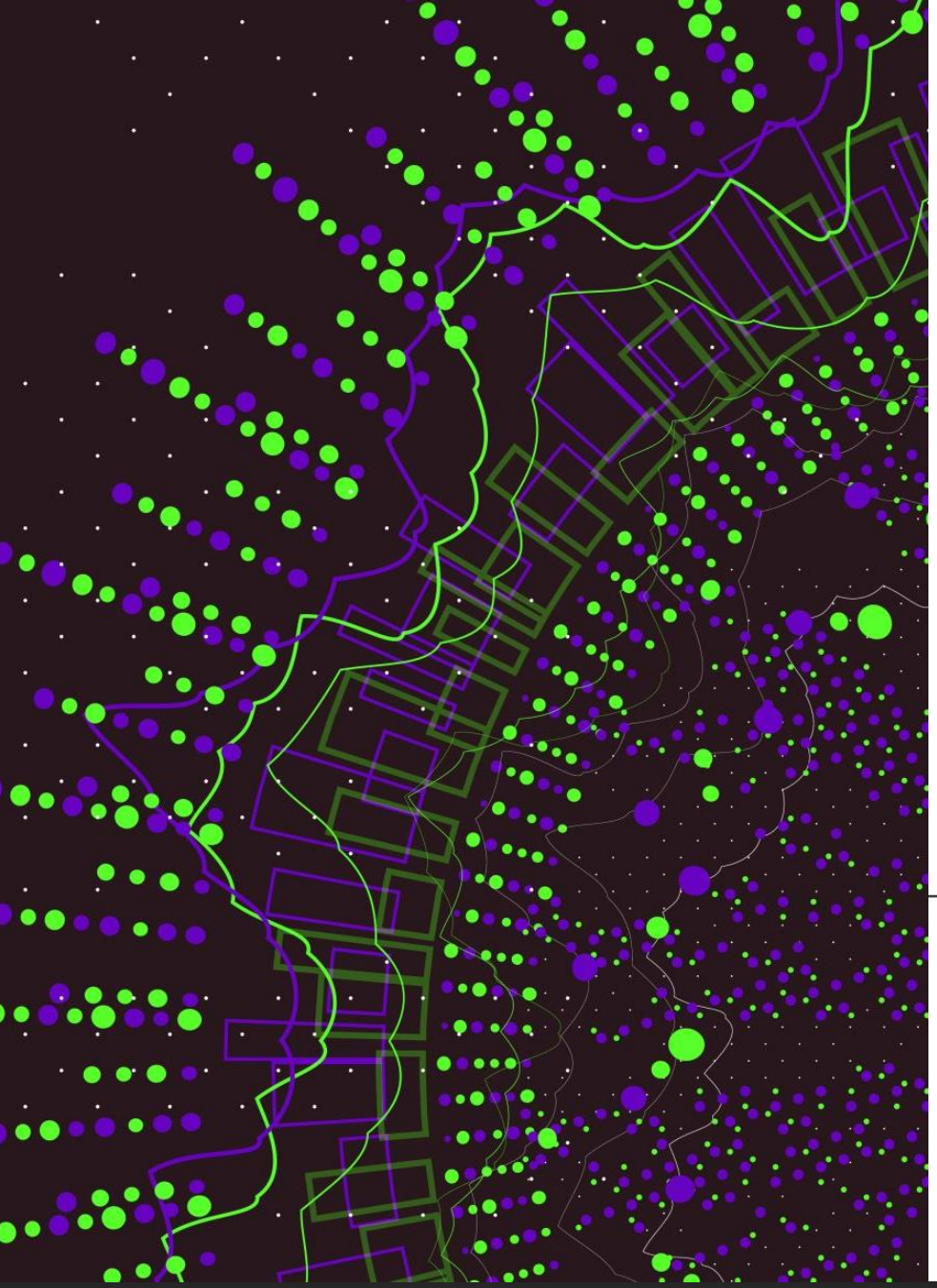


Reframing Disability in Writing Centres through Generative AI Visual Storytelling

Cara Violini, MAIS, MFA, EdD
Athabasca University
17th International Conference on The Image



Cara Violini, MAIS, MFA, EdD

20 years teaching online

Began in special education

Taught secondary English for 10 years

Taught academic and creative writing since 2016

Writing Specialist (Write Site) since 2021



Background

What are Writing Centres

Dedicated post-secondary spaces for students to seek help with academic writing

Nuanced learning environment with its own pedagogy, practice, and scholarship

Writing Centre Professionals

- peer tutors
- graduate students
- writing centre scholars
- faculty members



https://www.aus.edu/cas/writing-center

The Write Site's Mission

At the Write Site, we support and encourage writers to develop confidence in their academic communication skills.

Missions of Independence

Our focus is to help you acquire the tools to be a strong and **independent** writer

The Writing Center's mission is to promote students' success and **independence** in college and beyond.

