

“You Keep Using That Word”: Gestural Disruption as Good Vibes in Higher Education

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Abstract

This conversation piece centres around the use of the word disruption in different post-secondary spaces. More specifically, this piece discusses how disruption has impacted the work of inclusion in relation to accessibility, justice, and decolonization, as disruption is a term that is not well defined and yet commonly used in academic discourse. The authors speak to the pedagogical and research impact that gaps in understanding of disruption can and do function as praxis, and how these perforated understandings show up in different spaces in our institutions. The focus of the discussion is to identify spaces where relationality and holistic awareness has been lost and substituted for a feel-good type of disruption framing that does not allow for the needed discomfort or difficulty required for the work of inclusion to happen. Referencing pedagogical guidelines such as Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and current technologies that are prevalent in post-secondary spaces such as large language models (LLMs), the authors challenge readers to imagine what disruption is contextually in their work, beyond just using that word. The piece ends with an encouragement to move beyond symbolic gestures towards accessibility, justice, and decolonization to real change, and the hope that can accompany change in post-secondary spaces.

Keywords: disruption, decolonization, justice, accessibility, praxis

How We Came to Disruption: Academic and Social Locations

Our initial collaboration—and the impetus for this piece—was our experience co-presenting on disruption at a scholarship of teaching and learning conference in 2025 hosted by a university teaching and learning centre. In the instructions provided by the conference organizers, we were told to provide an interactive discussion element for the audience. We organized a synchronous workshop and also provided the participants with asynchronous modalities to engage as well as resources for them to read after the session. The questions that form the organizational subheadings for this paper were those that we asked the audience; our goal was to engage them in their specific disciplinary areas in a way that led to a larger conversation about inclusive pedagogy. We later found out that our session and many other sessions at the conference would provide participants with professional development credits simply by attending and not necessarily synchronously participating in the session. Because of this credit allotment for the conference, engaging with the questions and prompts we provided could be seen as optional, disrupting the very premise of the workshop as designed. This tendency of passive attendance often practiced by participants was unfortunate and runs counter to the principles of scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) such as “grounded in context” and “appropriately public” (Felten, 2013, p. 122). Ironically, our session became sign, signifier, and signified of the failure of disruption as a result of the way the conference was organized and professional development credited to participants.

In an attempt to keep in conversation with SoTL principles, we decided to frame the questions to ourselves and engage with the idea of how disruption is being understood discursively and how it is positioned within higher education discourse. By forming our own responses, we aim to connect concepts of disruption to our own research interests and positionalities since we all have different socio-cultural and disciplinary identities. This paper was written asynchronously across time zones and geographies with different familial, relationship, and community commitments impacting how we sat down to work. It was written in bodies that at times function as we would like them to and at other times behave in ways that are bewildering and painful. It was written (late 2025), and subsequently revised (early 2026), during a geopolitical time that is frightening, abhorrent, and depressing. Good vibes indeed.

How We Came to Disruption: Academic and Social Locations

Ann: Disruption as a part of teaching and learning discourse is not new, and, in fact, is becoming more common especially since the pandemic where disruption became synonymous with new educational strategies (Samuel, 2022; Motala & Menon, 2022). Every time there is a new delivery modality, like emergency remote teaching at the beginning of the COVID pandemic, or a new technology, like large language models and different generative artificial intelligence tools, the word “disruption” appears in higher education (Higher Ed) dailies and conference themes. As Samuel (2022) suggested, “postgraduate education is disruptive, not in a violent sense, but in the sense that it explores working outside of one’s comfort zones” (p. 118) but ultimately is a place of empowerment where faculty can work towards social justice principles through disrupting norms. This use of disruption often suggests changes on the horizon: that pedagogies will be questioned and that assessment design strategies will need to

be modified. Disruption also tends to appear not because it was called in, but rather because it was applied in systems and institutions without consultation or without choice. Though Connell (2014) suggested that disruptive pedagogues should be guided through relationality—“*start learning* [emphasis in original] in new ways, and in new relationships” (p. 219)—there is, in fact, currently no relational element in disruption; disruption is the antonym to relational, where words become empty signifiers (Riddle & Hickey, 2023).

