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## Nothing about Us Without Us: Practical Strategies for Accessible Pedagogy

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## CHAPTER 9.

# NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US: PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR ACCESSIBLE PEDAGOGY

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JENNIE BAKER AND HEATH J. WOOTEN

### KEY TAKEAWAYS

- This chapter explores practical strategies based on the lived experiences of the authors, who are disabled graduate instructors.
- Theoretical approaches to accessible pedagogy should be rooted in praxis that accounts for the material realities of the disabled people it professes to be for.
- Most classroom interventions at present are accommodations, which are based on the medical model of disability; this chapter describes an approach to accessible pedagogy rooted in the social model of disability, and an ethics of disability justice.
- Instructors can explore ways of implementing accessible praxis by rethinking the ableist assumptions inherent in such areas as time, space, grading, participation, and technology.

We are writing this chapter from the firmly held perspective that accessible pedagogy should build from the experiences of disabled people. In other words, “nothing about us without us.” In the following chapter, we share our personal experiences, theoretical backgrounds on accessibility and disability, and practical suggestions for the accessible classroom. This chapter is organized as an orientation to accessible pedagogy, as we understand it, from our experiences and relative positions. We hope that our narratives will lend shape to the nebulous menace of “academic ableism.” To do this, we begin from a place of sharing stories before moving into theoretical frameworks and,

finally, invitations to reflect on opportunities for (re)thinking classroom practices to make them more accessible.

## AUTHORS' POSITIONALITY

### Heath

As a chronically ill graduate instructor, accessibility and accessible pedagogy are constantly on my mind. In the interest of acknowledging my full positionality, I am a queer white man who suffers from hypothyroidism, depression, and frequent cluster headaches. My experiences as a student are marked by a pervasive brain-fog and fatigue and a struggle to complete assignments in a timely manner. As a graduate instructor, my illnesses manifest in an anxiety that I am failing my students if I do not deliver course content enthusiastically, which is difficult to live up to.

The COVID-19 pandemic has compounded many of my anxieties in regards to teaching. I did not begin teaching until August 2020, when the pandemic at my institution had yet to reach its peak. Because I had recently relocated to the other side of the United States, I did not have a local doctor, and I would not be able to get an appointment for several months; however, graduate teaching assistants were required to prove disability in order to move to an exclusively online course delivery. I was unable to secure such proof, so I was required to teach in person. While we eventually were given the opportunity to teach online without conditions the next semester, we were offered few mental health resources. Most of my non-classroom time was spent alone, unable to motivate myself to do anything other than sleep and attend class. Time felt like a luxury I could not afford.

These experiences prompted a line of thinking: if I was suffering this much as a graduate student and instructor, how might my students be feeling during this time? How can I support their development as writers while also ensuring that my course delivery is as accessible as possible? It is from this viewpoint that I enter this chapter, hoping that—in some way—I can help alleviate the struggles of current and future graduate instructors and their students.

### Jennie

To echo Heath's introduction, throughout our collaboration on this chapter, we often found ourselves pondering accessible pedagogy at odd times throughout the day. Few parts of our writing process took place during standard "working hours." I am never *not* thinking about accessibility; as a chronically ill and disabled graduate instructor, the accessibility of an event, class, or program determines whether or not I can even get in the door. To explain, I will introduce you to my bodymind. I am a white, queer PhD student with an immune disorder, several chronic illnesses, a physical disability that limits my mobility, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among other mental disorders. I've sometimes referred to myself as "medically complicated." I've lived with some of these conditions my entire life, while others emerged and reshaped my adulthood. I've lost jobs, been punished in school, and faced social exclusion due to my disabilities, whether named or unnamed; I've been marked as a paradoxical overachiever and "problem student."

