



Bridging Justice: Disability Access and Anti-Racism Work
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This document builds on the work of Tema Okun and Kenneth Jones, bringing inclusive practices, anecdotes, and further resources to the work of disrupting white supremacy culture. It is a starting point that intends to spark further conversation, dissection, and work within the field of Community Arts Education to work toward greater access, inclusion and justice for people historically and currently excluded, marginalized and oppressed.

Inclusive Arts Vermont approaches this work with curiosity, offering our ideas and experiences as a starting point, with hope for expanded collaborations. We are not experts, we don't have all the answers, and our ideas are not the only way. In our work with people with disabilities in the arts, we use a process focused, open-ended approach along with Universal Design for Learning and a social emotional focus in most of our work because we find it to be helpful in including and engaging people with and without disabilities.

- We have chosen to not offer the full list of ways each characteristic presents to keep our document length manageable, and instead have offered a short definition of each characteristic, followed by the proposed antidotes and then some ideas for inclusive practices
- For more information about the white supremacy culture characteristics and antidotes this work is based on, please see <https://www.whitesupremacyculture.info/>

Connecting antidotes to white supremacy culture characteristics with inclusive practices for people with disabilities.

Perfectionism- “Perfectionism is the belief that we can be perfect or perform perfectly.”

Antidotes:

- *Develop a culture of appreciation (organization takes time to make sure people's work and efforts are appreciated)*
- *Develop a learning organization (expect everyone to make mistakes and use mistakes as opportunities for learning)*
- *Normalize and celebrate mistakes as part of the learning process*
- *Acknowledge what is working in addition to offering criticism*
- *Offer specific suggestions for how to do things differently when offering criticism*

Inclusive Practices:

- Utilize a process-focused, open-ended approach. This means giving emphasis to the experiences of students/participants rather than the outcomes.
- Vocabulary- Framing things as “explorations” or experiments
Take out the preciousness of the products
- Provide [feedback without judgement \(noticing and curiosity\)](#)
- Teach that mistakes are crucial to the creative process and finding new and innovative solutions (check out “Ish” by Peter H. Reynolds and “Beautiful Oops,” by Barney Saltzberg)
- Offer multiple ways of communicating (verbal and nonverbal, written, artistic, etc.)
- Recognize that determining disabilities in order to receive services is framed in a language of “can’t,” and this has implications and impacts - learn more about ableism, disability history, etc.

Sense of Urgency- “cultural habit of applying a sense of urgency to our everyday lives in ways that perpetuate power imbalance while disconnecting us from our need to breathe and pause and reflect.”

Antidotes:

- *Realistic work plans*
- *Leadership understands things often take longer than expected*
- *Discuss and plan for goals around inclusivity and diversity*
- *Learn from past about how long things take*
- *Write realistic funding proposals with realistic timeframes*
- *Be clear about how you will make good decisions in an atmosphere of urgency*

Inclusive Practices:

- [Account for and include time for planning for accommodation request, coordination, and delivery](#) (Plan ahead to avoid exclusion)
 - Make accommodations such as ASL, verbal descriptions, extra time and translations, (this can take more time, so build it into your agenda)
- Whenever possible, share materials ahead of time to give participants additional processing time
- Practice leaving space in conversation. People process in different ways and in different paces/cadences - take the hierarchy out!
- Go deeper with learning and projects rather than more. Use reflection, present moment observations and making connections to create rich learning experiences rather than trying to get to more topics or projects than you have time for.
- Create time for reflection
 - Pause at beginning of meetings or classes (mindful moments)
 - Add space for reflection at the end
 - Recognize reflection as integral to the process
- Maintain a focus on process over product
- Utilize [Universal Design for Learning](#) plans. These can take more time to develop and implement.
- Use time to develop relationships. Relationships are crucial to inclusive practice
- Utilize flexible and scaffolded plans that honor the moment, and the energy, interest, and curiosity of participants

Quantity Over Quality- “things that can be counted are more highly valued than things that cannot”

Antidotes:

- *Include process or quality goals*
- *Ensure the organization has a values statement that expresses the ways in which you want to do your work*
 - *Make sure this is a living document that people are using in their day-to-day work*
- *Look for ways to measure process goals*
- *Learn to recognize times when you need to get off the agenda in order to address people’s underlying concerns*

Inclusive Practices:

- Focus on the creation process, try considering products as by-products
- Measure progress with stories, growth measurements and engagement, in addition to how many or how much.
- Utilize [Results Based Accountability](#)
- Make sure students’ needs and concerns are always the top priority, as opposed to what is on the agenda
- Reflect on all parts of the process
- Remember that relationships are integral to the work, not in addition to it
- Challenge models of funding to provide quality, authentic learning, and depth, rather than just “serving more students”
 - Some people need small group size for safety, engagement, or learning
 - Focus on depth over breadth
 - Relationships and rapport building take time
- [Interrogate competing narratives around finite budgets and “who needs to be at the table”](#) and associated costs, consider the quality of the experiences as it relates to the number of participants
- Recognize that participants may assess their experience through a quantitative lens, as it is the dominant culture. Model, teach, and support the growth of a quality focused approach.

