

RADICAL TEACHER

A SOCIALIST, FEMINIST, AND ANTI-RACIST JOURNAL ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF TEACHING

LGBTQ+ Ally Education for Adults with Disabilities

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GRAPHIC FROM THE CENTER FOR INDEPENDENT LIVING

There is a dearth of resources designed to present sex education and/or LGBTQ+ ally education to an audience of developmentally disabled adults. This is a lessons-learned essay in which we describe how we facilitated a Safe Zone workshop to just this audience. SUNY Geneseo's (1) Safe Zone program, the program highlighted in this article, provides on-demand educational workshops that introduce participants to the basics of LGBTQ+ identities. Our campus also partners with a county-run organization, the LIVES program, (2) that brings adults with intellectual and/or other developmental disabilities to our college to develop educational, social and career skills. When the LIVES program made a request for a Safe Zone workshop it revealed a range of challenges and opportunities; we hope other institutions, especially those committed to equity, inclusion, and accessibility in their co-curricular programming will find this account helpful because of the insights we offer around institutional support, inter-unit collaboration, and our commitment to make ally training available to everyone in our community.

Our experience suggests several key insights. First, it revealed both the obstacles and the payoffs of collaboration across academic units and roles; at a relatively small institution like ours, we believe these kinds of alliances are critical to successful diversity and inclusion work. Accomplishing our goal of offering a Safe Zone workshop to the LIVES program required us all to step outside our areas of expertise. Second, we came to more fully embrace the principles behind universal design. As suggested by UDL on Campus, we started with small steps and tight learning goals, involved students in helping drive change, and provided multiple ways for our participants to access the information ("Getting Started" para 3). These ideas encouraged us to create spaces that are innately accessible as opposed to remediating spaces that have already been created. In fact, many of the tools and strategies we ultimately selected in order to adapt the workshop to a new audience not only laid bare our assumption that our usual Safe Zone participant is neurotypical but also demonstrated that even neurotypical folks can benefit from pedagogies that slow down, break things up into smaller pieces, and require more frequent, focused engagement.

What follows is an explanation of the planning process during which we fielded this request, reworked our standard workshop for an audience of developmentally disabled adults, and ultimately facilitated the workshop. The authors include the faculty member whose disciplinary home is an English department and who also coordinates Safe Zone on our campus (Alice - she/her/hers); the Chief Diversity Officer at our institution, who also served as one of the co-facilitators of the workshop (robbie - they/them/theirs); and the other co-facilitator of the workshop, an undergraduate student at the time (Vanessa - she/her/hers), who has since graduated with her B.A. in Psychology.

The choice of the co-authors both to use first names (rather than surnames and honorifics) and to write about our experiences in the first person (both the individual "I" and the collective "we") in the sections that follow are intentional and at the heart of what we see as the key contributions of this article. As to the former choice, both

Alice and robbie have (relatively speaking) consciously-honed, informal personal communication styles that actively welcome collaboration and aim to set aside traditional academic hierarchies. (3) As to the latter point, the social sciences (robbie and Vanessa's disciplinary home) have structures built into teaching and research that encourage and sometimes even expect collaborative scholarship; but the Humanities broadly and - even more precisely - literary studies, Alice's home discipline, "has the most entrenched model of academic authorship - the sole author - yet the discipline rarely reflects critically on the implications of this model" (Leane, Fletcher and Garg 786). By contrast, the discipline that has perhaps theorized and practiced multivocal scholarship most thoroughly is feminist ethnographic writing and we took inspiration from those scholars. For example, anthropologists Mounia El Kotni, Lydia Z. Dixon, and Veronica Miranda write: "co-authorship can be seen as a form of feminist writing and methodology because it challenges entrenched power dynamics, promotes multiple perspectives and experiences, and emphasizes reflexivity. In advancing these claims, [our work aims to] probe what it means to write meaningfully with others" (para 3). In other words, we would like to practice the radical politics of writing collectively while maintaining the specificity of our individual voices.

The article has four parts. The first section offers some context within which to consider education about gender and sexuality that is directed at adults with disabilities. The second section describes the institutional home of our Safe Zone program and the initial handling of the request for the workshop. The third section details the adaptation and facilitation of the workshop itself. The final section offers some thoughts on best practices and lessons learned.