My experience with the COVID-19 pandemic has been fraught and complicated. By the time COVID-19 emerged in the United States, I had been recently diagnosed with my immune disorder and shifted my career from secondary education to higher ed, where the flexible schedule allowed

me to work around my frequent hospitalizations and periods of protracted illness. I was almost always sick at work. When the pandemic closed down the university where I worked at the time, I was already three months into a battle with acute bronchitis that rendered me unable to climb the stairs to my second-floor office. I thrived in the entirely online environment of the early pandemic, briefly shielded from exposure to infection of any type. When the university returned to in-person operations, I had to acquire a recommendation from a doctor to work remotely. I was able to get a remote work accommodation on the sheer chance that I had been very recently hospitalized and diagnosed with a devastating, life-altering medical condition. I had to declare the fact of this diagnosis frequently, to produce evidence of it at a moment's notice, as evidence of my continued existence in a pandemic from which everyone was desperate to "move on."

I enter this chapter from this place, in this bodymind, recognizing that the present moment is fraught and demanding. The pandemic has laid bare the inherent inaccessibility of numerous structures that we take for granted, and instructors must take up the task of teaching accessibly and safely during a time of continuing uncertainty. The purpose of this chapter is, first, to meet instructors at that place, recognizing that the demands placed on graduate instructors in particular are numerous and heavy. This chapter is an attempt to sit with ideas about and approaches to accessible pedagogy, to offer points of reflection, and ultimately, to share in the great burden that is teaching in the continuing and emerging post-pandemic.

#### A NOTE ON ACCESSIBLE THEORY AND PRACTICE

We believe that pedagogical theory and academic discussion of accessibility should be accessible to all, without eradicating the necessary complexity of work informed by theory. In writing this chapter, we strive to hold ourselves to the same pledge Jay Dolmage (2017) makes in the opening of *Academic Ableism*: "On these pages there will be an effort to create accessible theory, answerable to all" (p. 31). We understand this pledge to mean two things. First, we center access in our rhetorical choices, and therefore pledge to pair theoretical concepts, jargon, and concepts associated with discipline-specific communities with simple explanations and discussions, so as to "welcome in" any number of possible readers, as well as to clarify any possible material implications of these concepts upon disabled people. Second, Dolmage's caveat, "answerable to all," centers the necessity of accountability in accessible pedagogy. Just as disabled scholars should be centered in the development of accessible theory and pedagogy, they should remain ultimately accountable to those who are affected by the practical measures they develop. Therefore, we welcome pushback, revision, insight, and complication of the strategies that we unpack here.

In order to ground this discussion in contemporary explorations of accessible pedagogy, we turn to Tara Wood's "Crippling Time in the College Classroom." As composition instructors, we primarily approach this topic from the realm of writing pedagogy, but we believe that this particular article illuminates how many approaches to accessible pedagogy fail to do the work of unpacking and applying densely theoretical concepts. Wood "aims to critically re-conceptualize time in the pedagogical practice of writing classrooms" (2017) through an examination of *crip time*, defined as "a recognition that trauma/disability affects time and what we can do in said time" (Blackburn 2019, p. 82). In a qualitative study on student perspectives, "Crippling Time" functions to establish that 1) assignments that must be completed within a normative time frame (such as timed writing) place undue stress upon disabled students, 2) inflexible deadlines are detrimental to student success,

and 3) students conceive of time in disparate ways. From a theoretical standpoint, Wood elucidates various issues with normative time frames; however, from a practical standpoint, it is uncertain how instructors are supposed to apply these ideas as praxis and how potential applications would materially affect disabled students.

In this way, there is an inherent inaccessibility to such theoretical approaches to accessible pedagogy. At the beginning of “Crippling Time,” Wood (2017) acknowledges the inevitability of temporal structures in the classroom: “every class has a first day and a last day. Every class has due dates, measures of time for when students should complete a task, and a stop-time for their work on that task” (p. 260). This inevitability is frustrating, but as the article moves forward—acknowledging the struggles of disabled students without giving practical suggestions for application—, it becomes apparent that “Crippling Time” is not concerned with solving the issue but with simply identifying it. This critique is not to suggest that Wood’s work was for naught, but to propose that more work must be done to make accessible pedagogy truly accessible to those who need it most.