Progress is Bigger, More-“our cultural assumption that the goal is always to be/do/get more and be/do/get bigger.”

Antidotes:

- *Create 7th Generation thinking by asking how the actions of the group now will affect people 7 generations from now*
- *Make sure that any cost/benefit analysis includes all the costs, not just the financial ones, for example the cost in morale, credibility, use of resources*
- *Include process goals in planning (speak to HOW you want to do the work, not just what you want to do)*
- *Ask those you work with and for to evaluate your performance*

Inclusive:

- Focus on relationships
- Consider focusing on depth of work over breadth
- Try process focus, open-ended projects, (where the product is by-product)
- Time is not money, time is time, things take time, relationships take time, time is a resource
- Little things can be big
- Honor the whole person, this benefits the work
- Remember that things don't have to be grand to start...check assumptions and examine what has value
- Explore Results Based Accountability
 - Count how people are “better off” not just how many were served
 - Effects of a program might be different than you ever could have imagined, find ways to note this when evaluating programs

Worship of the Written Word- “cultural habit of honoring only what is written and only what is written to a narrow standard, even when what is written is full of misinformation and lies. Worship of the written word includes erasure of the wide range of ways we communicate with each other and all living things.”

Antidotes:

- *Take the time to analyze how people inside and outside the organization get and share information*
- *Figure out which things need to be written down and come up with alternative ways to document what is happening*
- *Work to recognize the contributions and skills that every person brings to the organization*

Inclusive Practices:

- Plan lessons, trainings and meetings using the framework of [Universal Design for Learning](#) (UDL) - multiple means of engagement, representation, action, and expression
- Offer multiple options and modalities (ie- visual arts, dance, drama, music, poetry, etc) whenever possible
 - Many art genres challenge the worship of the written word by offering multiple ways of expressing, however, sometimes people with disabilities need words for access
- Provide and accept multiple options for communication
 - Spoken, artistic, video recorded, Braille, sign language, tactile, digital communications, written, etc.
- Make explicit that requests for accommodations are welcome and will be honored (Circle with a question mark inside- the accommodation request symbol.)
 - See: [27 Sep Downloadable Disability Access Symbols](#) for more information.
- Recognize that acknowledging and identifying disabilities is a process, and a lack of access requests doesn't mean that accommodations aren't needed, (this is where [UDL](#) planning and inclusive practices make things more accessible)
- Understand that disability identity and needs are fluid and changing and that needs change over time, day to day, and in different circumstances
- Acknowledge that miscommunication is ordinary

Only One Right Way- “the belief there is one right way to do things and once people are introduced to the right way, they will see the light and adopt it.”

Antidotes:

- *Accept that there are many ways to get to the same goal*
- *Once the group has made a decision about which way will be taken, honor that decision and see what you and the org will learn from taking that way, even and especially if it is not the way you would have chosen*
- *Work on ability to notice when people do things differently, and how those different ways might improve your approach*
- *Look for and name when a person/group pushes the same point over and over out of belief that there is only one right way*
- *When working with communities from a different culture than yours or your organization's, be clear that you have some learning to do about the communities' ways of doing*
- *Never assume that you or your organization know what is best for the community in isolation from meaningful relationships with that community*

Inclusive Practices:

- Use [Universal Design for Learning](#)- multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression
Offer multiple modalities or genres of art (ie- visual arts, dance, drama, music, poetry, etc)
 - Offer multiple options or choices for participants
- Focus on creative choice, agency, and expression
- Focus on relationships with partners and participants and collaboration
- Focus on the creative process, remain open to determining the outcome as it unfolds
- Consider the framing (language choices) you use, such as asking “What’s happening?” rather than “What’s wrong?”
- Develop tolerance for ambiguity
- Utilize “approaches” rather than “curriculum”

- Balance structure and flexibility (spontaneity)
- Honor individual needs and preferences
- Use [access symbols and honor accommodations requests](#)

Either/Or Thinking- “cultural assumption that we can and should reduce the complexity of life and the nuances of our relationships with each other and all living things into either/or, yes or no, right or wrong in ways that reinforce toxic power.”

