

NARRATIVE 2.

LOCATING SOUND WHILE LEARNING HOW TO TEACH

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On a night before my teaching debut, I remember getting up from a chair in an empty classroom and grabbing my phone from my back pocket. I placed it on a desk, all desks in this room were fashioned into one piece and adorned with wheels. I tapped open my phone and played a song—a lyrical melody that I was familiar with that calmed my anxiety. I placed the phone on the desk, closed my eyes, and swung the desk to an unknown corner of the room. Then I took a few steps around—eyes still closed—and I tried to locate the melody lazily crooning through my phone. I had to try to hear it, to locate the sound. I identify as Hard of Hearing and was born with primarily unilateral profound hearing loss, rendering it most difficult for me to pinpoint individual sounds.

In Fall 2019, I earned the opportunity to start my instructional journey in a first-year composition course. I was fat, a person of color, Hard of Hearing, and disabled—I felt like all the odds were stacked against me. During the interview process, I ran through every question the interviewers could possibly ask while asking myself how I could be myself without being myself. After the joy of being accepted into the program, I told my Disability Student Services coordinator that I did not want accommodations as an instructor. I typically use Communication Access Realtime Translation (CART) in my own courses as a graduate student, but I did not want to be faced with ableism, discrimination, or even judgement in my role as an instructor. I had never seen an instructor use visually recognizable accommodations before, and my internalized ableism at the time did not want myself to be the first.

Now looking back on that semester, I witnessed so much growth in my students, as well as myself. I walked through the door on that first day of instruction reciting how I was going to tell them about my hearing disability, or how classroom discussion might look a little bit different with the use of exaggerated visual cues, and how I might not be able to pinpoint the direction of voices. I cried almost every day for the first few weeks, especially after a lively classroom discussion—but for more complex reasons than I probably understood at the time.

On the first day I went over the syllabus, but I also went over my lived experience. I openly and vulnerably explained to my students how I navigate my disabled identity and how this would sometimes affect them. Together we encouraged visual cues during class discussion and students were forgiving when I was not too sure who was speaking or where they were speaking from. Together, we read and discussed identities far beyond our own and they got a glimpse of my own lived experience.

Throughout the course, students chose their own topics to write about. Many of these students chose to write about disability focused readings and videos I had slowly and carefully incorporated into the curriculum. Students wrote passionately about disabilities, both those that were more apparent and less apparent, they read articles and research on how to better serve their disabled peers. Some of these students mentioned that they had never read, learned, or considered disability experiences prior to this course. Even though I continue to take small steps in my own learning and research about my disabled experience and that of others, I am hopeful about the future.