It is imperative that we as instructors are cognizant of our own biases regarding time, space, grading, and technology, while also recognizing that in reorienting the classroom to an accessible pedagogy, we must work through our own discomfort. In this process, we are often challenging our own notions of “good teaching.” As Wood (2017) points out, “we may enforce normative time frames upon students whose experiences and processes exist in contradiction to such compulsory measures of time” (p. 260-261). As Asao B. Inoue suggests in *Labor-Based Grading Contracts: Building Equity and Inclusion in the Compassionate Writing Classroom* (2019), “Sometimes our work as teachers and scholars cannot be cool, objective, unemotional, and purely reasoned. Sometimes it must hurt, cause us some discomfort, so that we really change” (p. 6). In this spirit, we ask our readers not to overhaul their approaches to teaching overnight, but to carefully consider the following suggestions according to the amount of labor they are willing and able to commit to.

## FRAMEWORKS: THE SOCIAL MODEL OF DISABILITY AND DISABILITY JUSTICE

Discussions of access and disability in the academy, while gaining attention in the last few decades, remain steeped in ableist assumptions— ableist meaning discriminatory on the basis of (dis)ability and illness. We identify two significant barriers to genuinely anti-ableist theory and practice. The first, as articulated by M. Remi Yergeau (2013), is an insistence that disabled people remain the subject of research on accessible pedagogy, never the source of embodied knowledge and lived experience to inform that research. Yergeau writes,

Access, as we’ve come to represent it in the field, functions as a narrative of remediation and erasure. Within disability contexts, much of our scholarship positions access(ibility) as a project of rehabilitation. That is, there is a set of able-bodied us’s eagerly waiting to rescue a few, rare disabled them who are in dire need of help (“Rehabilitation ≠ what we do”).

Applied to pedagogy, this is a practical consideration: implementing more broadly accessible practices requires input from disabled people across a spectrum of embodied experiences. Otherwise, accessible praxis becomes a limited accommodation (Hitt, 2021, p. 88). Perhaps more importantly, however, is Yergeau’s observation considered as an ethics of pedagogical practice, one that acknowledges student agency as including agency over their embodied experiences and needs. By

considering disabled students as a body of study, rather than knowing bodies that have rights in their classrooms, pedagogical practice often falls short of embracing practical and ethical anti-ableism.

The second barrier to anti-ableist theory and practice is the ready availability of accommodation as the primary means of implementing accessibility measures in the classroom. Accommodations are changes made to classroom activities according to the needs of a disabled student, only for that single student, typically on the basis of a certain medical diagnosis. In higher education, accommodations are typically processed by a Disability Services office, whose responsibility is to take in information about a student's medical conditions and/or existing alternative education plans from K-12 in order to generate recommended accommodations for the student. These accommodations are then delivered to the instructor. Instructors typically learn of a student's status as disabled through the delivery of these accommodation letters, which require the instructor to follow the accommodations as described, backed by the punitive force of the ADA. This is a deeply flawed and limited system for practical reasons, as discussed in the introduction to this chapter, which Yergeau (2013) expands upon. "To accommodate is to retrofit," she writes; "it is to assume normative bodies as default and to build spaces and infrastructures around those normative default bodies; it is to deal with deviant bodily and spatial conditions as they bubble out at the seams" ("Reason). The accommodation model assumes that disability exists where it is defined by medical diagnoses or aptitude tests. Determining disability purely based on these factors is deeply exclusionary for a number of reasons. As we touched on in our positionality statements, access to a formal medical diagnosis is not a universal standard. Access to medical services and evaluations is far from universal, and is heavily influenced by class, gender, and race. In the accommodation process, there is little space for the disabled student themselves to advocate for their needs; instead, they are proverbially talked over by doctors and institutional bureaucrats, who make decisions about the students' welfare without them.