Antidotes:

- *Notice when people use either/or language and push to come up with more than two alternatives*
- *Notice when people are simplifying complex issues, particularly when stakes are high or urgent decisions need to be made*
- *Slow it down and encourage a deeper analysis*
- *When faced with urgent decisions, take a break and give people breathing room to think creatively*
- *Avoid making decisions under extreme pressure*

Inclusive Practices:

- [Universal Design for Learning](#)
- Remember that needs are fluid, accommodations need to be flexible
- Utilize a generative creative process- (without judgement at first)
- Utilize reflective practices
- Provide time accommodations (ample time to complete the project or task)
- Seek to understand spectrums as rainbows, rather than linear which is still based on either/or thinking
- Balance yes/no questions with open-ended questions, do so with thoughtfulness (not intention to control)
 - People process things differently, understand that sometimes open-ended questions are difficult, sometimes yes/no questions are difficult, and sometimes brains need more time to process

- Review and revise applications, processes, that are limited/limiting (i.e.- gender, identities, disability, etc.). Consider using the open-ended option and include “self-identified” write in options rather than “other”

Power Hoarding- “little, if any, value around sharing power”

Antidotes:

- *Include power sharing in organization’s values statement*
- *Discuss what good leadership looks like and make sure people understand that a good leader develops the power and skills of others*
- *Understand that change is inevitable and challenges to your leadership can be healthy and productive*
- *Make sure organization is focused on the mission*

Inclusive Practices:

- Utilize collaborative processes
 - Design curriculum with teacher partners, and participants
 - Make explicitly collaborative projects alongside individual projects (A collaborative work of art. 5 rows of brightly colored paper collages are hung together between two wooden dowels in front of a white wall.)
 - Scaffold, practice, model, and teach collaborative skills
- Consider using a Shared Leadership model, (Between team members, WITH YOUTH, and/or participants)
 - Examine where silos exist, focus on relationships and intentional connection building
 - Authentic transparency is important, knowledge is power, accountability is easier with strong relationships
- Examine how power dynamics are operating in your spaces, (name the power of leaders/teachers and reflect on what that means and can do)
 - Notice how people are sharing, speaking, and contributing, as well as how often
 - [Reflect on participation, engagement, and inclusion](#) of people with disabilities
- Examine power dynamics around accommodations
 - Assume strengths and assets

- Notice where the power is living
- Check-in and listen deeply to persons with disabilities
- Understand needs are fluid, accommodations need to be flexible, do so with grace
- Remember that sometimes the word “Help” can trigger emotions, and sometimes people need help figuring out what they need help with
- Understand that everyone has power. Prioritize agency, voice, and choice of participants
- Reflect on and revisit the why of the work
 - Consider how each piece fits into or doesn't fit into the values and mission, especially in education spaces. (The mission of education is knowledge which includes so many different things...experiential...)
 - Expand the mission of knowledge beyond the traditional hierarchy of American educational systems
 - [Social Emotional Learning](#) for all (especially leaders)

Defensiveness- “organizational structure is set up and much energy spent trying to prevent abuse and protect power rather than to facilitate the capacities of each person or to clarify who has power and how they are expected to use it.”

Antidotes:

- *Understand that structure cannot facilitate or prevent abuse*
- *Understand the link between defensiveness and fear (of losing power, losing face, losing comfort, losing privilege);*
- *Work on your own defensiveness*
- *Name defensiveness as a problem when it is one*
- *Give people credit for being able to handle more than you think*
- *Discuss the ways in which defensiveness or resistance to new ideas gets in the way of the mission*

Inclusive Practices:

- Consider the role of a safe container for working through new ideas as well as the need for iterations and repetition in the creative process

(discern the nuance between defensiveness and repetition/iterative work)

- Scaffold towards building ownership of new knowledge and ideas
- Focus on amplifying the voices of choice and voice
- Shared leadership
- See the work of Dr. Chris Emdin around student leadership
<https://chrisemdin.com/>
- [Loop back up to learning from mistakes! In perfectionism.](#)
- Seek to notice and understand how power flows and influences each situation.
- Leaders facilitate participants creating their own journeys
- Cultivate [Social Emotional Learning for leaders](#) and participants
 - See CASEL Cares series for more: <https://casel.org/weekly-webinars/>
- Establish collaborative group agreements

Right to Comfort- “the belief that those with power have a right to emotional and psychological comfort”

Antidotes:

- *Understand that discomfort is at the root of all growth and learning: welcome it as much as you can*
- *Deepen your political analysis of racism and oppression so you have a strong understanding of how your personal experience and feelings fit into a larger picture*
- *Don't take everything personally*

Inclusive Practices:

- Discern between discomfort and harm
- Create spaces that are safe to take risk
- Create cultures of wellness that move beyond comfort/discomfort
 - Celebrate practices that bring balance (joy and justice)
- Examine what comfort means and the privileges of comfort through the lens of disability. Some people have a different baseline and pain can be a constant, be sure explore both physical, mental, and emotional comfort.