This same lack of relationality and absence of holistic awareness happens in conversations connected to inclusion systemically and institutionally. These relational gaps lead to more isolation and even more inequitable policies, procedures, and systems. We saw the use of disruption as a concept in our own pedagogical and research areas, and the subsequent conversations led to seeing the affinities in the spaces we are in even though we embody different positionalities in academic space.

Social Locations

Ann: I am ironically writing this social location statement while my body is actually engaging in a full-on disruption of my day through urticarias and numbness. I am a queer disabled woman of French-Canadian and Italian background. My disabilities are dynamic in that they choose to disrupt without notice. My socio-cultural location, as someone raised as working class and who gained middle-class status through education, was done through a disruption of expectations of class and geography as a first-generation university student. Now this disruption extends to the work that I do in accessible pedagogy where access frictions are real for both the teaching teams and the students.

Nicole: I am in the quagmire of simultaneously parenting small humans, beginning my academic career (while being well into my teaching career), and completing my PhD. I'm in the first generation of my immediate family to complete university and graduate studies. My family is Germanic diaspora from Czechia and Russia who settled and farmed in the Canadian prairies, either receiving land from the government or working on others' land. Most of my career has been in education but inside prisons, where people have very little access to opportunities to learn and few supports upon release. This work and advocacy has shaped my perceptions of who “gets” to belong in society, and I am incredibly aware that my and my family's social location is one of immense privilege, despite the struggles they have historically faced.

Danielle: I am the child and great grandchild of immigrants from Europe. I am the first in my family to complete a university degree. I am completing my PhD while also working because no one gets a break from capitalism. My dissertation research focuses on settler colonialism in the Alberta K-12 context, but I have also published on Indigenization and disability in higher education. My body is both disruptive and disrupting. Because it is a disabled body, it disrupts the settler nation state's norm of a “normal body,” a desired body, and, fundamentally, a body that belongs. But at the same time, the dynamic/chronic illness I have disrupts me from doing the things I want to do when I want to do them.

How Do You Define Disruption?

Danielle: I am a proponent of starting with dictionary definitions of words. The definition of *disruption* offered by the *Oxford English Dictionary* (n.d.) is “the action of rendering or bursting asunder,” a “violent dissolution of continuity,” and a “forcible severance.” Although the OED provides the etymology of the words defined within, the broader meaning of words as they are used is sometimes lost. I would argue that, in the context of higher education, disruption is neither implicitly nor explicitly violent. At best, it is a mild inconvenience.

Nicole: Definitely. The idea of disruption in Higher Ed as being a mild inconvenience really resonates with me. It makes me think about who is currently allowed to be here and how their presence can be made to be more palatable to those who were always in Higher Ed. Things, people, ideas are allowed when they do not cause or demand structural change.

Ann: I am also an etymology human. In fact, that was something that was brought into my writing praxis from my dissertation supervisor many years ago. I think it was ironically his way of making me think about the history of the word in the hopes that I would get to theory that way, since I was not a theory person innately but rather more of a pedagogical application person.

“Disruption” etymologically comes from the Medieval Latin, and it originally referred to a medical laceration; disruption was literally about breaking tissues apart (Etymology Online, n.d.). So when I think about this in relation to Higher Ed and what you are saying in relation to inconvenience, academic spaces are literally seeing their tissue being broken apart, and often the first areas that feel that tissue breaking are those where the research and pedagogy are related to any kind of inclusion or equity. There has been a “forcible severance,” as the definition notes, and an active refusal to see the need for a holistic view of how our research and pedagogies work together.

Nicole: Thank you for that incredibly graphic visualization of laceration and breaking tissues apart, Ann. It reminds me that when tissues are medically separated, they are also medically sutured back together, hopefully in new and healthier, or more functional, ways.