In addition to being gated by way of the medical system, accommodations are also often temporary. Accommodations are institution-specific, created when a disabled student goes through the process of submitting medical paperwork or school records and an institutional body writes accommodation letters based on the recommendations outlined in this paperwork. These accommodations often lapse with the arbitrary end of a semester. As Dolmage (2017) writes, accommodations "'fix' space, but retrofits also have a chronicity—a timing and a time logic—that renders them highly temporary yet also relatively unimportant" (p. 79). This is because accommodations are slow to come and fast to expire, the process to get an accommodation letter is slow and cumbersome, and letters typically only apply for a single semester. The accommodation model is not simply unjust: it simply does not work well as a way of practically supporting student learning.

Further, considering accommodation as retrofit reveals another shortcoming of this model, which is the labor demand on the instructor. Accommodations suggest that the way an instructor is teaching currently is whole and complete; its inaccessibility to certain students is the problem of the student and not the instructor. Accommodations demand that the instructor take on additional labor of "retrofitting" their teaching practices to accommodate certain students.

As a result, many instructors, especially graduate student instructors, feel disempowered to implement accessible praxis because they read accessibility as yet another demand on their already-overflowing plates, an add-on to teaching practices that they are already being asked to learn and implement quickly, perhaps even for the first time. Current discussions of accessible theory and

practice tend to problematically align access interventions as abstracted from the labor those interventions demand, an intervention carried out through a rearrangement of syllabus readings rather than a reimagining of the labor demands of instructors and students. Our intervention is to call for a reimagining of the work of accessible praxis as an opportunity to rethink labor and power as collaborative in the classroom. We believe this intervention to be especially important from our position as graduate instructors, whose labor in academic hierarchy is so often deeply undervalued.

To push back against these harmful ways of thinking about disability, we offer the social model of disability as an alternative way of understanding the lived experiences of disabled people and creating genuinely generative anti-ableist praxis. The social model of disability posits that “We [are] not disabled by our impairments but by the disabling barriers we face in society” (Oliver, 2015, p. 1024). Put another way, disability is not located in the medicalized body of the individual, as suggested by the medical model of disability, but rather created through the (in)accessible ways in which society is configured. A person may not experience a medical issue as disabling, for example, until it prevents them from participating in a certain exercise in class. Many people found themselves disabled during the COVID-19 pandemic when the medical issues that render them “high-risk” never bothered them specifically in the past. Similarly, the social model allows for a wider diversity of experience in (dis)ability, creating space within disability studies discourses for people who experience ableism in the absence of a formal medical diagnosis or are otherwise restricted from receiving a diagnosis by socioeconomic barriers. The social model of disability does not universally describe all (dis)abling experiences, nor should it be allowed to flatten the diversity within the disability community. Rather, this model invites us to consider the ways in which our pedagogical praxis may force students to experience certain structures as disabling. The critical focus shifts from the disabled individual to the structures of society.

In his reflection on the social model of disability thirty years after he first introduced it, Mike Oliver (2015) reflects that while the model has been largely successful in reframing dominant modes of thinking about disability, “the hegemony of special education has barely been challenged,” and while some barriers in higher education have been removed, “the social model has also barely made a dent in the employment system” (p. 1024). This presents a clear challenge for graduate instructors, whose designated role in higher education straddles student and instructor, often taking the less-advantaged elements of each. Graduate instructors are often tasked with reconciling the differences between the promises of “diversity and inclusion” that pepper public-facing rhetoric in higher education and the so often deeply regressive policies that affect them as students and the students that they teach. Further, while teaching practices in higher education may be informed by the social model, the medical model remains the law of the land when it comes to seeking and granting accommodations as a student. Even as a graduate instructor creates an accessible, inclusive classroom community, they may be excluded from classroom communities in which they themselves are students.