Context: gender and sexuality education for adults with disabilities (robbie)

Commonly, identity-based workshops on college campuses are designed for a broad range of constituents and do not reflect the particular needs of intellectually or developmentally disabled populations. Instead, such programs are often founded on assumptions such as: a shared awareness of social appropriateness, moderate to advanced literacy skills, and the ability to focus one's own attention for significant periods of time. The traditional Safe Zone program curriculum at Geneseo is no different, assuming: participant comfort navigating the social nuances of a conversation about gender and sexuality, relatively high level of participant literacy, and participant ability to meaningfully consider multi-faceted concepts for extended periods of time. When approached with the opportunity to provide a Safe Zone training for students in the LIVES program, we were unsure how to challenge these assumptions and thoughtfully redesign a curriculum that would allow for effective learning opportunities

Our process of navigating this request from LIVES mirrors some of the well-known barriers to sexuality education for people with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. Boehning asserts that sexual education programs for individuals with developmental disabilities are

grossly inadequate, most notably in instances where the curriculum utilizes vague language and euphemisms to broach the subject. The educational needs of participants with developmental disabilities necessitates a more nuanced approach and requires the use of direct and easily accessible language to address concepts. Boehning concludes that individuals with developmental disabilities are “often excluded in the discussion and rarely receive any sex education at all” (60). Our anecdotal understanding that this type of learning opportunity is not readily made available to individuals with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities was what motivated us to accept the request.

There are many societal and institutional barriers to providing education about sexuality and gender to adolescents and adults with intellectual and/or developmental disabilities. These barriers lead many institutions either to not attempt to deliver this education or to not do it well, greatly limiting educational access and the opportunity to further one’s personal understanding and social acceptance (Boehning 60). Here, we have identified three distinct barriers.

1. The first barrier is the long-standing stereotype that people with developmental disabilities are “asexual, childlike and naive” (Wilkenfeld and Ballan 3) and therefore do not have a need to learn about sexuality or sexual orientation (also see Gomez).
2. The influence of parents/caregivers (whose attitudes are shaped by societal norms) in determining what sexuality education individuals with developmental disabilities are afforded (Wilkenfeld and Ballan). There also exists a societal fear that learning about sexuality will *cause* a person with a developmental disability to be abused or become a sex offender (Gomez). The pervasiveness of this fear both societally and in the minds of parents/caregivers can prove to greatly limit access to sexuality education.
3. Finally there is the lack of appropriate curriculum and training resources, trained educators, and institutional support (see Wilkenfeld & Ballan; Boehning; Bazzo et al). In addition, the lack of programming correlates to limited program evaluation data that would be used to inform best practice (Swango-Wilson).

Research concludes that educators’ attitudes towards sexuality education for this community are generally positive but still mixed. They continue to assert that even educators with a positive inclination towards this kind of education often have little experience in tailoring the subject matter to this population and conclude that they are either too unskilled or it would be inappropriate for them in their role (see Aunos & Feldman; Howard-Barr et al). Wilkenfeld & Ballan suggest policy development as a useful method for minimizing the barriers produced by ill-equipped educators and educational systems.

Safe Zone at Geneseo and the LIVES request (Alice)

In order to make a case for the importance of ally training around LGBTQ+ issues -- and also why we were determined to make these benefits available to LIVES students -- it’s helpful to begin by describing the genesis and aims of Safe Zone programs in higher education. The history of Safe Zone programs generally is a bit murky: a number of scholars maintain that the first reference to such a program was in 1992 at Ball State University. Since then, hundreds of colleges and universities have instituted ally programs of different sorts. There is no national organization or certification required to have such a program; however, most Safe Zone programs have a number of elements in common. As described by Kerry Poynter:

The core of Safe Zone programs is a series of educational and self-reflective workshops on various LGBTQIA+ themes and issues. Upon successful completion of the Safe Zone curriculum, participants become members of the Safe Zone program and are able to display a sign outside their office indicating they are allies to the campus LGBTQIA+ community. Public identification of allies encourages dialogue about LGBTQIA+ people (who may not be readily visible) and allows LGBTQIA+ students and others to identify supportive staff and faculty without fear of bullying, retribution, and harassment. (1)

Our program shares these goals. For our standard, three-hour workshop, we inherited the *structure* from the local LGBTQ+ advocacy organization that first trained facilitators on our campus, but all the curriculum has been built in-house by the student trainers and is reviewed at annual facilitator retreats.

