From Self-Advocacy to Collaborative Care:

Supporting Neurodivergent Wellness in Higher Education (part 2)

Territorial Acknowledgment

I am speaking to you today from Toronto which is covered under Treaty #13 and the Williams Treaties. It is the traditional territories of many First Peoples, including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnaabe, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee, and the Wendat peoples.

This territory is part of ‘the Dish with One Spoon’ wampum, a Treaty made between the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas, and Haudenosaunee, where nations entered into an agreement to protect the land and responsibly care for its resources in harmony together.

I am mindful of broken treaties and my responsibilities to engage in a meaningful, continuous process of truth and reconciliation with all my relations.

Then Securing the Mask for Our Students: *planning for collaborative care in higher education*

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Outcomes for Today's Workshop

- Reframe relational dynamics in our situations to strategize solutions rooted in collaborative care
- Leave with one concrete strategy and a plan for how to implement it in your own context that will help ensure both you and your students' have your oxygen masks secured (or better yet, create conditions that keep the plane from going down in the first place!)

Important Accessibility Information

- 5-minute bio break at halfway point
  - (but do as you need to do as you need to do it!)
- Mix of solo, pairs/groupwork, large group discussion
  - (please participate as you are able, and if you ever want to do the work of a group moment alone, just let us know!)
- Please keep your camera on as much as you can
  - (but, of course, turn it off if you need to!)
- Recognize diverse types of knowledge in the room
- All articles/studies referenced will be available on final slide

Recap

- Higher Ed seems designed to make accessibility for faculty and staff inaccessible
- Stigma and lack of resources are among top barriers we experience to getting our needs met
- Research shows that accommodations do make a difference

Reminders

- Starting points are scattered all over – so think about what *you* need
  - HR, your direct supervisor, whoever assigns classrooms, union or faculty association rep…
- Know your rights!
  - They are what your institution believes someone in your position needs and deserves
- *In order to continue to do my work at the level excellence I have been doing it up till now, these are the supports I will need for a time…*
- Find friends, allies and co-conspirators

Accessibility Policy

Students with a disability or health consideration, whether temporary or permanent, are entitled to accommodation. Students in conjoint degree programs must register at the University of Toronto's Accessibility Services offices; information is available at http://www.studentlife.utoronto.ca/as.

The sooner a student seeks accommodation, the quicker we can assist. Students who have supplied accessibility documentation may request pre-approval at the start of term to submit all journal entries on alternative specific dates during the term.

Accessibility Policy, cont…

The course instructor also has accessibility requirements. Students supplying accessibility documentation do not need to consider the instructor's needs when making requests covered by their approved accommodations. Students who wish to strategize how to manage their needs in relation to their learning in a more holistic way are welcome to discuss further adjustments to course requirements with the instructor. In such cases, we will find a mutually agreed upon approach that takes into account both of our health needs.

Sticky Situations

Come prepared with a real 'sticky situation' from your context—a moment when your accessibility needs clashed with students', or where you anticipate future challenges.

Bio Break

(5 mins)

To consider:

What in my story felt most familiar to your experience, and what felt most impossible to try?

Assignment Description: Learning Plan

This course follows a modified ‘adult learner’ model, which recognizes that we all bring different experiences to the classroom, and that we typically learn better when our agency in the learning process is increased.

We’ll hold on to the pedagogical value that the adult learner model gives to diverse experience and enhanced learner agency in this class.

But, using trauma-informed pedagogical lenses that value neurodiversity and decolonizing higher education, we will also challenge three assumptions this model makes about what constitutes an ‘adult’ learner so that we can adapt it for a more justice-oriented approach.

Assignment Description: Learning Plan

First, ‘adult’ learners in the traditional model seem strangely neurotypical (moreover, in a way that implies neurodivergence to be childish!). For example, whereas traditional adult learners’ *intrinsic motivation* is directly linked to their independent learning agency, a neurodiversity approach attends to how different forms of motivation can enhance different forms of agency—and it seeks to nurture that diversity.

Similarly, traditional adult learners are presumed to have a single passion they want to pursue which, in turn, normalizes learning plans that are oriented around a single goal with a linear plan to accomplish it.

