'm finding it tougher to get the approval for assessments." (Simone, Bayview College)

Simone went out of the TAFE system (decoupling the system) to support her students with appropriate 'reasonable adjustments' for their disabilities. Simone had a soul in her ability to provide services for adult students with dyslexia. Reasonable Adjustments are supports, modifications or individual/learning needs of a person who has a disability (Australian Government, 2013; Queensland VET Development Centre, 2010, 2012).

According to Aristotle (cited by Pakaluk, 2005), the soul is comprised of our thoughts, thinking, and intellectual stimulation, which enables us to function and interact with other humans in 'good' ways (Pakaluk, 2005). Yet we cannot analyse the ability or goodness of the human soul, it is a function that is immeasurable, yet we can measure those virtuous actions of 'good' (Pakaluk, 2005). This was accomplished by DOs in this study as noted below:

"If they choose not to disclose, but they still have a known learning disability, we put them on VDSS funding, which is sort of a parallel state funding to the federal DAAWES funding ... we normally will not turn them away, just because they don't have a diagnosis. A lot won't identify because the employer is present, and they are worried about not getting, continuing their job. At sign up with the Registered Training Organisation (RTO), they will discuss [it with them in TAFE] again ... out of 50 people,

I would say there would be only about 15 - 20 ... I think there is a big stigma attached".
(Mary, Townclose College)

After the interview, Mary told me that if students do not disclose and they needed help, she provided support because legally she was obliged to, and morally she had to provide services to all students who needed support. Emmy also provided extra support:

"When students came in with forms not completed, it is usually about their inability to complete it, so then we will do it together, and I'll offer them a scribe if they need it ... it will be difficult for them, so you may look at packaging [disability knowledge] and talking to the teachers". (Emmy, Cityview College)

Students were unsure of their needs and Emmy felt terrible about the fact that embarrassment or uncertainty made them unable to speak with teachers. Emmy would speak with teachers on students' behalf. These good deeds are a proactive phenomenon for having a better world (Harris, 2012). Performing 'good deeds' was an ethical and moral action of their virtuous-self (Mara, 2015). As Simone was working with her clients, she realised there were many challenges not addressed by TAFE, such as Meares-Irlen Syndrome assessment and glasses: *"Simone organised the glasses for me and there was a pool of money ... she accessed for the tests, so I only had to pay for the glasses, I didn't have to pay to be tested".* (Elizabeth, aged over 55 years)

7. TAFE Disability Officers' Services

It is noted that DOs were Street Level Advocates (Caskey, 2017), through their assistance and kindness toward adult students with dyslexia, they advocated for the student. Disability Officers were not Street Level Bureaucrats, as Lipsky (2010) had identified them: as professionals working with marginalised clients, providing clients with essential funding (Lipsky, 1983b, 2010). Furthermore, DOs were tutoring students after hours, and educating teachers about disability and learning strategies, essential for positive student outcomes. In addition, Street Level Bureaucrats behaved autonomously and some were advocates for their clients (Lipsky, 1983b, 2010) in a manner that could be described socially just, through their virtues and morals, similar to DOs. Students were responsive to the advocacy and all had success in TAFE. All DOs became the critical friends of students who were struggling in TAFE. Three students remarked on the support provided by one DO:

"It does come down to the person I think, like Emmy, she's just straight on to it. And she's way open ... she's just not just a disability officer ... to me I find her as a good counsellor, a good listener". (Gavin, aged 45-54)

And I think TAFE actually gives more for me personally, in talking to Emmy, she's been amazing ... like everyone at TAFE and my teacher, Lavinia." (Robyn, aged 45–54)

"[Emmy] She's really nice". (Grace, aged 18–24)

Satisfaction is produced by doing 'good turns' toward another. As identified by one adult student with dyslexia, moral and ethical actions were extended to the homes of students after hours, as noted:

"I've got mobile phone numbers to call at night ... if I am ever having trouble studying, so she's just brilliant, [Mary] I think she's not in the same position as she was a month ago, so I don't know whether that will still be available, but she's just a lovely lady". (Victor, aged 18–24)

The voices of DOs and adult students with dyslexia illustrate the importance of the professional role utilised by the DOs in TAFE. The caring role of DOs and the supportive strategies provided for adult students with dyslexia, exceeds the existing role which is the TAFE administrative and regimented. Disability Officers have a new pseudo-professional role in their practice. Despite this existing role, DOs accomplished 'virtue ethics' utilising moral and ethical judgments as discussed in other literature (Fletcher, 2007; Madden, 2008; Singh, Urbano, Haston, & McMahon, 2010) and actioned in TAFE contexts.

8. The Literature on Essential Good Deeds

Modern literature also illustrates the good-deeds of Aristotle (Pakaluk, 2005; Pressman et al., 2015). As presented previously, Pressman, Kraft, and Cross (2015) identified that "Paying It Forward (PIF)" was a benefit to both the giver and receiver of good deeds. In that study, it was identified that even a short time spent with the receiver of the goods (e.g. coffee, talking, and giving a gift) was positive for both the giver and receiver. Not only were the giver participants doing good, but 40 per cent of the receivers of the good-deed were also 'Paying It Forward' to another person. (Pressman et al., 2015). This example of good deeds, not dissimilar to those described by the Grand Master of Philosophy, Aristotle.

For Aristotle the focus on ethics, virtues, and good deeds was synonymous with ultimate happiness (Pakaluk, 2005, p. 2). In other words, satisfaction is produced by doing 'good turns' toward another. As identified by one adult student with dyslexia, kindness and support (moral and ethical actions) were extended to the homes of students after hours, as noted:

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Many DOs in TAFE colleges who did not adhere to the strict administrative role, utilised ethics, morals, and virtuous deeds while using discretionary practices. Disability Officers were advocates for adult students with dyslexia in TAFE. These good deeds only came about due to the good-will of DOs and the ethical contributions made for adult students who had previously been marginalised in educational, family and social contexts (Caskey, 2017; Caskey et al., 2018).

Further to this study, recent studies have also illustrated that students with dyslexia were being marginalised in organisations, particularly in the medical field (Clandinin, Cave, & Berendonk, 2017; Shaw & Anderson, 2018; Shaw, Anderson, & Grant, 2016). Good deeds and caring behaviours can be actioned to employ success and self confidence in all students within universities and colleges.

9. Conclusion

The characteristics of DOs enabled them to practice good deeds in their communicative relationship with adult students with dyslexia and these actions were compared with the criteria of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* (Books 1-6) (Pakaluk, 2005). The relationship was one of being 'a critical friend' to adult students with dyslexia in TAFE Colleges.

There is either inadequate or inappropriate support for marginalised, adult students with dyslexia; when they enrolled in courses at TAFE. Many adult students are exploited because they often cannot read, write or comprehend textual information. Despite there being some hope for people with dyslexia in several educational contexts within Australia, there remain many systemic inequities, such as formal disclosure of the disability; system processes regarding dyslexia and expectations of assessment and assistance for adult students; and inadequate support in the classrooms.

As identified in this paper, there needs to be a change in the role description of DOs, because most go beyond the strict boundaries of their role. They are ethically, morally, and virtuously getting satisfaction from their role by performing good deeds for adult students with dyslexia. Disability Officers accept their role as being discretionary Street-Level Advocates, not simply administrators. The six DOs interviewed revealed that advocacy and providing good deeds made them happy in their role.

Not only do DOs find happiness in their new professional role, but they also behaved as advocates toward their clients, the adult students with dyslexia. This role reflected the good deeds of Aristotle's philosophy, which has produced a positive two-way relationship between DOs and adult students in 21st Century TAFE.

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