Danielle: Continuing the metaphors of laceration and suturing from Ann and Nicole, Higher Ed needs something more than simply being sewn back together. The disruption within Higher Ed should come from an ontoepistemological and axiological skin graft: ideas from outside the academic status quo (healthy donor tissue) are stitched into the norms of Higher Ed (the injured existing tissue); this integration yields a site that looks different from the original (scars and/or scarred tissue) while simultaneously telling a story about that change.

How are Integration and Disruption Connected? What About the Idea of Belonging?

Ann: This refusal to hold things together in holistic ways or interdependent ways (Sins Invalid, n.d.), to use disability justice principle framing, creates trickle-down inequities (Martin, 2025). This is why this belonging discourse so prevalent in Higher Ed right now just does not work. The question of who belongs, or whose educational spaces are open to others, is deeply predetermined by the systems and policies that reinforce a certain kind of learner, a certain kind

of faculty member, a certain kind of staff member. We can't have a conversation about disruption in the ways the systems define it while also using belonging as a tag line in institutional marketing. I know that ideally the plan is that more disruption will lead to more belonging, but because the disruption being proposed is a mild inconvenience, as we have noted previously, that brochure belonging will not happen and what will remain is a highly curated version of diversity. I have seen this curatorial diversity talked about so much in different places in a very Noah's Ark sort of way: Places demonstrate inclusive success as "we have one Black person, one Indigenous person, one Queer person, one disabled person in our office" like it's diversity bingo.

Nicole: Diversity bingo, or curated diversity, as you have aptly described, Ann, also continues to position folks in those "other" categories as exceptions. The default student, faculty, and staff member remains, and any additional needs that might be required by diverse folk are viewed as "nice to have, if we have time and resources." Increasingly, we see a movement towards "inclusion helps everyone." I'm not convinced that that actually succeeds in increasing belonging, inclusion, and equity.

What Happens With One-Size-Fits-All Inclusion and Equity?

Ann: This one-of-each type of thinking noted in relation to belonging is also part of one-size-fits-all inclusion that I see a lot in relation to Universal Design for Learning (UDL; Centre for Applied Special Technology [CAST], 2024b) conversations. Basically, I would love for discussions about inclusive design to be more representative of intersectional inclusion and not just a conversation about UDL, as though that is the one and only way to make accessible pedagogy a praxis. Sadly, we tend to see this a lot in the SoTL literature that relates to UDL (see the conversation between Boysen [2024] and Edyburn [2024]), in that there is a hesitancy to move away from the exact UDL guideline language as noted by CAST. CAST did try to help change the kinds of conversations that were being had about UDL with the 3.0 guidelines released in July 2024 (CAST, 2024a) by adding more EDI-type framing, flagging the resources that informed those changes, and using "considerations" as the 3.0 language as opposed to "checkpoints" they used in the 2.2 version. But what remains is this belief that UDL is a route for inclusion "for all" which will probably not go away until CAST changes its slogan from "until learning has no limits" to something else less monolithically aspirational.

The slogan does a kind of heavy lifting that could be appealing to a K-12 teaching audience because K-12 educators have a lot of "belongingness" metrics to meet in different boards and districts and that "for all" discourse becomes a real statistical target where they are. However, what the "for all" does in Higher Ed research and pedagogy is that it suggests that a UDL approach is one-size-fits-all that erases the deeply contextual at colleges and universities. The contexts I am referencing here are learning outcomes, the context of disciplines, the context of student demographics, and the context of pedagogical modalities of delivery such as on-campus, online, hybrid/blended, or experiential learning.

Danielle: So, what you're saying, Ann, is that a one-size-fits-all approach to inclusion and equity, as it is currently mobilized in Higher Ed institutions, is both incapable of doing what

is needed while also failing at what it is doing currently (e.g., Rankin et al., 2022; Todorova, 2024), correct?

Ann: Yes, definitely, Danielle. I think this one-size-fits-all modality is motivated by a neoliberal at scale and thus a more capitalistic view of education, one that values the credential or piece of paper over the process or the learning that is needed on one's way towards the piece of paper. It, in fact, sort of gestures towards the possibility of disruption but simultaneously demonstrates the impossibility of it in the systems we currently have in place.