Independence and Ableism in the Writing Centre

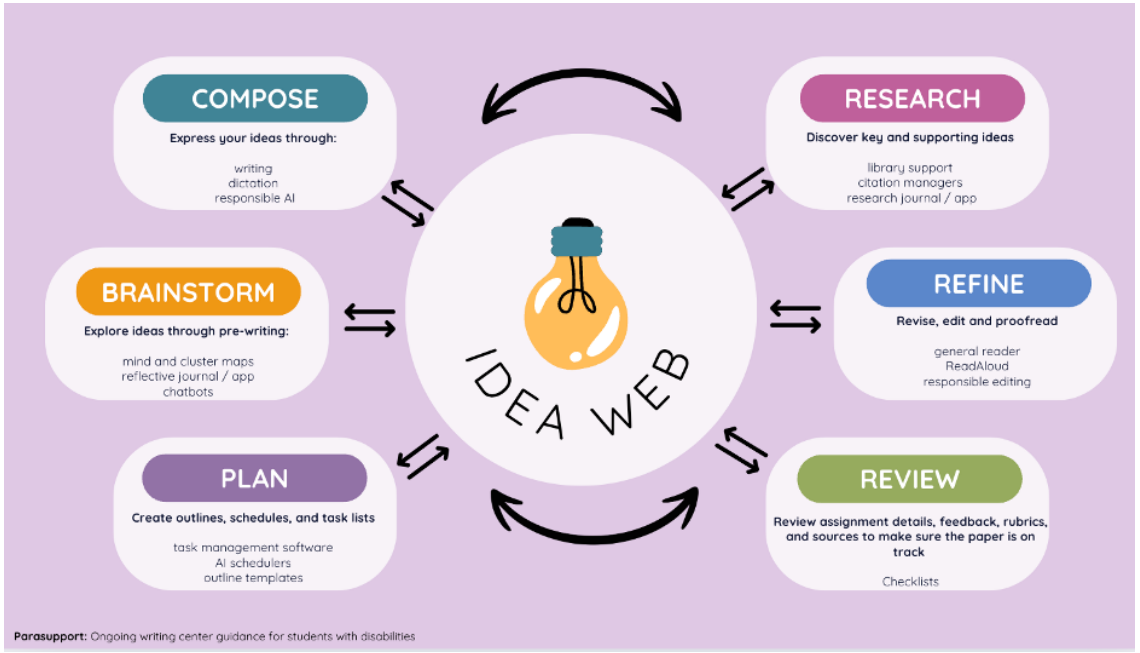
- North (1984): Make better writers
- Pemberton (1994): Independency [solves] pathological visitation
- Dembsey (2020): "Naming Ableism in the Writing Center"
  - Independence assumes able-bodiedness and a deep level of privilege
  - Dependence implies resource drains
- Dembsey (2020) suggests interdependence as a solution

Ableism and the Writing Process

LINEAR WRITING PROCESS



NON-LINEAR WRITING PROCESS



(Violini, 2025)

Models of Disability (Inclusion London, 2023)

MEDICAL MODEL



SOCIAL MODEL



The Disability Gap

WHY DISABILITIES?
(HENDRON, 2021: REAUME, 2014: SEP, 2023)