Assignment Description: Learning Plan

A neurodiverse approach, alternatively, values diverse types of enthusiasm for learning and how these can be harnessed towards a more dynamically oriented set of pedagogical ends.

Assignment Description: Learning Plan

This leads to the second modification that we want to make to this model, which arises from a decolonial lens. Traditional adult learner models require and value their learners' independence (which too often means, *individualism*). Rooted in and returning to the individual learner's life experience, they are often mistaken for decolonial educator Paulo Freire's approach to *critical pedagogy*.

But the role of experience in Freire's work isn't individualistic. With critical pedagogy, learners do bring their personal narratives, for sure; but they also learn to act from and towards a collective experience.

Moreover, because Liberal, Progressive Western educators can often appropriate Freire's approaches without accounting for the differences between his and our social and institutional locations, it's important that any critical approach we engage in our Canadian context attend to both our individual and shared forms of social and institutional privilege—otherwise, adult learner approaches risk reifying the forms of oppression that make their pursuit possible in the first place.

Assignment Description: Learning Plan

Perhaps what one of us wants to learn can lead to another's oppression. Ideally, what we help each other learn will contribute to our and others' liberation.

Assignment Description: Learning Plan

So, what does all that mean for this assignment? Aside from the fact that it's got a lot of moving parts! It means that, in general, we will collaborate to support each other in developing our own learning plans, and that these plans will concretize the MDiv Program outcomes in relation to each of our own discerned learning gaps and goals. There are a number of ways this can be done, and we will think through them together during the first class. But at a minimum, the learning plan requires outlining the following components:

(1) personal ***barriers and/or gifts*** for learning

(2) learning ***outcomes*** to pursue

(3) an ***action plan*** for how to accomplish the outcomes

(4) ***timelines*** (including deadlines) for the action points

(5) ***resources*** you have, can share, and need to acquire

(5) ***artifacts*** that will demonstrate learning

(6) information on how learning will be ***evaluated***

Assignment Description: Learning Plan

Because we develop these learning plans in community, attending to our shared and individual work, we'll spend time at each of our first three meetings to develop them together. The following guidelines are not exhaustive, but they do clarify some of the places where students can get stuck when creating a learning plan, and thus provide a starting point for our shared work.

When setting outcomes…

"Just do your best" is an unquestioned—even, seemingly, compassionate—good in our culture. But 'doing our best' at *everything* is exhausting and, frankly, not conducive to vocational flourishing—let alone to work/wider life balance.

A trauma-informed approach that attends to neurodiversity and decolonization recognizes the Capitalist orientation of always 'doing our best,' and instead seeks to *discern* which tasks require which levels of effort to balance our responsibility to the wider group, our own learning/vocational commitments, and our wellness.

As you create your learning plan, be realistic about your capacities and discern where you should challenge yourself and where you should seek rest. You can plan for a mix of excellent, very good, good, and good enough work, using the 'ideal' and 'minimum' benchmarks for the curricular outcomes as your guide.

What is one concrete strategy you've heard that you want to try in one of your courses?

- Which course?
- When will you try it?
- How does it need to be adjusted to work in your context?
- What could keep you from trying this strategy?

Resources for further reading

(and cited for these workshops)

- Creating an Inclusive Space for Faculty in the Academy: Identifying and Removing Systemic Barriers (report prepared by Tamar Myers for Ryerson University, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, 2015)
- Brown, Thompson & Leigh, "Making academia more accessible" in *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice* (2018)
- Natasha Saltes, "Disability Barriers in Academia: An Analysis of Disability Accommodation Policies for Faculty at Canadian Universities" in *Canadian Journal of Disability Studies* (February, 2020)
- Lindsay and Fuentes, "It Is Time to Address Ableism in Academia: A Systematic Review of the Experiences of Ableism among Faculty and Staff" in *Disabilities* (2022)
- Natalie Wigg-Stevenson, "Dismantling the Supercrip Prof: Theological Education and Faculty Accessibility" in *Journal of Disability and Religion* (October 2023)
- Levitt, Thelwall & Moreira, "Identifying disability-related barriers to academic employment" in *Studies in Higher Education* (December 2023)
- Podcast, *The Academic Imperfectionist*, episode 104: "Kate Ahl on what academics talk about in therapy"