Nicole: For me, UDL represents a starting point for good pedagogy but (intentionally?) misses the nuances of the teaching and learning context. For example, the way I approach each course changes based on the topic, the students, the level, and the modality. Using UDL principles is the least we can do, and its framing as the ultimate answer to instruction in Higher Ed is troubling to me. I remain unconvinced that universally designed instruction is a "feasible goal" (Anastasiou et al., 2024. p. 150).

Ann: Nicole, I agree, and I think that what you are getting at, as Danielle and I are stating as well, is that it is the universality aspect that is the problem, that we cannot define things as disruption while also trying to be universal. That is not how disruption works.

How Can Disruption Function as Praxis?

Nicole: When I reflect on concepts of who/what can belong in Higher Ed and how disruption is viewed as permitting space for minor inconveniences, it makes me think about how we view issues as individualized instead of systemic. For example, the accommodation process that is common among universities tends to take each student separately and manages the minor inconvenience of their presence in a classroom with standardized letters that direct the instructor to provide extra exam time or post slides early. When we view issues as individualized instead of systemic, we can avoid the larger role that systemic failures have in perpetuating inequalities. Similarly, if we focus on an individual, helping them to fit in or participate in Higher Ed, we do not often have time to attempt to disrupt the system to make it more accepting and accessible to folks of all kinds.

By focusing on individual transformation, we are distracting ourselves from the true work of disruption. It will never bring about meaningful change. It also distracts us from the role that we have in the system and from confronting our reliance on the very system we are attempting to disrupt. Focusing on the individual is certainly easier, but it maintains, upholds, and strengthens the status quo.

It's Good Vibes Disruption—we feel good because we helped certain people fit in, under certain conditions.

I think we should attempt to return to the original etymology of disruption: a forcible severance from the status quo. It should not be comfortable, especially not for the people who benefit from the status quo (myself/ourselves? included).

Ann: As well, some of the reasons that it is impossible to see disruption in accessible pedagogy land is because the teaching team already see accessible pedagogy as disruption, much in the good vibes comfortable way that Nicole has just flagged. In fact, most teaching teams will do whatever it takes to *not* disrupt the status quo, to *not* disrupt what they feel are “regular time flows” in a semester, and to *not* change any assessment or activity design. So the way we get to disruption as praxis in an inclusive productive way is to get teaching teams to see the iterative nature of pedagogy as both foundational and positive. Engage with learners in a way that acknowledges their lived experiences and knowledges that they bring to a space as opposed to prioritizing the design for a module or lesson. For instance, when a good conversation happens that is “off-script” or a learner may need to engage with something in a different modality—video instead of text, for example—that should be welcomed and not feared.

Nicole: These things are so hard to do in 90-minute blocks, twice a week, or however your Higher Ed institution does timetabling. That said, I don’t want a switch to turn on and off: “Now is the time for praxis and disruption.” “Class is over. Time for your next one.” Disruption inside tiny, institutionally designated boxes isn’t disruption.

Danielle: I think the challenge for us rests in the interplay between individual action and systemic change: we are limited in what we can do because we only have so much time (we do not have the same 24 hours a day) and so much capacity. That doesn’t mean we do nothing but rather that we acknowledge there are limits to our praxis. At the same time, we can always dream about what a better world will look like.

What Can Dreaming Look Like in Higher Ed?

Ann: I love that I came to this prompt in the manuscript and I was like, “oh this is probably where we need to chat with each other about what we dream for the future.” And funnily enough, the only thing I could think of when it comes to “dreaming” currently is all the use of the word “speculative” in the pedagogy and research discourse around Generative AI use and a future filled with large language models. And it is funny to me because they are asking folk to “dream big” or as the Federation of Humanities and Social Sciences asks of us, to do some “Big Thinking.” But so many folks are having a difficult time with generative AI in our educational spaces because none of the decisions to bring it in, nor to engage with it in our institutions, have been inclusive decisions. It has been on the assumption that GenAI is what needs to be used in the workforce going forward, and somehow we need to train or prepare learners to use these tools.