In addition to reframing disability with the social model, accessible pedagogy relies on an ethics of disability justice, which considers the ways disabled, chronically ill, and otherwise medically complex people are marginalized, and seeks to generate alternative systems, policies, and lifeways that honor and celebrate difference over normative modes of existence. The disability justice performance project *Sins Invalid* defines disability justice as “a vision and practice of what is yet-to-be, a map that we create with our ancestors and our great-grandchildren onward, in the width and depth of

our multiplicities and histories, a movement towards a world in which every body and mind is known as beautiful” (“10 Principles”). Importantly, disability justice consists of vision and practice; it is something considered as well as it is done, and as such, the practices envisioned below draw from theory to develop practice.

Our gloss of theoretical concepts and practical suggestions draws from several frameworks developed by disability studies. In order to move away from a medical model and toward an accessible pedagogy that centers disability justice, we approach our suggestions as part of a larger practice of “deep accessibility,” developed by Star Ford and expanded by Dolmage (2017) as a system of five “levels” of accessibility that move beyond just “getting there and getting in” to consider that

Once we are there, we need to be able to perceive all that is going on, sort important information from noise, and sense the action without delay or undue stress [...] We also need to have ways for all bodies and minds to understand the orientation of the architecture— to understand its ideologies and affordances as well as how it might divert bodies and minds [...] and we all need to be able to communicate. Finally, we all need to be able to ask our questions, make our ideas known, and share in discourse in a shaping way (Dolmage, 2017, p. 119).

Dolmage’s explication of deep accessibility demonstrates that we must think deeply about our pedagogical praxis and grasp at the root of certain teaching practices and structures in order to open them up and render them accessible. This framework builds upon Universal Design for Learning (UDL), a framework that rewrites universal design principles into pedagogical practices and similarly writes against the retrofit model of accessibility. By rethinking our pedagogical practices to center access, we create more equitable classroom communities in which all members are able to participate and shape their learning, from instructor to student. Critically, deep accessibility lightens the burden on the instructor to retrofit existing policies and practices and shifts the focus to allow students and instructors alike to collaboratively build a shared classroom space. Brewer et al. (2014) describes this as a “culture of access,” in which “we need to create spaces where students have multiple access points for engaging content and expressing themselves—making space for students to come over to discussions of pedagogical accessibility” (p. 151, italics original).

## ACCESSIBLE PRAXIS: PRACTICAL STRATEGIES FOR THE ANTI-ABLEIST CLASS

Each section listed below stands as an invitation to (re)think how certain aspects of pedagogical practice and normative classroom structures can create barriers to access for students. We identified several common strands throughout our review of the literature and organized this section into a few sites of (re)vision. This section is by no means exhaustive, and in our gloss of theoretical concepts, we devote more time to moving toward practical applications of theory over explicating the theory ad nauseum. Therefore, in each of these short meditations, we invite readers to think critically about their values in the classroom and offer gestures toward incorporating accessible pedagogy and disability justice into those values and practices. The practical strategies that we suggest are primarily informed by our experiences as both graduate instructors and disabled students in addition to anecdotal evidence from other members of the disability community. Finally, our focus on practice is also a push back on a problematic positioning within disability scholarship, “when access is only a question of texts—products divorced from labor/ers,” which positions students seeking access “as bodies in need of help” (Brewer, 2014, p. 151). Instead, we hope that readers will begin to see themselves as collaborators with their students in creating a culture of access in our classrooms.



Our suggestions in the following sections are primarily informed by our own lived experiences as students and writing instructors. We do not suggest that these strategies will work in every classroom, and, therefore, we do not suggest that they will work for every student or instructor; still, we invite readers to adopt, modify, and otherwise “crip” these strategies in order to make learning accessible for students and to make teaching more accessible to graduate instructors.