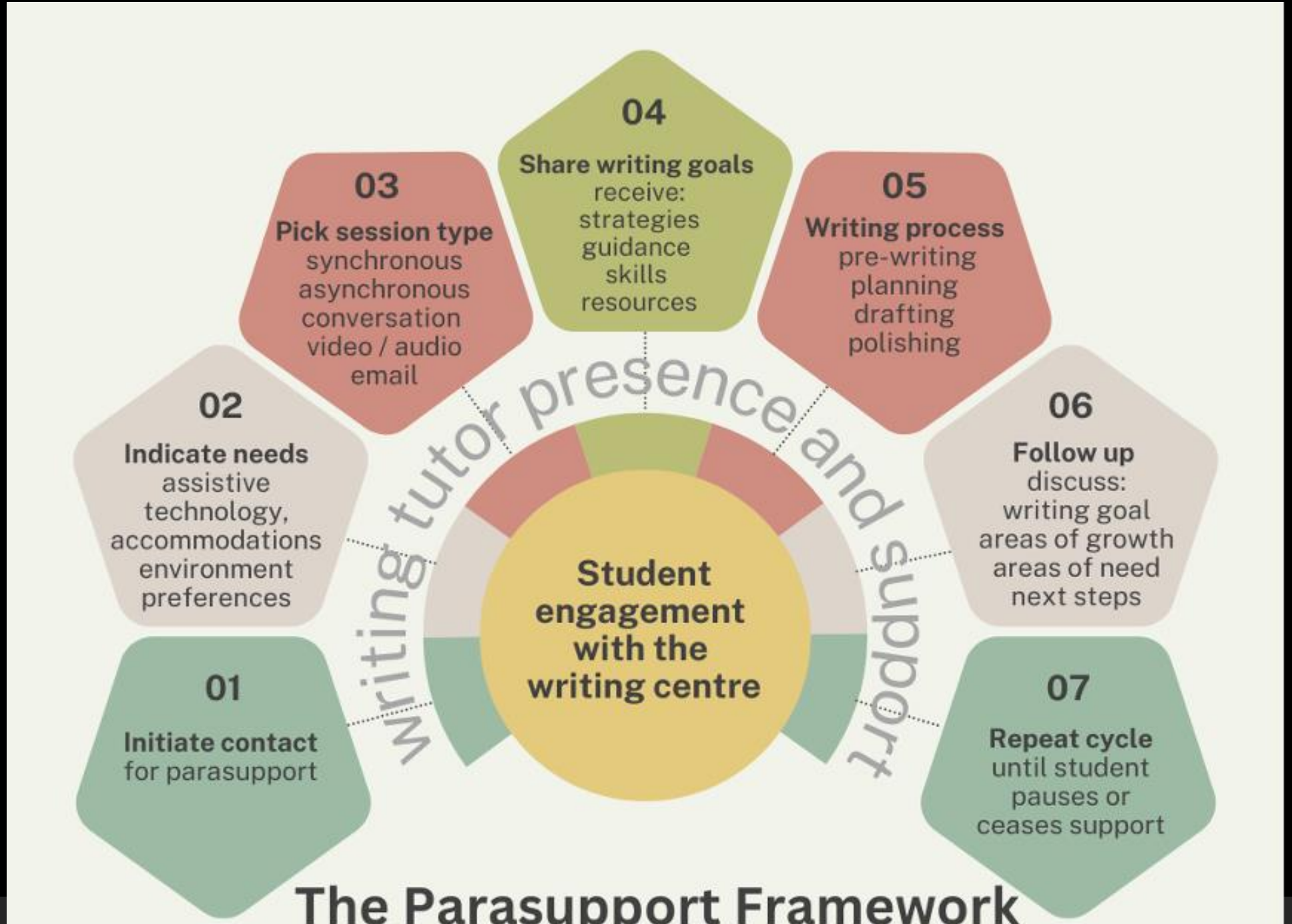
A **reality of the human experience**

Polymorphous:
No two presentations are equal

Ubiquitous:
Most people will encounter disability at some point in their lives

WHY ONLINE LEARNING? (UNESCO, 2021)

- Safety
- Flexibility
- Openness
- Accessibility
- Reduced need for disclosure



(Violini, 2025)

Gen AI:
A Sea Change

(WEF, 2023)

- reduce barriers
- improve efficiency
- enhance communication
- reduce ableism
- support student autonomy



Research Design



(UN, 2024)

Narrative vs. Visual Methodology

WRITING IS FRAUGHT
(CHUNG, 2020; FELIPE, 2021; KETCHAM, 2023)

- most demanding form of communication on executive function
- challenging for students already seeking writing support
- exacerbates cognitive load

VISUAL STORYTELLING THROUGH GEN AI

- fast and efficient
- high yield in minimal time
- fun and creative
- recursive nature is not taxing
- reduces language to the vocabulary level

Concerns with Gen AI Image Generators

- Generating an image has a carbon footprint (Heikkila, 2023)
- Inability to source all images (Koidan, 2023)
- Lawsuits over artistic intellectual property (Appel et al., 2023)
- Images cultivates misinformation and biases
- Digital fluency / familiarity
- unpredictable nature of generated images

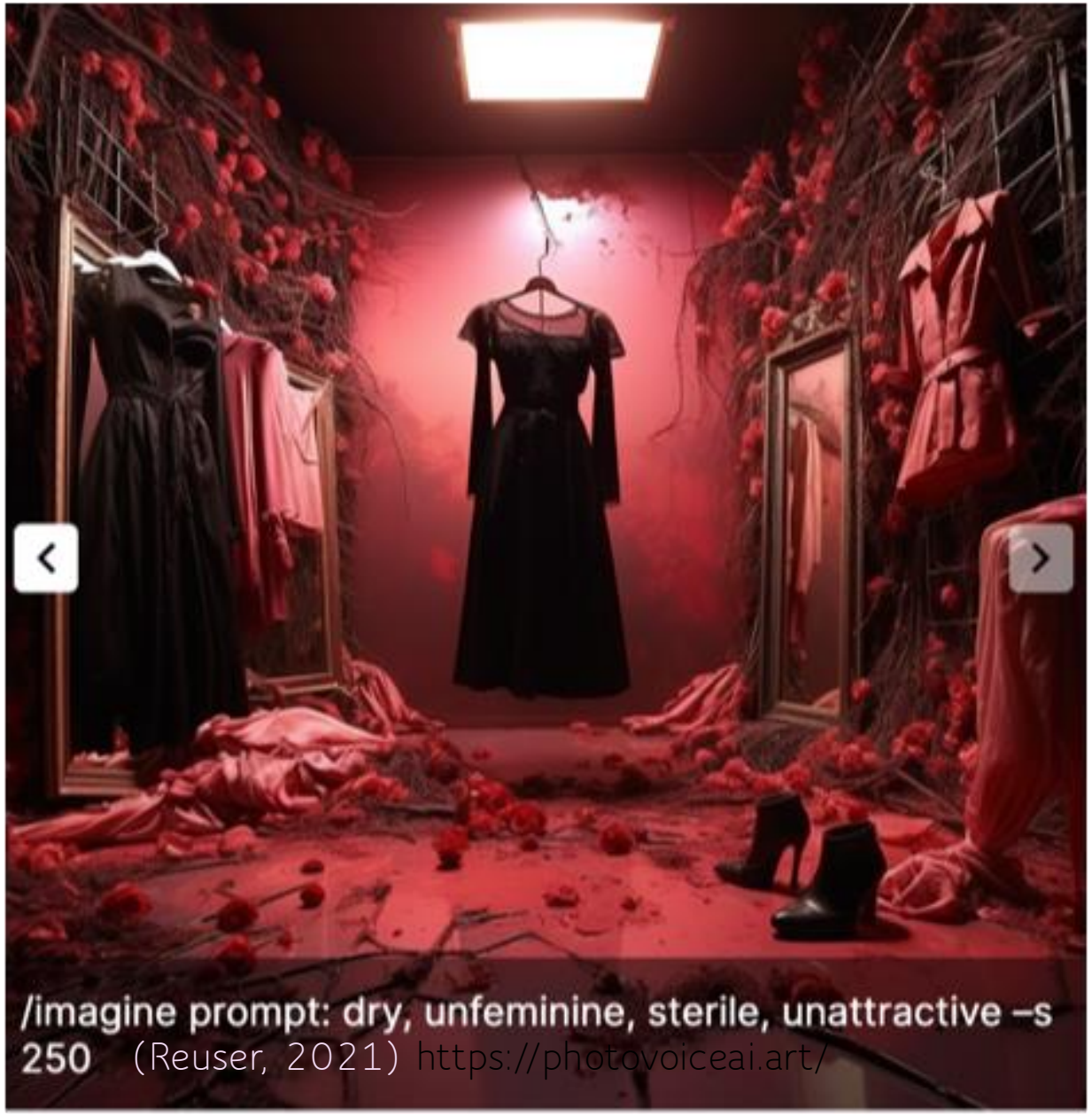
Photovoice

Photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997)