However, what are never part of these conversations are the accessibility and inclusion parameters of these tools. And yes, finally, the Government of Canada (2025) through Accessibility Standards Canada has released the *Accessible and Equitable Artificial Intelligence Systems Standard*, but it is still really hard for me to dream or speculate about a future that includes technologies that were not designed with accessibility as foundational. This is because, yes, in some ways these systems can support disabled folks, as in the use of assistive technology. But for the most part, the discourse is mainly “disability diversion” as Williams (2025) refers to it, where that same “for all” narrative we saw with UDL is used to sell generative AI to the masses as an apparent net good, which of course it isn’t because most of these tools

do not pass even basic digital accessibility standards. The disruption through technology continues to disrupt disabled lives by giving access to selective users in exchange for their data. This is a strong endorsement for folks to read Williams' book.

Danielle: I wish I had something more eloquent to say, but I am fundamentally exhausted by AI—or perhaps more accurately, large language models (LLMs). There is so much discourse around what LLMs will be able to do when so many refuse to look at the harms they are currently enacting. For instance, Rus and Kendeou (2025) argued that LLMs are harmful for learning because they take away “productive struggle” and eliminate the ability of learners to gain mastery on a topic. From an environmental standpoint, as van der Ven and colleagues (2024) have noted, the power needed to run GenAI data centres and the raw materials required to create them result in significant environmental emissions. In other words, they're not great for learning and not great for the environment, so we need to jump on them really, really, really fast because why? As Stasiewicz (2025) more eloquently noted, pedagogical integrity must be considered as part of the GenAI conversation: in my experience it often is not.

Nicole: I agree with you both. The constant discussion on AI and large language models has me wishing for some kind of real talk. Almost like the surface-level texts that they create, I find that many of the conversations about the utility of these models in Higher Ed leaves me wanting a deeper discussion. Ironically, as I type this, the Google Doc has given me a prompt from Gemini: “In Guided Learning, Gemini helps you build a deep understanding instead of only giving answers.” I don't think LLMs are capable of critical thought, and I am left thinking that perhaps this is what is problematic about the current discourse in Higher Ed: the search for the easy answer, the quickest and least systematically disruptive way to do inclusion, education, Indigenization, or all the things. It is used to simulate deep understanding of the issues, then write about the response in a few pages in an annual report or strategic plan (of course, in a language style that could have been AI-generated).

Danielle: In returning to our discussion, perhaps “dreaming” was not quite the right word for us to use. In hindsight, it seems too loaded, too problematic: dreaming maintains social spaces (i.e., field [Bourdieu, 1983/1986]) and social structures (i.e., habitus [Bourdieu, 1977/1979]). It is safer to dream, because what exists is not challenged: action is not required.

What Would a Truly Accessible and Inclusion-Forward Institution Look or Function Like?

Ann: This is honestly such a difficult question because I do not want to spend time saying it is only one thing when I have spent so much time in this discussion previously saying that we need to be okay with the iterative of accessible pedagogy. And maybe honestly that is it: accessible and inclusive-forward institutions, with accessible pedagogy, and accessible technologies, and inclusive practices, are pliable. They are pliable in a way that they could never even dream of currently. Because currently, the system says one's accommodations are for the year and they cannot change, and they exist on the assumption that folks will need the exact same accommodations in the exact same way for every class and for every week. And humans do not work like that. Humans, especially disabled humans like myself, have dynamic disabilities (Benness, 2019).

As a case in point, this week, as I tried so hard to find time to write part of this manuscript, I had bad basilar migraines, which means that I lost sight in my left eye and couldn't see screens for much of the week. Are the accommodation systems and the pedagogical design of courses set up for such situations? Absolutely not. In fact, Danielle texted me and said, "please do not spend time on the manuscript today if you have a migraine." And this also demonstrates how often care in academic spaces comes from the people who are part of your community, even if it is across miles and across institutions. So what we need is a revisiting of the system, a disruption of the systems that basically acknowledges that human disruption is the norm, and not just for disabled folks. Courses, assessments, and activities that are designed using an accessible pedagogy framework recognize the deep need for flexibility and have designed other ways to engage or other ways to scaffold in a way that still allows for essential outcomes, core goals, and even accredited skills in professional degrees to be met.