## Time

Time is one of the most pervasive normative structures in educational spaces, and it often goes entirely unnoticed and unquestioned. People in disability communities might be familiar with “crip time,” which refers to a mode of temporality that is flexible and malleable according to the needs of a particular bodymind—some simply use “crip time” as shorthand to mean “going to be late.” This reveals the ways in which time structures create expectations that disabled people may struggle to meet. If someone struggles with arriving on time due to the unpredictability of their illness, for example, then they will certainly struggle similarly to attend class sessions that begin at a rigid, defined time. In this way, even the most shallow level of access, simply “getting there,” can become a barrier.

Understanding that time is a normative structure that can create disabling conditions for people with chronic illnesses and disabilities, then, we might rethink ways of interacting with time in our classrooms so as to incorporate the compassionate flexibility of “crip time.” To frame this (re)thinking, it is helpful to examine several particular pedagogical structures that work with time.

As discussed above, even simple temporal structures such as strict class beginning and end times assume a normative relationship with time. If a student is late, we might consider this a communication of the student’s lack of interest or care about the course. Certainly, regardless of our individual teaching practices, our students have been conditioned to think of their management of time as a measure of their engagement with the course. While the scheduled meeting times of a course are administrative structures that can be difficult to push back on, consider the time that *is* under your responsibility within those administrative constraints. Students may be expected to devote a certain frame of time to your class meeting, but in what ways might you support your students’ learning as it spills outside of those boundaries? Consider how much time you are asking students to spend on your particular course and *when* you are asking them to spend that time. When asking students to have a reading prepared for a certain time, consider when and how that reading is done, and how you might provide students more agency in making these decisions for themselves. Give students a heads-up as to what they will be doing in class on a particular day, so that students are able to plan around the demands of your class meeting. Transparency and collaboration are key in any accessible pedagogy; consider ways of communicating respect for your students’ time by being open about what you are asking them to do with it. Finally, to further divest from carceral and punitive dimensions of class time, we might rethink tardiness as a communication of a barrier to access and an opportunity to build support rather than a subversive behavior to be punished.

Strict deadlines also assume a normative relationship with time, as they carry implicit expectations of labor attached to a certain time frame. Deadlines, like so many classroom structures, are complicated in myriad ways by the demands of the bodymind, and as such, there is not one universal pattern of deadlines that will work for every student. Further, having no deadlines at all, or having deadlines

that carry no accountability whatsoever, may very well increase the labor on the instructor who must contend with assignments coming in on a wide variety of timeframes. Contract grading, grading systems that are designed as agreements between student and instructor, can provide a way of negotiating these timeframes. When establishing a contract with students that outlines course expectations and criteria for achieving certain grades, the contract also establishes certain deadlines for meeting those criteria. By allowing students to revise those deadlines, either individually or collectively as a class, the instructor invites student engagements with time into the contract of the course, and students are able to choose deadlines that work well for their specific needs and context. As Jesse Stommel (2020) suggests, it is necessary to revise these practices with the start of each new class, as each classroom community will have different needs. In addition to collaboratively negotiating deadlines, “soft” deadlines can also establish accountability without assuming a normative relationship with time. “Hard” deadlines are set at a certain day and time and often carry punitive consequences for submitting work after the deadline. “Soft” deadlines are suggestions for turning in work by a certain date in order to stay on track with the course of the class and carry accountability; what “accountability” can look like varies on instructor, course, and class community dynamics. For some instructors, accountability might look like reaching out to students who have not turned in work by a certain time to check in with progress; for others, it might be using asynchronous modes of assessing participating, such as check-in questions. Generally, low-stakes check-ins on progress throughout work in a course help build a culture of accountability without enforcing normative structures of time.