- makes the invisible visible
- investigates identity
- promotes critical dialogue
- pursues social justice
- reconceptualizes experience

Restorying (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006)

- creates a new story of self that confronts dominant and problematic narratives



(Reuser, 2021) https://photovoiceai.art/

Research Question

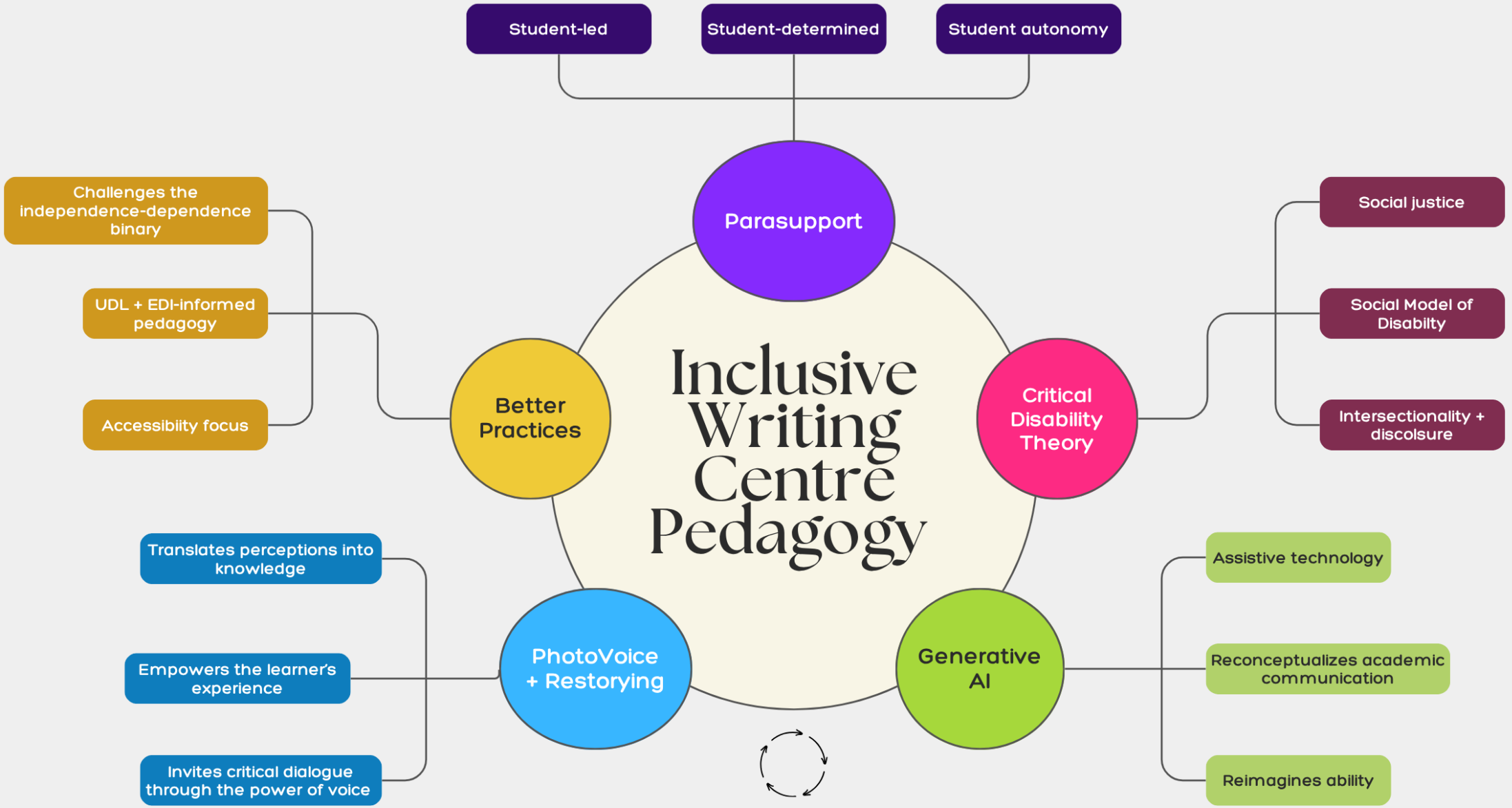
How can the restoried AI-generated images through photovoice reframe disability support in writing centers?

Sub-questions

In what ways can a participant with disabilities use generative AI to capture their engagement with the writing centre?

How does generating visual images using photovoice influence the participant to restory their relationship with the online writing centre?

Will these generated images help confront ableism in writing centre pedagogy and practice by giving voice to students with disabilities?