There is a growing body of research to suggest that Safe Zone programs have a measurable effect on climate and even student persistence. For example, one study “indicated that those who were both aware of the ally training program and those who had participated in it had more supportive attitudes toward LGBT individuals compared to those who were unfamiliar with the ally training program” (Worthen 363). GLSEN’s (the Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, a non-profit policy, research and advocacy group focused on LGBTQ+ inclusion in K-12 education) annual school climate survey even asks students as a measure of climate if they’d seen Safe Zone stickers in the past year and concludes, “students who had seen a Safe Space sticker or post in their school were more likely to identify school staff who were supportive of LGBTQ students and more likely to feel comfortable talking to school staff about LGBTQ issues” (Kosciw xxiii).

SUNY Geneseo has a Safe Zone program that developed out of a need to build a community of experts on campus and offer allies a visible way to demonstrate their support of LGBTQ+ community members. Our program has over 25 trained facilitators who are pulled not only from faculty and staff ranks but also from the student population. In addition to a range of regularly scheduled workshops

open to the campus community, our program also offers a mechanism by which anyone on campus can request a training for their group of six or more individuals. For example, Geneseo Safe Zone regularly receives requests from sports teams, academic departments, sororities and fraternities, campus offices, standing committees, etc. This mechanism was the way in which we were contacted by the LIVES program. During the 2018-19 academic year, we had 577 unique participants from across all sectors of the college community.

Despite the research that supports the idea that ally education workshops like Safe Zone have an appreciable impact on climate for LGBTQ+ people, there is certainly a critique to be made wherein Safe Zone is inadequate -- in and of itself -- to both anticipate and combat the institutional, structural, and personal challenges that this same community faces, especially at our own institution. For example, the Consortium of Higher Education for LGBT Resource Professionals has a ten-item list of best practices for supporting transgender students. Many of the supports listed we already offer: a clear name-change policy (that does not require legal name change); trans-supportive housing; clear policies for trans students to participate in sports; all-gender restrooms in more than half of campus buildings; and a college nondiscrimination policy that includes "gender identity" as a protected category. We have not met their final two recommendations, however: we do not provide a regular transgender health clinic, nor is there is clear way for trans students to report problems with accessing healthcare. And finally, we do not have any mechanism at all to "create a fair equitable process for hiring, training, and maintaining trans*-identified and trans*-knowledgeable staff in all areas." (4)

Most concerning -- and unrelated to the Consortium's best-practices list -- our administration has consistently refused to support a full-time professional staff position in Student Life to support LGBTQ+ students; since 2015, we have had one such half-time position, but given the position's lack of a living wage, there is constant turnover and there is often not enough support for the individuals who have served in that position. To connect back to Safe Zone, there is certainly a way in which seeing the hallways blanketed in rainbow Safe Zone stickers has offered cover to our institution's refusal to offer substantive, consistent, and ongoing attention and financial support to these issues.

I (Alice) am a faculty member in the English department, so both an initial and continuing challenge is the fact that to do this work (and to describe it in published research) I must work not only outside my specialization but outside my discipline. I designed and now teach, annually, a credit-bearing, academic course under the Women's and Gender Studies prefix that trains students to be facilitators in the program. I coordinate the Safe Zone program on top of my full-time teaching load. In recent years I have begun involving students in the administration of the program in a concrete way. This happens through the "Safe Zone Leadership Program," which I also devised, wherein students who have successfully completed the class can sign up for an internship for academic credit that gives students ownership of various parts of the program. There are a number of reasons for this: most crucially, to

ensure the content and values of the program will actually serve LGBTQ students (and a majority of our student trainers identify in some queer category) so they can shape the direction and curriculum of the program. But the students' level of involvement also provides a high-impact learning experience with an unusually high level of coherence between the curricular and co-curricular aspects of their learning. Finally, it also takes a core component of our program - student leaders acting as facilitators -- and wraps the training of those students into my teaching obligation.