## SPACE

To disabled bodies, space is critical. Will a disabled body be able to access a particular space? To navigate it? To feel comfortable within it? Space, in this context, takes on physical and mental import. With that in mind, we call on instructors to carefully consider their classrooms as an accessible space. Lorelai Blackburn (2019) suggests in her dissertation *Toward a Trauma Informed Pedagogy* that the ideal approach to office hours is letting students “choose how, where, and when to meet” (p. 81). Students are offered various in-person opportunities to meet—in Blackburn’s office, in a computer lab, or in another location—as well as online methods. This approach to office hours shifts control and power to the students. They are able to determine what works best for them, regardless of ability. We suggest that instructors take this approach even further to encompass regular classroom meetings as well.

Instructors of all stripes understand that our institutions will assign specific spatial and temporal parameters to our classes—we *must* meet in this specific place at this specific time; however, we challenge those parameters. As we navigate the COVID-19 pandemic, the spatial dimensions of our classrooms are in a constant state of flux. While in-person and online course deliveries are self-explanatory, hybrid models are increasingly common. Instructors may be required to coordinate simultaneously both in-person and online spaces for their students. In our experiences, the hybrid model has failed due to a lack of institutional support and explanation. Our institution never specified guidelines as to how hybridity can and should be effectively implemented in the classroom and instead left it up to faculty and graduate instructors—many of whom had never experienced an online teaching environment—to figure it out. Still, despite our personal experiences with hybridity, there are certain lessons we can take from hybrid models and practically implement into our courses regardless of format.

Firstly, we must acknowledge the complexities and disabilities of our students—visible and invisible, acknowledged and ambiguous. Some students may not be able to attend classes regularly, but they still deserve access to the same experience as their able-bodied peers. Therefore, we call upon instructors to revise the spatial aspects of course delivery. There are, indeed, many ways to achieve this revisioning. For example, lecture materials can be made available online asynchronously for students who are unable to attend class. Office hours can be made available via both online and in-person modalities, according to the needs of the students and instructor. Finally, the notion that attendance should be a graded, quantified category in assessment should be dismissed. This is not to say that instructors should ignore their students' patterns of attendance, but that we should understand that for certain students, access to physical and online space is not constant. Rather, their access is subject to change according to their disabilities.

Regarding the latter suggestion, it may prove difficult for instructors of larger courses to implement non-attendance-centered grading strategies as the instructor may need to implement several specific and individual accommodations. There are also classes—such as workshop-based writing and laboratory-based science courses—that demand participation from students in order to assess success. As one of the authors of this chapter has taught in both of those contexts, we advise careful consideration of the language on your syllabus. We suggest that instead of setting hard boundaries for attendance such as *you are allowed three absences or you can miss five attendance questions*, you instead gently suggest such boundaries and encourage students to communicate their concerns and limitations with the learning model you employ. As instructors, we strongly believe that we are not beyond critique, and especially as chronically ill and disabled instructors, we understand and are open to any complaints our students may have about access.

What we hope to emphasize in this section—and indeed within this chapter—is that accessibility is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Rather, it is something that must be actively pursued with each instructor and with each group of students. We implore you to carefully consider how your praxis and policies affect your students' access to the learning space and adjust according to their needs and situations.

### **Grading and Participation**

Much of the contemporary scholarship on grading has revealed that traditional grading methods reproduce racism, misogyny, and colonial power structures, and rarely in fact contribute to the values higher education claims to hold (Kirschenbaum, et. al. 1971; Butler, 1987, Kohn, 2011, Stommel, 2020). There are a number of alternatives to traditional grading that offer significant advantages in accessible pedagogy. Ungrading, as proposed by Jesse Stommel (2020), centers metacognition and reflection as the primary determinants of students' grades. Students guide the conversation on their progress in the course, and the instructor uses student reflections as evidence in contributing to those conversations. Reflective writing is a relatively common and well-researched practice within composition studies, but it is also adaptable and helpful in other fields. In fields that typically rely on testing to give feedback on student progress, collaborative exams with embedded reflection can open up this space for student agency. Similarly, labor contracts link grades to student labor, decoupling grades from arbitrary measures of "quality" or "correctness." Grading contracts are also inherently participatory, bringing students into the conversation on assessment and taking first steps toward addressing the power dynamics between instructor and student. One of the most important aspects in moving toward alternative grading systems is practical implementation, of course, and graduate

instructors in particular might feel anxiety in pushing back against such a fundamental administrative structure. As with time, you do have aspects of grading and assessment that you are responsible for, independent of administrative structures; we often internalize far stricter rules than we actually face (Stommel, 2020).