Fear of Open Conflict- “people in power are scared of expressed conflict and try to ignore it or run from it.”

Antidotes:

- *Role play ways to handle conflict before conflict happens*
- *Distinguish between being polite and raising hard issues*
- *Don't require those who raise hard issues to raise them in acceptable ways*
- *Once a conflict is resolved, take the opportunity to revisit it and see how it might be handled differently*

Inclusive Practices:

- Integrate [Social Emotional Learning](#) for all- explore language and vocabulary of emotion, personal and group reflection
- Understand conflict cycles, escalation and de-escalation,
- Recognize that conflict can be expansive. Conflict is not necessarily negative.
- Recognize that “behavior is communication.” Behavior is not inherently wrong or bad.
- Normalize multiple ways to communicate to provide avenues for airing of conflicts, disagreements, etc. (one:one, written, group, anonymous)
- Invite feedback on group process in multiple ways and throughout the process
- Utilize personal practices (i.e., mindfulness) to prepare to enter challenging situations so you can be present regardless of what others bring
- Recognize that individual stories are linked to larger social narratives, each of us have home, internal, external experiences and environments that influence our beliefs, behavior. We are all whole beings in each moment experiencing layers of influences.
- Recognize internal conflicts, practice agitating, practice saying no
- Work to create spaces that are safe to share perspectives and difference (which can lead to sharing of harder things)

Individualism- “our cultural assumption that individualism is our cultural story - that we make it on our own (or should), without help, while pulling ourselves up by our own bootstraps.”

Antidotes:

- *Evaluate people based on their ability to delegate to others*
- *Evaluate people based on their ability to work as part of a team to accomplish shared goals*

Inclusive Practices:

- Social Emotional Learning around cooperation
- Scaffold learning of collaborative skills, make explicitly collaborative arts works

- Awareness of [accommodation requests, dynamics, and responsibilities](#)
- Explore where autonomy and agency intersect with teamwork and collaboration
- Explore the dynamics of “helping” and “being helped”
 - Understand that there is a context of the hierarchy of help and explore the power flow
 - Create equitable, mutual, interdependent opportunities for “helping” and “being helped”
 - Celebrate helping and being helped
- Check assumptions about people’s ability to DIY -
 - The internet is not universally accessible
 - Ability to get info quickly is not universal
 - Doing it by yourself is not necessarily the best or most important goal
- Note that things are fluid and change: participation means different things on different days... respect “No,” “pauses,” and “not now”
 - Use no/low pressure approaches
 - Respect each person’s needs

Objectivity- “the belief that there is such a thing as being objective or ‘neutral’

Antidotes:

- *Realize that everybody has a world view and that everybody's worldview affects the way they understand things*
- *Realize this means you too*
- *Push yourself to sit with discomfort when people are expressing themselves in ways which are not familiar to you*
- *Assume that everybody has a valid point and your job is to understand what that point is*

Inclusive Practices:

Prioritize [Social Emotional Learning](#) practices includes self-reflection and learning, as well as supporting skill-building in others.

- Understand that some disabilities can be invisible, especially mental and emotional health disabilities, but having and expressing emotions is not, in itself, a disability.
- Recognize that people's history with their disability and accommodations can contain emotion, and that is fully valid.
- Approach people and the work with strengths-based mindset, curiosity and openness
- Remember that people have capacity for resilience and change
- Acknowledge that people are whole humans
 - Ask partners and participants about emotional vocabulary they already use to check in with each other. If none is currently in use, consider developing one together.
 - Remember that behavior is not the same as emotion, behavior is a mode of communication.
 - Validate emotions and know that no emotions are "bad"
 - Invalidating emotions is harmful and exclusive
- Recognize people are creative, [people are art](#), people are works in progress
- Know that the creative process is inherently non-linear, and includes chaos, emotions, and spirals. There is literally no "objectively right way" to do it.

For Additional Resources:

<https://www.inclusiveartsvermont.org/resources/>