I have a student leader who serves as assistant coordinator of the program; this person does much of the labor of attending to requests when they come in; the requests arrive via a simple web form that is submitted to us electronically. In our weekly meetings, this student leader checks in with me about which facilitators to assign to which training sessions to ensure the best fit both between co-facilitators and between the facilitators and the group being trained. But -- to bring us back to the subject of this essay -- neither the student assistant nor I knew much about the LIVES program and -- though I now realize I should have -- didn't investigate further on receiving their request. The request from the LIVES program did specify, however, that one of the participants in the program was part of the LGBTQ+ community and was hoping for more education for their peers without being singled out. My student coordinator assigned two student facilitators (one of these facilitators was Vanessa, precisely because we knew she had expertise in thinking about accessibility) to the training and let them know they needed to meet with the two graduate students that coordinated the LIVES program. There I thought our role in planning the workshop had ended.

But the student facilitators who had been assigned to the workshop returned upset from the meeting with the LIVES coordinators. First, they were told that not all the participants in the LIVES program could read; in the most basic way, this meant we'd need to modify the standard workshop which literally opens with a written worksheet. Second, they were told by the LIVES coordinators that they were not allowed to use the word "sex" in the training. Our basic workshop includes very little explicit information about sex acts (occasionally it comes up in Q&A but it's not a focus) but in order to comprehensively explain transgender identities we must carefully cover the differences between sex, gender, gender expression, and sexual orientation. (5) Some of these requests, at first glance, seemed like deal-breakers and we weren't sure what to do. I told the students I'd investigate further and get back to them.

Simultaneous to this request I was also teaching the academic course that prepares undergraduates to become facilitators in this program. I described the situation to that group of students and they were outraged; many were concerned for the autonomy of the participants in the program and their access to accurate information about sexuality and sexual health -- these folks were, after all, they pointed out, adults. One student went so far as to say we should refuse to work with LIVES given the conditions that were put on the content. This extreme response, I saw,

was coming from a good place -- the student was idealistic and passionate -- but it also revealed her inexperience: taking that kind of stand would mean the LIVES students would not get the benefit of Safe Zone at all. Her response helped me realize that this group deserved access to the information our program provides; also, I came to see that I simply didn't have all the information needed to understand the modifications they requested. Another student in my class strongly advocated for including the student from the LIVES program (the one who had spurred the request) as part of the planning process; this latter suggestion was both wise and helpful.

So I did what I should have done from the beginning: I gathered together all the stakeholders -- myself, my two undergraduate facilitators, the two LIVES graduate coordinators and the faculty member who advised the LIVES program. And we started over. I asked them to explain their program, its goals, its values, and its participants, to us. Then the student facilitators and I explained the Safe Zone program to them. And it became immediately clear we had plenty of shared goals and that we'd have to compromise very little to design a session that would achieve them. To give just one example (I'd like to leave the rest of the story to Vanessa), I asked explicitly, "I know we cannot use the word 'sex.' Can we say something like 'some people have penises and some people have vaginas?'" And I was told "absolutely."

This was also the point in the process where I reached out to robbie. Not only is robbie a facilitator in our Safe Zone program, they have more experience with teaching group facilitation than anyone I know. They also relish complex conundrums like the one this request posed to us; luckily for everyone involved, they graciously took over as the second facilitator when one of the two students -- in a canny recognition of her own abilities and limits -- stepped aside. We now had not only shared goals and a shared understanding, but we had our dream team of facilitators who could take the project to completion.

Developing and Facilitating the Safe Zone Workshop for LIVES (Vanessa and robbie)

Participation and leadership in the Safe Zone program was a crucial part of my (Vanessa's) academic and personal identity in the second half of my college career. As someone whose first encounter with Safe Zone was as a participant, I was excited to see an announcement that the Safe Zone Train-the-Trainer course was going to be offered -- for the first time -- during the fall of my junior year. I was eager to interview for a slot in the class and even more enthusiastic to be a part of the first cohort of students to receive this kind of training. The announcement of this course came at a perfect time for me. Before the beginning of my sophomore year at Geneseo, I had come out to my parents, which significantly changed the way in which I viewed myself as an activist. At the time I felt as if I had given them news that is considered disappointing in our family and culture overall, which led me to feel bothered and conflicted about my own identities. I love my parents

and felt driven to educate them and others close to me about LGBTQ+ identities. Since I was already aware of the effect the Safe Zone program at Geneseo had in educating allies, I felt compelled to be a part of the network that was improving campus climate for the queer community at the college. After completing the course, Alice offered the opportunity of an internship for the following Spring semester after the course concluded, for which I eagerly signed up. My work as a Safe Zone trainer gradually became more practical and less theoretical in the following months. The Safe Zone Leadership Program gave me, and other trainers who had also become interns, the opportunity to take a closer look at the Safe Zone program and suggest concrete changes to ensure it was accurately representing the needs of students.