Nicole: So, a truly accessible institution is pliable. It fits the needs of the humans as their needs change. This reminds me of the saying, "Do not let your pedagogy be determined by your LMS (learning management system)"; that is much less eloquent than I remember it being.

Ann: Nicole, this is so true in the world we are in right now. Often the EdTech is leading in spaces where pedagogy should be informing choices and not the other way around. That deterministic nature of decision making that we see in academe is very colonial and one of the reasons why disruption is not taken as a systemic possibility outside of language.

What Would a Truly Decolonial Institution Look or Function Like?

Nicole: This is always an interesting question to me, because our institutions are so deeply colonial that I'm not sure I can imagine a truly decolonial institution.

Ann: I agree, Nicole. I think most of what I see that falls under the broad banner of "decolonial" in institutions is actually just the equivalent of adding more representation in terms of texts or resources that speak to Indigenous knowledges. I remember at a previous institution where I worked, I had a colleague who called that "Shake and Bake inclusion": the idea is you could add a bit of Indigenous texts to a course, shake it around and, voilà, decolonized course! But, of course, that is not how it works.

Nicole: I've heard the same, describing Indigenizing curriculum as sprinkling some spices on top of the existing reading list. Decolonization as exotic seasoning for academic appetites.

Danielle: A truly decolonial institution would likely not resemble any of the institutions that we are familiar with today. If we consider the work of Tuck and Yang (2012), decolonial work must have two primary goals. First, decolonial work must disrupt existing social structures; these structures, within the Canadian context, are always-already settler colonial. Second, decolonization must also be committed to #LandBack, or the movement that advocates for the return of Indigenous lands and the recognition of Indigenous sovereignty and land stewardship. A decolonial institution would therefore need to exist in opposition to the Canadian nation-state and its affiliated institutions. Regardless of whether these institutions are repressive state apparatuses (e.g., policing, military) or ideological state apparatuses (e.g., schools, legal

system, media), Canadian institutions function to maintain the social order (Althusser, 1970/2014), and the social order is based on settler colonialism.

One thing I have heard over the years—and echoing what Ann just wrote—is that adding Indigenous content to courses is a form of decolonization. I disagree: it is a form of inclusion (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Although Indigenous content does push back on the norms of Eurocentrism, whiteness, and settler colonialism, it can only challenge the perceptions and understandings of the reader: the structures remain intact. Indigenous content does not change how the course is delivered, how many weeks the course is (could you even imagine a course that considered crip time? [Samuels, 2017]), how it contributes to a student's GPA, or how the course's tuition is connected to the university's bottom line. It certainly does not consider Indigenous sovereignty or land stewardship, even if those topics are included in some of the readings in the syllabus. This isn't to say that the inclusion of Indigenous content is bad: as recent work by Jaber et. al (2024) has indicated, the inclusion of Indigenous pedagogies in social work education positively impacted student interest, engagement, and learning as well as offering students better understanding of how to build respectful relationships and awareness of Indigenous ontoepistemologies. Despite these benefits, the inclusion of Indigenous content can only do so much in the settler colonial system it exists within.

Ann: This has me thinking about if inclusion, as you note here, Danielle, in different disciplines is their earnest attempt at equity. It is disruption without geographical awareness, which ignores the insight, knowledge, and feedback given about how to build more just spaces.

What Would a Truly Just Institution Look or Function Like?

Nicole: Along the same lines, a truly just institution would look completely different. If it's even possible, that is. I found myself wondering (as I read your previous responses) if these are the right questions to ask? Since a truly just, accessible, and decolonial institution would mean the dissolution of everything we know about Higher Ed—a true disruption or breaking apart—we, as beneficiaries of the current system, are at a crossroads.