Student-led
Student-determined
Student autonomy
Parasupport
Challenges the independence-dependence binary
UDL + EDI-informed pedagogy
Accessibility focus
Better Practices
Inclusive Writing Centre Pedagogy
Critical Disability Theory
Social justice
Social Model of Disabilty
Intersectionality + discolsure
Translates perceptions into knowledge
Empowers the learner's experience
Invites critical dialogue through the power of voice
PhotoVoice + Restorying
Generative AI
Assistive technology
Reconceptualizes academic communication
Reimagines ability
RESPONSIVE, ORGANIC & EVOLVING

Research Design

Sampling	**Random, purposive** sampling
Participants	**4** AU students with disabilities
Methodology	**Photovoice** using GenAI
Interviews	**1-2**
Images	**2-5**
Compensation	**$60** by e-transfer
Storage / Security	**AU Microsoft OneDrive**; stealth mode, pseudonyms, secure room
Ethical Considerations	**IVSA Code of Research Ethics and Guidelines**
Analysis	Thematic coding, SHOWeD, restorying, and CSVM

Midjourney

Participants

- work in private rooms protected with passwords
- control privacy settings on Discord (stealth mode)



Image generated on Midjourney by Jenn Mishra

Methodology Revision

ROSE'S (2023) CRITICAL VISUAL METHODOLOGY

Site of Production → How it was made

Site of Image → Composition of image

Site of Circulation → Who organized it?

Site of Audiencing → Exhibits and viewers

CRITICAL SYNTHETIC VISUAL METHODOLOGY

Context Engineering → Refining prompts

Image Generating → Visual result

Synthetic Imagery → Prompt + visual

Social Exchanging → Sharing + viewing

Critical Synthetic Visual Methodology

1 CONTEXT ENGINEERING (TEXT)

Technological	Compositional	Resonance
• enter prompts • text-to-image • authoring	• recursive prompting • vocabulary • criticality of language	• context adherence • language authenticity

2 IMAGE GENERATING (VISUAL)

Technological	Compositional	Resonance
• generate images • image-to-image • scraping and ownership	• style refs • configurable parameters • criticality of visuals	• image satisfaction • “good enough” • critical authenticity

3 SYNTHETIC IMAGERY (TEXT + VISUAL)

Technological	Compositional	Resonance
• prompt + image • version history • authorship	• connecting image to vocabulary • criticality of bias	• resonant messaging • critical authenticity • representation

4 SOCIAL EXCHANGING

Technological	Compositional	Resonance
• sharing + posting • authorship	• self-audiencing with bot • reinforcing bias	• social resonance • attention • remixing

Image 1



Image 2



Image 3



Image 4



Example (Openart.ai)

1: Real cat (Frankie)

2: Failed prompt
Black cat eating a cupcake

3: Good enough prompt
Long-haired black cat with yellow eyes licking a cupcake

4: Synthetic image
...in art nouveau

Attention response:

- 🐈‍⬛
- cupcake looks weird bro
- Aww! 🐾

Heuristics and Data Analysis Flow

Analytical Task	Critical Synthetic Visual Methodology	Analytical Method(s)
Analyze Texts	**Context Engineering (Texts)** • *Technological* • *Compositional* • *Resonance*	**Thematic Analysis** (Braun & Clarke, 2013) **Textual-Visual Thematic Analysis** (Trombeta & Cox, 2022)
Analyze Visuals	**Image Generating (Visuals)** • *Technological* • *Compositional* • *Resonance*	**Compositional Analysis** (Rose, 2023) **Textual-Visual Thematic Analysis** (Trombeta & Cox, 2022)
Connect Texts + Visuals	**Synthetic Images (Text + Visual)** • *Technological* • *Compositional* • *Resonance*	**Textual-Visual Thematic Analysis** (Trombeta & Cox, 2022)
Reflect	**Exchanging Meaning (Social)** • *Technological* • *Compositional* • *Resonance*	**Photovoice Reflection** (Wang, 1999) **Restorying Reflection** (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000)

Participant Contributions

Photovoice Process Flow





They did not make me feel like a disabled, “other” student. I was given tools in a way that worked for me” (PA, restorying, 13).

The specialist helped with the scariness of the clock and made it more friendly (PB, personal communications 12).