### **Technology**

In a world still ravaged by the COVID-19 pandemic—and indeed, in the world that will emerge post-pandemic—it is unsurprising that we feel inclined to reassess our online teaching praxis. As online learning becomes more prevalent, it is crucial that we critically consider accessibility in terms of the technologies and programs that we bring into our classrooms. We hope our anecdotal perspectives will help prompt discussions about access in online learning spaces.

There are many options for course delivery in an online setting, and many of these options have come to the fore in the wake of COVID-19. While some—such as the Google suite of programs—have experienced popularity for several years, others—PearDeck, Zoom, Voice Thread, SeeSaw, and FlipGrid, among others—have only recently entered the wider consciousness of instructors across disciplines. While each of these programs occupy a certain niche, it is important to recognize that each time we implement one of these programs in our classrooms, we are asking our students to learn how to use something that is potentially unfamiliar and inaccessible.

In our opinion, it is important to think carefully about adding additional programs to a course. There are some that are likely unavoidable like Zoom and the Google suite of programs, but each time we add an additional program, we must either take the time (which we may or may not have) to instruct our students and ourselves in using those programs or operate under the assumption that they will figure it out on their own time. It is clear then, that for both students and instructors, excessive use of new technology can build barriers to accessibility.

We ask that instructors consider the full range of these programs' functionalities rather than arbitrarily adding additional programs—and therefore, labor. For example, the chat function on Zoom can replace PearDeck in many scenarios, while Google Drive hosts a space for students to upload multimedia content in addition to fulfilling many other functions. In our perspective, the approach that makes the lives of our students the clearest and most accessible entails incorporating the fewest possible technological barriers to our praxis.

### **CONCLUSION**

In this chapter, we hope to have grounded theoretical approaches to accessible pedagogy in actionable praxis, but we recognize that our work here is only a small piece of the continuing and evolving conversation around accessible pedagogies. Our suggestions regarding praxis are largely founded upon our lived experiences as disabled and chronically ill graduate instructors. While each instructor can adjust their praxis to be more accessible to disabled and chronically ill students, the issue of accessibility in the classroom is a systemic one, bound by the dictates of governments and institutions; however, even as the medical model of disability builds barriers to widespread accessibility, we hope that instructors can use the suggestions within our chapter to move toward a more accessible and equitable space for all students.

Once again, we ask you to carefully consider your pedagogy and praxis in order to move toward a classroom experience that is truly accessible to all students, regardless of (dis)ability. We also implore you to keep your own (dis)abilities in mind as you make this journey. Any measure of accessibility in a course cannot be attained overnight. There is bound to be discomfort and frustration along the way, but we encourage you to lean into your discomfort in order to displace and disrupt the inaccessible classroom, to foster access to all, and to—hopefully—bring about systemic change.

With this being said, we do not mean to suggest that the onus of affecting change rests solely on the shoulders of graduate instructors. Rather, we would like to gesture—as we have throughout the article—toward theoretical approaches to accessible pedagogy that omit the praxis element, thereby making the information contained have little practical import. Such theoretical approaches must be revised to incorporate the perspectives and lived experiences of the disabled people they affect.

As mentioned above, the issue of accessible pedagogy is pervasive, rooted deeply in institutional and governmental attitudes toward disability. This is not to say that there is no hope. Indeed, if we can take even small actions in our own classrooms toward equitable and accessible pedagogy and praxis, then we are one step closer to broader and truer accessible structures in academia.

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