

On The Oh-So-Unreachable-But-Worth-Striving-For
Concept Of Universal Design: Techniques For
Accessibility That Don't Start With VISAS/RCPD

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Universal Design

“Universal design involves designing products, buildings, or environments so that they can be used readily by the widest possible range of individuals. Although well established in architecture and other domains, universal design is relatively new to elementary and secondary education and even newer to higher education” (Wilson).

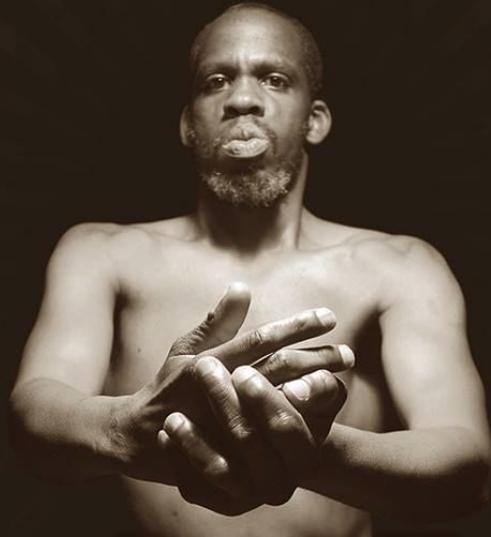
ALL BODIES ARE UNIQUE AND ESSENTIAL.

**ALL BODIES ARE WHOLE. ALL BODIES HAVE
STRENGTHS AND NEEDS THAT MUST BE MET.**

**WE ARE POWERFUL NOT DESPITE THE COMPLEXITIES
OF OUR BODIES, BUT BECAUSE OF THEM.**

WE MOVE TOGETHER, WITH NO BODY LEFT BEHIND.

THIS IS DISABILITY JUSTICE.



Richard Downing
via Ballou

Disability Justice

“Disability justice challenges the idea that our worth as individuals has to do with our ability to perform as productive members of society. It insists that our worth is inherent and tied to the liberation of all beings” (Lamm).

This Presentation *Will Fail* to Attain Universal Access.

- Consider the impossibility of designing a universally accessible classroom. In what ways do learning needs conflict with one another?
- How might you implement “as accessible as possible” as a framework?
- What are the limits of the academic spaces we inhabit around accessibility?
- How do approaches to the universal sometimes preclude access?

Impossibility of Universal Access

- “far too many classrooms present the Curriculum as universal truth” (Collins *Fighting Words* xi)
- “Black feminists appear to... move themselves and their disciplines closer to the humanist vision implicit in their work-namely, the freedom to be both different and part of the solidarity of humanity” (Collins *Outsider* S30)

One Back to Class Technique: Learning Needs

- On the first day of section, I ask every student to write down at least one learning need they have.
- If they are struggling to think of one, that might be because their basic learning needs have been met in most of their academic experiences.
 - A desk that is left or right handed like they are/A desk that fits their body
 - A teacher who is not biased against them due to their race/sexuality/gender/(dis)ability
 - Font in a large enough size for them to see
 - Having enough food to eat before class
- I explain that learning needs aren't about disclosing personal medical information. They are about meeting your functional limitations.

What is one of your learning needs?

Universal Design Syllabus Language

Accommodations, Disabilities, & Diverse Learning Needs:

In the spirit of universal design, we strive to make this class accessible to all students regardless of ability/disability. With that said, if you need anything specific from me or your classmates, please contact me at the beginning of the semester so I can plan ahead. (If an issue arises during the course of the semester, contact me as soon as possible.)

You do not need to have a diagnosed disability or illness in order to discuss your learning and physical needs with me. Learning how to identify and articulate your needs can be empowering. You can frame it in terms of functional limitations and ways that I can help you; you never have to disclose personal or medical information.

As Accessible As Possible: Beyond The First Day of Class

- I'd love to keep thinking with y'all around access and pedagogy.
- In what ways can we make graduate and undergraduate pedagogy as accessible as possible?
- What would a classroom that meets/exceeds your learning needs and those of your students or peers sound like? Look like? Feel like?
How do we begin to imagine from here?

On crip methodologies

In “Towards a Crip of Color Critique,” Jina B. Kim states, “to take seriously disability as methodology is to take seriously this politics of refusal, to recognize disablement and racism as inextricably entangled, and to enact intellectual practices—like resistance to hyper-productivity—that honor disabled embodiment and history.”

Learning with the 1989 Capitol Crawl

Graduate study doesn't have to be about climbing through a pile of books stacked on the table on the first day of class. Let's change the scale: slowly moving across the page, being learned by the text instead of learning the text, expanding a single sentence into a vast space of embodied epistemologies.

[Image Description: Two protesters one crawling, one scooting push their ways up the steps of the US capitol.]



Works Cited

- Ballou, Adrian. "What is Disability Justice? Some Resources to Get You Started" *Civil Liberties and Public Policy*. 11 March 2016
- Collins, Patricia Hill. *Fighting Words*. Minneapolis: Minnesota UP. 1998.
- . "Learning from the Outsider Within: The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought" *Social Problems*, Vol. 33,:6. 1986.
- Kim, Jina B. "Toward a Crip-of-Color Critique: Thinking with Minich's 'Enabling Whom'" *Lateral: Critical Disability Studies*. Cultural Studies Association. Chicago: Spring 2017.
- Wilson, Jan Doolittle. "Reimagining Disability and Inclusive Education Through Universal Design for Learning" *Disability Studies Quarterly* Vol. 37:2. 2017