1

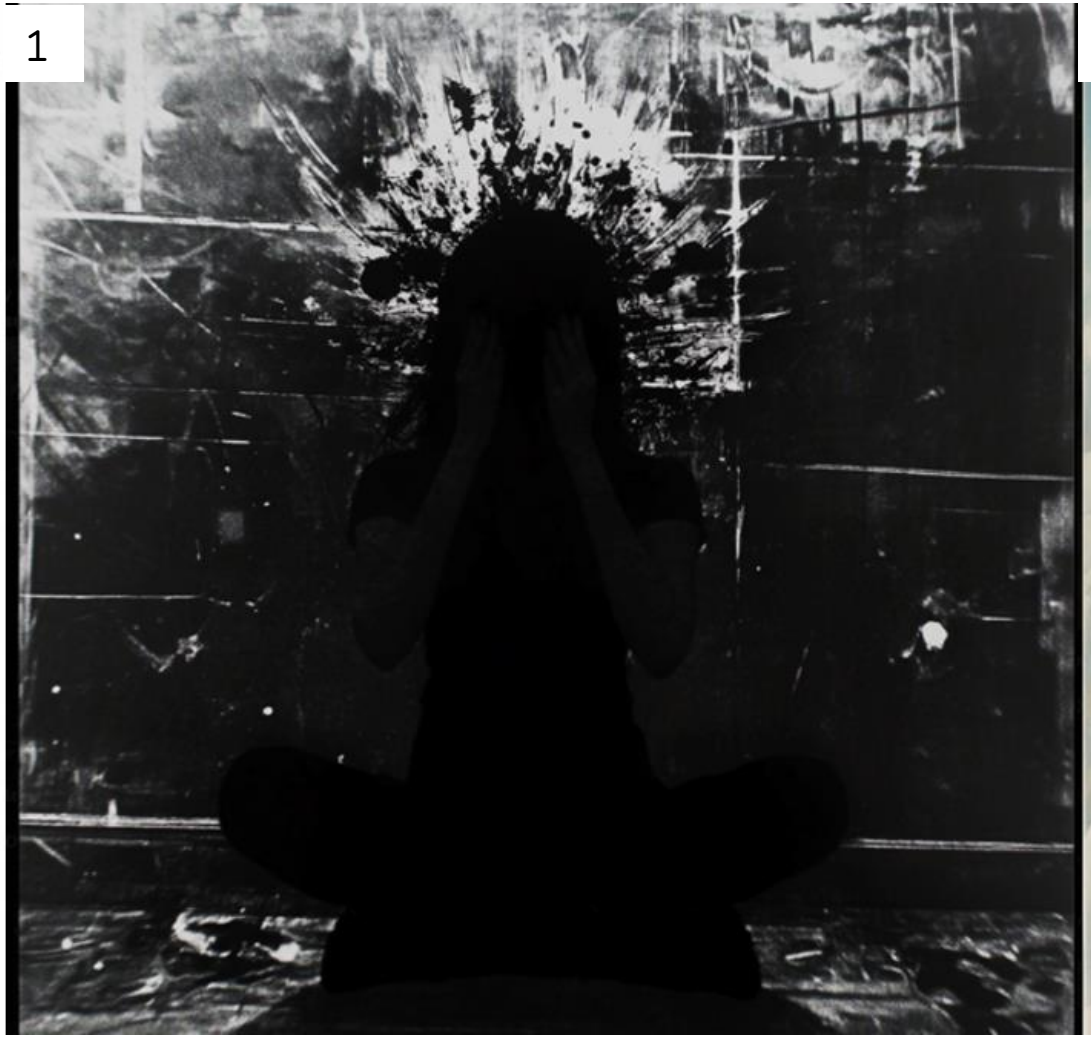


2



I don't need a tutor to correct sentences or fix basic issues. [I'd rather] discuss deeper issues (PC, personal communications, 12).

1

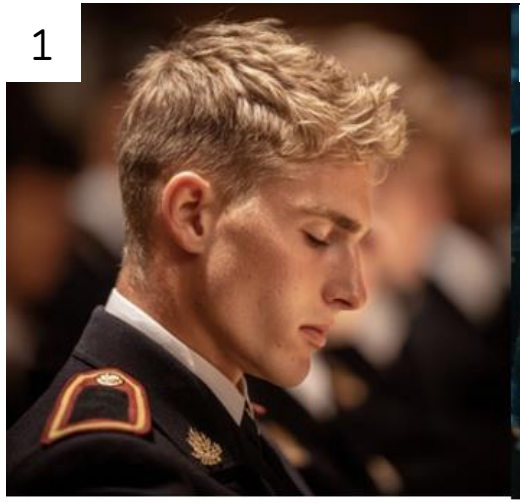


2



PARTICIPANT C (PC)

1



2



3



4



5



The flexibility to access the writing centre from anywhere with an internet connection helps as due to my combat experience, I would always be sitting with my back to a wall, looking for people. I would not be able to concentrate (PD, restorying, I1).

Answering the Research Questions

Primary Research Question

How can restorying GenAI images through photovoice reframe disability support in writing centres?

THEMES	RESTORIED IMAGES THROUGH PHOTOVOICE:
Power of Visual Communication	Make the invisible disability visible
Power of Advocacy	Reveal systemic ableism in writing centre pedagogy
Power of Gen AI as Assistive Technology	Show the influence of agency on wellbeing
Power of Parasupport	Reinforce how an inclusive pedagogy empowers students

Sub-Question 1

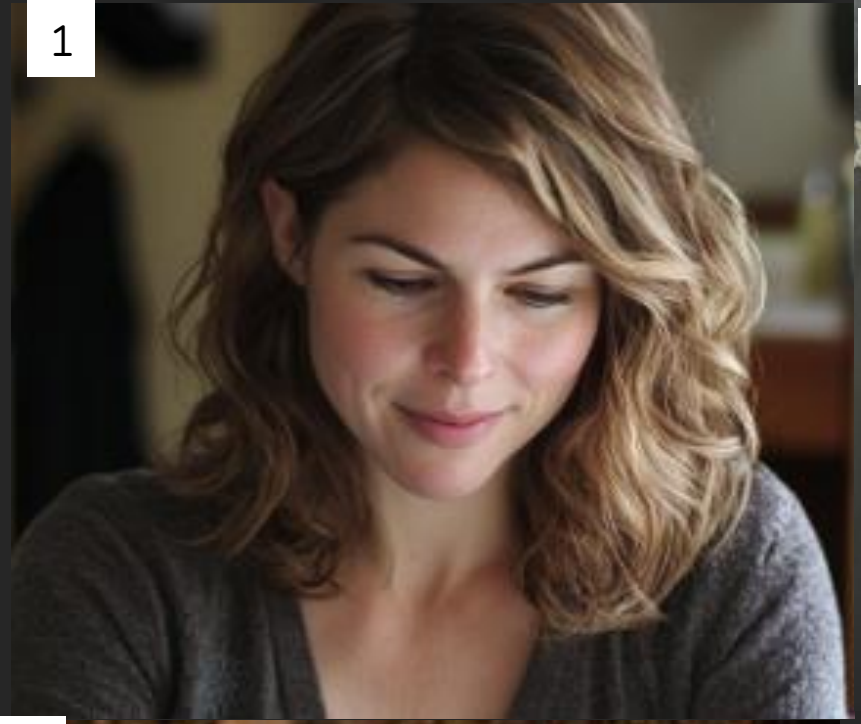
In what ways can a participant with disabilities use GenAI to capture their engagement with the writing centre?