Even before we were approached by the LIVES program, I already had a deep interest in issues around supporting and including individuals with disabilities. I met a number of peers with disabilities during my undergraduate career; I was lucky these friends were willing to talk frankly about the challenges posed by inaccessible spaces and policies on our campus. As an able-bodied person, I simply hadn't been aware of the extent to which structures themselves -- whether physical or curricular -- could affect how someone was able to participate and feel welcome. So, as someone who was involved in a range of activist endeavors around other issues, I found myself often reflecting on what I could do within my own sphere of influence. It took understanding these barriers on a painfully practical level to move me forward. For example, before getting started on editing content on our website, I was required to watch a web accessibility training video. The training was highly informative and brought things to my attention that I had not thought about before, such as text and file placement on a page. I started to wonder about the extent to which we'd thought about these issues when in offering Safe Zone workshops. When brainstorming how Safe Zone could be more intentionally intersectional in preparation for a conference presentation, I concluded that accessibility in the context of the program was ensuring that every participant, regardless of ability or identity, could attend a Safe Zone training in a way that was comprehensive and not limited by someone's identity.

For all these reasons, I was thrilled when I was asked to be part of the team that would offer the workshop to the LIVES program. Before this training, I had facilitated a number of our standard workshops: we all follow the 3-hour workshop outline, though within that structure there are opportunities for facilitators to choose the activities with which they feel the most comfortable. However, with the LIVES program, we understood that rather than the *facilitators* generating the plan, it was critical to sit down and discuss the needs of the *program*.

Initially, another veteran trainer and I met with the two graduate students who coordinated LIVES, and had submitted the request form on behalf of their program to discuss what their goals were in having the training administered to them and their students. First, we simply asked about the reason for the request. They described the student in their program who was hoping for more

education for their peers around these issues. In offering a Safe Zone training to the students in their program, they explained, as leaders of the program they hoped to become more knowledgeable and learn how to be a better ally to the student and the LGBTQ+ community overall. They also felt this was a way to offer support to the LGBTQ student without singling them out, since all the students would participate in the workshop in the same way. Out of this discussion arose some conflicts about how certain content would be presented in the workshop. This is when we discovered that talking about sex was prohibited, which raised some concerns for us. After feeling conflicted, we contacted Alice for help, who then planned a meeting with all the relevant stakeholders.

Some of what transpired at this meeting has already been covered by Alice. But at this larger meeting we also specifically asked if we might be able to talk directly to the student who had precipitated the request to begin with. The LIVES coordinators were immediately responsive to this idea, and were optimistic that the student would consent to help. At the meeting with that student, I was extraordinarily concerned and anxious: I didn't want them to feel singled out or that they had to represent the views of all disabled trans people. I relied heavily on robbie to guide the conversation, since their job often entails facilitating difficult conversations. Funnily enough, in discussing it with robbie later, robbie said they relied heavily on the LIVES program coordinators for guidance and assistance given that they were the people who knew the student best. The meeting was a collaborative effort in the best sense of the word and the student was thrilled to be consulted.

Next we got down to planning the nuts-and-bolts of the training, which included accommodating varying literacy levels, breaking complex or theoretical sections into smaller chunks, and making sure we made room for the tangible concerns of the participants. The first thing we (robbie and Vanessa) realized right away is that the labor-intensive part of this training was going to be in the planning. While Alice always requires facilitators to meet in person to plan before any given training, the two of us met more often and for longer than is typical. Our overall ethos was about taking things more slowly and doing even more checking in with participants over the course of the workshop than is usual. Most often these workshops are one three-hour session; for scheduling reasons, the workshop for LIVES was two 90-minute sessions that were scheduled a week apart, and we think that format was especially helpful for this audience, giving them more time to think and process between parts one and two.