We see the problems, we acknowledge the need for change, but can we do that while ensuring our own self-preservation? If I help to destroy the system, what does that mean for us?

Danielle: I agree, Nicole, that there are significant barriers to the creation of a truly just institution because of what you've noted, but I think there is an additional reason: access friction. In her podcast, Ann explained access friction as the "situations where providing accessibility supports in certain ways to one person can in turn create accessibility barriers to another" (Gagné, 2024, 00:01:17–00:01:25). I am not sure that we can wholly eliminate access friction in Higher Ed. But maybe I am confusing the idea of "perfect" with "truly just." Ann, would you care to add your thoughts?

Ann: That's a good point. I think that one of the things we need to take into account with a question like this is "just for whom?" Because a lot of the policies and guidance in institutional spaces that are supposedly there to support a just space are student-focused and seems to forget that teaching teams made up of professors, sessional instructors, teaching assistants,

and marker/graders, for example, also deserve justice. Teaching teams have their own access needs that are not taken into account: in the eyes of the institution, teaching teams cannot have accessibility needs, or at least there is no space for their accessibility needs as well. This is why I get a bit annoyed when folk throw the term “disability justice” around in an attempt to make it seem like the systems know that disability justice is needed in an inclusive space. However, what that does is fail to acknowledge the origins of disability justice principles with Sins Invalid (n.d), a group of Queer BIPOC disabled folk, and that the eighth principle of interdependence specifically notes that “state solutions inevitably extend into further control over lives” (Sins Invalid, n.d., para. 8). Thus, disability justice is really, as Nicole says above, impossible to gain in an institutional space of hyper-control.

Conclusion: What’s Next; How Do We Disrupt Good Vibes Only?

Nicole: And now I ask the question that is asked in every Higher Ed circle to make people roll their eyes and groan. Why does this struggle matter then, if it is impossible? What is our endgame? What’s the point? If these truly inclusive, decolonial, and just institutions are impossible, what are we even doing?

Because Higher Ed institutions exist inside colonial capitalist society, attempts to disrupt and create a just institution inside an unjust society wane. Views on disruption become weaker, thinned out, and individualized. As definitions of disruption become watered down, disruption is equated with individual transformation: helping someone integrate into Higher Ed and “pass” as someone who “belongs here,” helping someone fit the mould of Higher Ed instead of breaking the mould. This is justice work, just not incredibly disruptive justice work. However, I do think that it is important and worthwhile work.

Ann: I agree with everything you are saying, Nicole; it is so difficult to do the work from the inside, but in fact, it is probably easier to do that work from the inside because we see how the systems work and where our perspectives can fit in those gaps. This has me thinking about this summer where someone I had just met asked me, “why should people care about accessibility?” And I honestly didn’t have a good answer to that besides the answer that I often give, which is, “it is important because don’t we all want to be ethical humans?” And the person started to laugh and said, “actually I think very few people actually want to be ethical humans.” And that is sadly the real truth, isn’t it? The only way folk tend to start caring about accessibility is if you remind them that one day they too will be disabled if they live long enough. The only way we get folk to care about justice is when any kind of injustice has happened to them personally or to the people they care about. They start to care when their good vibes have been disrupted, you know? And this has me thinking about the work that Danielle does because that is often seen by others as work that is deeply tied to positionality, and so getting others to care enough to disrupt the colonial vibes that allows post-secondary to exist is a lot. Pedagogically, we say that the way to engage learners is to find some commonality or to allow the learners to bring their authentic experience to their learning in an applicable way. Is that the real disruption we need? A disruption that is not gestural in that it acknowledges everyone’s lived experiences.

Danielle: I’m going to return to the idea of disruption as a violent dissolution of continuity: true disruption requires a change that not all people want and not all people are

ready for. Calls to burn it all down—if the “it” is the institution or something else—are seen as inappropriate because there is too much change being called for. But I want to lean into some song lyrics from a band called Dead Pioneers (2023): “even those that want to burn everything down / Must have some hope tho, right?”

Real disruption is hopeful. It is an aspiration for something better than what currently is.

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