1: Getting back on track

2: Collaborating with specialists

3: Adapting their environment

4: The consequences of unhelpful feedback









Sub-Question 2

How does generating visual images using photovoice influence the participant to restory their relationship with the online writing centre?

PA: The images validated my experience.

PB: My emotions have turned into images.

PC: These images show a progression from anxiety to capability.

PD: Looking back helps me reflect on how much I've learned.

Sub-Question 3

How do these generated images help confront ableism in writing centre pedagogy and practice by giving voice to students with disabilities?

---

1. Use inclusive language when providing feedback (PA, PB, PC)
2. Learn more about the complexities of invisible disabilities (PA, PB, PC, PD)
3. Diversify instruction for ELL students with disabilities (PC)
4. Support a student's sensitivity needs (PB, PD)

Discussion

Additional Limitations

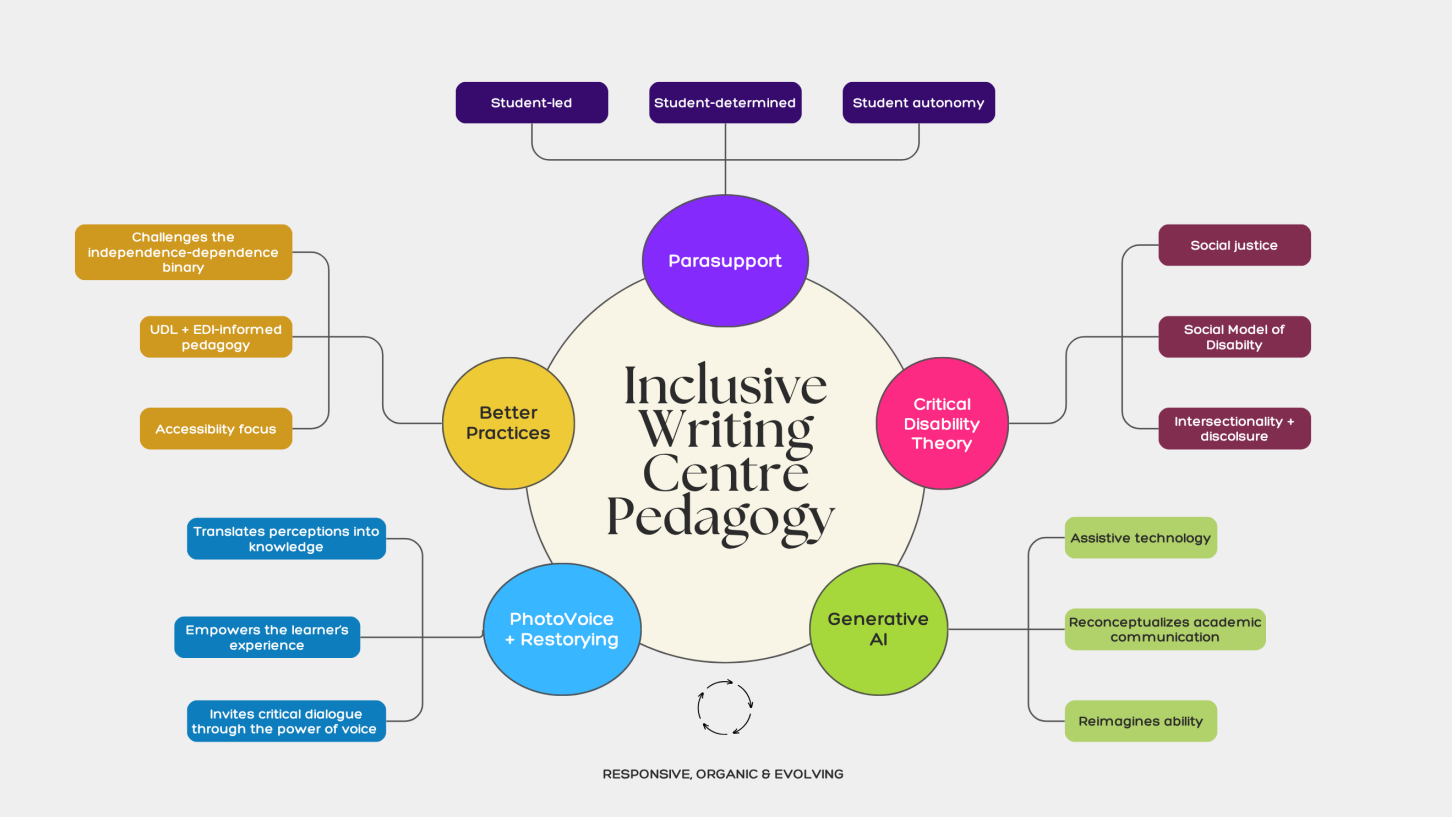
Methodological limitations

Midjourney representational bias

Access check needed

Recommendations for Future Research

For Visual Researchers	For Writing Centre Scholars	For Disability Scholars
Combine Videovoice and Midjourney Video	How the rules of social etiquette problematize access in the writing centre	Creating more accessible virtual learning environments


Student-led
Student-determined
Student autonomy
Parasupport
Challenges the independence-dependence binary
UDL + EDI-informed pedagogy
Accessibility focus
Better Practices
Inclusive Writing Centre Pedagogy
Critical Disability Theory
Social justice
Social Model of Disabilty
Intersectionality + discolsure
Translates perceptions into knowledge
Empowers the learner's experience
Invites critical dialogue through the power of voice
PhotoVoice + Restorying
Generative AI
Assistive technology
Reconceptualizes academic communication
Reimagines ability
RESPONSIVE, ORGANIC & EVOLVING