The planning of every workshop must begin in the relationship between co-facilitators. While our intention is always to have each co-facilitator play an equal role, we understand that different amounts of power, privilege, and authority can affect how individuals are seen in this situation. Our college's Safe Zone program is configured to emphasize student expertise and leadership and requires that every workshop have at least one student co-facilitator. Faculty and staff who co-facilitate with students are encouraged to mentor and offer support to a student co-facilitator but also to consciously take a step back and let the student take the lead. Research on co-teaching,

however, has shown that imbalances in power don't simply take care of themselves, even with the good will of everyone involved. A.D. Montebianco reminds us that "co-teaching cannot alter the circumstances of a power imbalance" and that "[u]nless these differences are explicitly discussed and intentionally addressed, the less powerful member of the co-teaching team might encounter obstacles" (65, 64).

This ideal, though, is challenging to achieve. I (robbie) would describe myself as a white senior administrator who grew up in a well-resourced family and has a graduate degree. I have extensive experience with social justice education, intergroup dialogue facilitation training, and navigating complex power dynamics where identity is salient. For these reasons I agree with Montebianco when she writes: "It is the responsibility of the higher-status teacher to breach and normalize these discussions early on; with higher-status comes added responsibility" (65). There are a number of strategies I use to balance the power while facilitating: one of these is multipartiality, which is a facilitation strategy for balancing the weight of dominant and counter narratives in facilitative setting. (6) Practically speaking, when I co-facilitate with a student, then, I often make sure that student co-facilitator has more opportunities to speak than I do (acknowledging this can place a burden, I also make sure we talk about fairness). The reason for this is that, anecdotally speaking, I've noticed that if a student and I speak equal amounts, listeners still perceive me to have had a more significant role. I also think carefully about how often to jump into the discussion, keeping in mind the primacy/recency effect.(7)

I (Vanessa) would describe myself as an Afro-Latinx first-generation college student (I graduated with my B.A. in Psychology in 2019). As the first person in my family to attain a bachelor's degree, I found myself highly involved in student leadership and activism. As a result, I pursued many opportunities during my undergraduate career to be a facilitator in multiple spaces for the first time. But all this also means, in the context of the situation described in this essay, I had the least amount of privilege relative to the other organizers and facilitators. In some of my past experiences co-facilitating with faculty or professional staff, I sometimes felt my co-facilitator's job title overshadowed me, making participants eager to hear from them and less interested in what I had to say. On the other hand, to the extent that imbalances in power and privilege can be adjusted for by careful planning, I feel robbie did just that. We spoke frankly about these issues and the way they would affect the division of labor from the very beginning. They (robbie) also had a way of checking in with me once they had made a point, often asking if I had anything to add, that had a real tone of humility in it; I felt they genuinely wanted my input as a fellow expert.

Having given careful consideration to our relationship as co-facilitators and the imbalance in power, we were able to proceed to plan content and delivery. Even basic assumptions about how we begin a workshop were rethought. After the participants are seated in the space, the facilitators generally introduce themselves and then share their pronouns; we then ask the participants to do the same. For even a general-audience Safe Zone, this is meant

to establish asking for and providing pronouns as a new interactional norm. We felt it was important to keep this moment in our introductions, but for this audience we included extra context and explained carefully what pronouns were, so the participants could understand their value. So, for example, robbie said, "I use they/them/theirs pronouns. This means that when you talk about me, or something that's mine, I hope you can use those pronouns. For example, 'They wore their favorite hat'. 'The hat is theirs'."

The first structured activity in our program's workshops is always vocabulary related to human sexual and gender diversity. The learning outcome of this activity is actually *not* what most people would assume: it's great if participants leave the workshop knowing a new word or term, but that's absolutely not the main goal. Instead, it is intended to model that LGBTQ+ issues are topics that can be spoken about openly, both with curiosity and with good intentions. It's also meant to signal right up front that the workshop is structured to be interactive and not a lecture; the interactivity, again, is more important than the content. A participant new to this material, ideally, will emerge with a sense of how to approach this material frankly and respectfully so they can continue learning after the workshop ends.

