

I believe that everyone can learn. Furthermore, I believe that learning is a universal joy; the desire to expand our understanding is part of human nature. However, not everyone professes to love learning. That's because how we teach can get in the way. I believe that student affairs educators in higher education can play a crucial role in "clearing the path" for students' sense of curiosity to take a front seat in the college experience.

So how can we act as student affairs educators to give each student access to the universal joy of learning at our various institutions of postsecondary education?

First, **we must destigmatize the act of needing support.** No person is an island. The act of asking for help must be recontextualized from an admission of weakness to an acceptance of teamwork and interrelation. The most productive person is only the most productive when supported. Asking for help, put another way, is neither giving up on yourself nor completely ceding responsibility to others. Thinking of providing support in such a black and white manner creates an unproductive learning environment for all. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in their publication *Disability, Work and Inclusion: Mainstreaming in All Policies and Practices* emphasized, "Individualised, targeted approaches are key but they are key for everyone who needs support; mainstreaming and individualised targeting must therefore go hand in hand" (OECD, 2022, 16). In other words, everyone has "access needs"—not just disabled learners. One learner's access need can be needing an elevator to access spaces beyond the ground floor. That learner could be a wheelchair user—or the learner is the only caregiver for an infant who is transported via a stroller. This may be something that is considered under the umbrella of "inclusive spaces" or "universal design," but so many more things are access needs. A parking spot near campus is an access need. Having the lights on during a lecture is an access need. Sitting at a desk instead of being told to stand during class is

an access need. When everyone is understood to have access needs, the practice of working for those needs to be met, whether through access-centered support offices or through building inclusion and inviting learning environments, is rightfully seen as natural. When one's needs are not merely *accommodated* as an exception to an imagined ideal bodymind but viewed as unimaginable *not* to support, learning can be accessed without extraneous stress getting in the way of joy.

Secondly, **we must validate learners' pre-existing knowledge.** No one can know everything, but everyone is knowledgeable about at least one thing: *themselves*. This self-knowledge, metacognition, is the trail through which myriad paths to learners' goals can be traveled. Some learners have had experiences in classroom settings where they acquired a low sense of self-efficacy: a belief, for example, that they are not "college-material." However, not even the forefather of social constructivist theory, one of the seminal figures in psychology, Lev Vygotsky, saw learning as a monolith. When he articulated his Zone of Proximal Development theory, which emphasizes that learning must be targeted between a learner's ability to do a task independently and a learner's ability to do that task with a teacher or more-experienced peer, Vygotsky declared, "Learning is more than the acquisition of the ability to think; it is the acquisition of many specialized abilities for thinking about a variety of things" (Vygotsky, 1978, 83). When learners see themselves as piloting their own learning journeys, they are empowered to enjoy the experience.

Thirdly, **we must celebrate and investigate all parts of learners' identities.** Learners enter our lecture halls, auditoriums, Canvas pages, Zoom meetings, and all the offices and services of the system of higher education not as carbon copies of each other but with unique histories, philosophies, and goals. Their experiences are shaped both by who they believe

themselves to be and what others, from their families and friends to people of political power, have told them they are. For some learners, the space between their internal identities and external identities is small. For others, it is a chasm. In her research of disability cultural centers at higher education institutions, Toni Saia characterizes the prevailing idea about disability in U.S. higher education as legal entity to be managed, rather than a legitimate part of a person's identity to be honored (Saia, 2022, 19). No one's identity is something they learn "despite." How we learn and why we learn is always "because" of our identities. All students deserve the opportunity to view those identities as valuable subjects of scholarly consideration. To ignore or, worse, *disparage* those identities is to strip the purpose from learning, rendering it joyless.

By first destigmatizing the process of support-seeking, next validating pre-existing knowledge, then celebrating all parts of learners' identities as they gain new knowledge, we student affairs educators can be student-centered in our practice, regardless of who those students are. Universal design is good design.