Conclusion

Cara Violini, MAIS, MFA, EdD
Writing Specialist
Athabasca University
cviolini@athabascau.ca

References

Appel, G., Neelbauer, J., & Schweidel, D. A. (2023). Generative AI has an Intellectual Property Problem. *Harvard Business Review.* https://hbr.org/2023/04/generative-ai-has-an-intellectual-property-problem

Barron, K. L., Warrender-Hill, K., Wallis Buckner, S., & Ready, P. Z. (2023). Expanding writing center space-time: Tutoring modality, access, and equity. *The Peer Review, 7*(1). https://thepeerreview-iwca.org/issues/issue-7-1-featured-issue-reinvestigate-the-commonplaces-in-writing-centers/expanding-writing-center-space-time-tutoring-modality-access-and-equity/

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2013). Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. *The Psychologist, 26*(2), 120-123. https://resources.nu.edu/c.php?g=1013606&p=8395539

Chung, P. J., Patel, D. R., & Nizami, I. (2020). Disorder of written expression and dysgraphia: Definition, diagnosis, and management. *Translational Pediatrics, 9*(1). 46-54. https://tp.amegroups.org/article/view/34093/28322

Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Dembsey, J. M. (2020). Naming ableism in the writing center. *Praxis: A Writing Center Journal, 18*(1). http://www.praxisuwc.com/181-dembsey

Denizen, N. K. & Lincoln, Y. S. (2011). Introduction: The discipline and practice of qualitative research. *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (4th Ed.) (pp. 1-19). Sage.

References

Felipe, , M. (2021). How do executive functions issues affect writing in students with neurodevelopmental disorders? In T. Limpo & T. Olive (Eds.), *Executive functions and writing* (pp. 160-180). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198863564.003.0007

Foste, Z. (2018). Exploring the methodological possibilities of narrative inquiry in service-learning: Reflections from a recent investigation. *Journal of Higher Education, Outreach, and Engagement, 22*(4). 9-28. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1202082.pdf

Heikkila, M. (2023). Making an image with generative AI uses as much energy as charging your phone. *MIT Technology Review.* https://www.technologyreview.com/2023/12/01/1084189/making-an-image-with-generative-ai-uses-as-much-energy-as-charging-your-phone/

Hendren, S. (2021). *What can a body do? How we meet the built world.* Penguin.

Huang, C., Zhing, Y., Li, Y., Wang, X., Han, Z., Zhang, D., & Liu, M. (2025). Enhancing student reading performance through a personalized two-tier problem-based learning approach with generative artificial intelligence. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, 12*. https://www.nature.com/articles/s41599-025-04919-4

Inclusion London. (2023). *The social model of disability.* https://www.inclusionlondon.org.uk/about-us/disability-in-london/social-model/

Ketcham, C. J. (2023). *Ableism in academia: The uneven impacts of distraction and procrastination*. Center for Engaged Learning. https://www.centerforengagedlearning.org/ableism-in-academia-the-uneven-impacts-of-distraction-and-procrastination/

Kim, J. (2015). *Understanding narrative inquiry: The crafting and analysis of stories as research.* Sage.

Kulman, R. (2025). *ADHD, Executive functions, and AI: A new era in treatment.* Psychology Today. https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/screen-play/202502/adhd-executive-functions-and-ai-a-new-era-in-treatment

References

Koidan, K. (2023). Legal and ethical aspects of using DALL-E, Midjourney, & Stable Diffusion. *Medium*. https://medium.com/@katekoidan/legal-ethical-aspects-of-using-dall-e-midjourney-stable-diffusion-cc5606a76d8e

Murray, J., & Williamson, A. (2025). Smarter than your average chatbot: Generative AI as study buddy. *EDULEARN Proceedings*. doi: 10.21125/edulearn.2025.1870

North, S. (1984). The idea of a writing center. *College English, 46*(5). 433-466. https://stjohns.digication.com/writing-center-staff/steve-north-the-idea-of-a-writing-center

Pemberton, M. (1994). Dependency in the writing center: Psychological profiles and tutorial strategies." *Research and Teaching in Developmental Education*, *10*(2), 63-70. https://www.jstor.org/stable/42802466.

Ravishankar, R. A. (2020). *What's wrong with asking "where are you from?"* Harvard Business Review. https://hbr.org/2020/10/whats-wrong-with-asking-where-areyou-from#

Reaume, G. (2014). Understanding critical disability studies. *Canadian Medical Association Journal, 186*(6). 1248-1249. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4216267/pdf/1861248.pdf

Reuser, M. (n.d.). *AI Art InnerWorlds.* https://photovoiceai.art/

Rose, G. (2023). *Visual methodologies: An introduction to researching with visual materials.* 5th edition. Sage.

References

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (SEP). (2023). *Critical disability theory.* https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/disability-critical/#

Theofanidis, D. & Fountouki, A. (2019). Limitations and delimitations in the research process. *Perioperative Nursing, 7*(3), 155-162. http://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.2552022

Trombeta, G., & Cox, S. (2022). The textual-visual thematic analysis: A framework to analyze the conjunction and interaction of visual and textual data. *TQR, 27*(6). https://nsuworks.nova.edu/tqr/vol27/iss6/6/

Wang, C. & Burris, M.A. (1997). Photovoice: Concept, methodology and use for participatory needs assessment. *Health Education and Behavior, 24,* 369-387.

United Nations (UN). (2004.) Nothing about us, without us. *United Nations Enable.* https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/enable/iddp2004.htm#

UNESCO Institute for Information Technology in Education. (2021). *Understanding the impact of COVID-19 on the education of persons with disabilities: Challenges and opportunities of distance education.* https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000378404