There are two ways we teach vocabulary in a typical Safe Zone workshop: there is a standard worksheet on which participants match terms with definitions (we ask them to do this in groups and discuss); we also have the same terms and definitions printed on large cards -- then we distribute the terms and definitions around the room and ask people to walk around the room and match them. Any given team of facilitators can choose which is best for their assigned group and there is always the option to add or delete terms. But both versions of this exercise can include up to thirteen different words with definitions that are a sentence or longer. Because we knew a number of our participants couldn't read, and because we wanted to emphasize discussion over "coverage," we had to re-envision the whole exercise. First, we chose to talk about only six terms: "transgender," "gay," "lesbian," "bisexual," "heterosexual," and "ally." We still decided to use the placards version of the activity, because we thought it was more participatory and immediately would get the LIVES students involved. We gave out just the words to different people in the workshop; I (Vanessa) then read the definitions out loud and we asked them to try and match. (When asked, we reminded them verbally about which words they were holding.) It turns out that the LIVES program regularly does a "word of the week" activity, so this pedagogical choice fit well with a structure with which they were already familiar.

Another key feature of the typical Safe Zone workshop is a short video (about eight minutes long) that introduces participants to transgender and nonbinary identities and helps them to learn to distinguish between the categories of sex, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation. The video we use, (8) frankly, even for our usual participants, moves pretty quickly and introduces a wide range of concepts all at once. We suspected that showing the whole video without pausing would be

overwhelming for our participants. So instead we found different sections and topics within that video where we planned to pause the video and actively invite discussion. The way we revised this exercise is a good example of using the principles of universal design. After the LIVES training was completed, we decided participants in our usual trainings would benefit from this strategy as well. Another student trainer developed a detailed script for using the video with instructions about stopping the video up to six times at different points in the video to allow for both the absorption of new information and for discussion.

As a final example, a typical Safe Zone always includes some problems or scenarios that are given to small groups of participants to puzzle out how to respond and put into practice what they've learned. For example, in a training for faculty we might give out a scenario that says "you overhear a student after class say 'that's so gay' in an insulting and dismissive way. What might you do or say in response?" For the LIVES participants we still included this section but planned fewer scenarios to present and we introduced them as role-plays. One of us (robbie or Vanessa) would act out the language or behavior and we asked the students to respond directly to us. The response to this activity amongst the participants was extraordinary, whereas in a typical Safe Zone, participants are generally nervous about how they'll be perceived, reluctant to make themselves vulnerable and anxious about saying the wrong word. Although not every student at the LIVES training participated verbally, those that did were much more willing to express their thoughts and feelings and take risks as compared to the usual participant. We also perceived an incredibly high level of engagement on the faces of those participants who did not contribute verbally. Both of us felt there was *more* conversation and the discussion was *more* wide-ranging than in a typical workshop.

Overall, the workshop for the LIVES program was enormously successful in terms of the participants' high level of engagement and enthusiasm. One element we did not anticipate is how quickly and clearly they would make connections between the treatment LGBTQ+ individuals are often subject to -- hurtful assumptions, harassment, violence -- and the treatment experienced by individuals with disabilities. The participants became particularly fired up when talking about similarities and differences between these two groups and they immediately began thinking out loud about how the two groups could support one another. This was a really long conversation -- longer than we'd planned for that section of the workshop -- and that would probably be our final insight. In a typical Safe Zone training, Alice has it drilled into us that each pair of facilitators needs to agree ahead of time on what to cut if time runs short: again, the goal of the training is modeling and practicing conversation about these difficult issues. This was one of those moments with the LIVES participants: the connections they were making between their own identities and those of other people were profound and moving.

Best Practices/Further Considerations

The first lesson we would emphasize is that when programming for participants with varied accessibility

needs, we had to identify and reconfigure our assumptions repeatedly. While on paper we do serve the entire campus community, in terms of numbers most of our participants are traditionally-aged undergraduate students at our residential, four-year, liberal arts college. That leaves out an enormous number of individuals from the community we live in, and thinking broadly about accessibility has the potential to increase not only how many people we can educate but whether the program itself thoroughly demonstrates our declared value of inclusion.

Second, although the large “intake” meeting was held only to deal with unanticipated misunderstandings about content, it’s clear to us that, ideally, this kind of meeting would *always* take place regardless of who has requested the training. It’s true that our google form asks requestors what, if anything, they would like covered in their workshop; but if the requestor isn’t sure exactly what to expect with the program, and we don’t have a sense of their group’s previous experience with LGBTQ+ issues, it’s difficult to customize trainings effectively. Our program’s current structure, where Alice coordinates the program on top of a full teaching load, and the fact that no facilitators in any category are paid, make this an ideal practice rather than a practical one that is achievable under current circumstances.

This brings up a structural barrier relevant to both equity and labor: while our institutional discourse supports diversity and inclusion generally and Safe Zone explicitly, the program garners little actual support for the faculty member who coordinates the program (she receives neither compensation nor a course release). There is some truth to the idea of the “Ivory Ceiling of Service Work,” in which women faculty spend much longer at the associate professor level because they perform a disproportionate amount of their institution’s service. As Misra, et al. write:

A variety of studies show that men focus more on research than do women. While men are not necessarily more productive than women, they are more protective of their research time. Tenured women, on the other hand, devote more time to teaching, mentoring, and service, and particularly to activities that may be seen as building bridges around the university. Yet, these pursuits hold less value in promotion cases in many institutions (para 5).

Everyone involved in Safe Zone at Geneseo has found that building bridges is the only effective and ethical way to operate. The trainings are opt-in only and the time spent customizing the program to our particular campus is one of its great strengths. But most institutions of higher education have similar siloed financial structures which make collaborations between individuals in Academic Affairs and Student Affairs complex and difficult to accomplish.

While a more logical place to house the program would be somewhere in Student Affairs, current levels of staffing at our institution won’t allow this. In addition, there are some real benefits from the program’s place under the umbrella of Academic Affairs and Alice’s status as a full-time member of the faculty. At our institution there is enormous faculty buy-in to the value of participating in a

Safe Zone workshop and sporting the sticker on one’s office door, and we believe much of that trust comes from the fact that the program is administered by a colleague. Put another way, we came to understand that in order to actually put into practice the principles of access and universal design, you must first learn about your community.

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Notes

1. The State University of New York (SUNY) College at Geneseo (also known as SUNY Geneseo and Geneseo) is part of the SUNY system of 64 public higher education institutions. Geneseo is a liberal arts primarily undergraduate college with approximately 5000 students, approximately half of which are residential.
2. The LIVES Program (Learning Independence, Vocational, and Educational Skills) is a four-year transition program located on the campus of the State University of New York College at Geneseo. The LIVES Program supports students with intellectual and/or other developmental disabilities in developing independence by focusing on vocational, social, and educational skills-building within an inclusive community. Each LIVES student participates in an individualized assessment annually, including career interests, learning styles, social and independent living skills, and academic skills. An individualized plan of study is derived from those assessments as well as other information regarding a student’s goals and needs. Students receive a certificate of completion once they complete their plan of study and their individually designed capstone project. See <https://www.geneseo.edu/lives>
3. We realize this “choice” of informality is a mark of our (Alice and robbie’s) relative privilege at the institution and in the world more generally: we are both white and able-bodied and have titles (tenured faculty member and Chief Diversity Officer, respectively) that confer certain kinds of authority.
4. See <https://www.lgbtcampus.org/suggested-best-practices-for-supporting-trans--students>
5. “Sex” refers to a range of biological components, including but not limited to: genitalia and their functioning, chromosomes, and hormones. It’s important to note there is no medical test for sex. “Gender” refers to an internal sense of one’s

gender which might be binary (“man” or “woman”) or fall outside the binary (e.g. “gender non-conforming”). “Gender expression” refers to how an individual expresses their gender using commonly understood cultural and social cues, like clothing, body language and pronouns. “Sexual orientation” is about whom someone desires erotically.

6. For more information about multipartiality as a framework for co-facilitation, see robbie routenberg, Elizabeth Thompson, and Rhian Waterberg, “When Neutrality is Not Enough: Wrestling with the Challenges of Multipartiality,” in *The Art of Effective Facilitation: Reflections from Social Justice Educators*. Stylus Publishing, 2013. 173-197.
7. This is the idea that when presented with a large amount of information, we tend to best remember those events that happened first (primacy) and those that happened most recently (recency).
8. The video we use was produced by a terrific nonprofit organization in Australia, YGender. We show the “basics” video, but the other videos in the series are also excellent. See <https://www.trans101.org.au/>

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