

Disabling Environments in Higher Education

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What are we going to do here?

Skip Stahl suggests it's the textbooks that are disabled, not the students.

We're going to explore the hypothesis that other elements of higher education instruction might also be disabled, or disabling.

We're going to examine the ecology of the institution to see what aspects of it might present barriers to learning.

Instruction in Higher Education: Why do we do what we do?

Tradition

Convenience

Necessity

Preference

Cost

Aesthetics

Efficiency

The way we've always done it

Have to

It works [does it?]

It's good enough

Can't do what would be better – not enough time, resources, demand

Ecological perspective: We adapt to our environment and to our experience in it.

Ecologists look at behavior, organisms, characteristics, and asks WHY?

A curious teacher, engineer, designer asks HOW ELSE COULD IT BE?

In architecture, tradition was: stairs, heavy doors, door knobs, bathtubs
ADA and access not for some, but for all. The appropriate measure is everyone
can use the facility or equipment. Not just can use, but do use.

What is access in higher education? Instruction designed so that everyone can
learn. The appropriate measure? Everyone does learn.

So, from an ecological perspective, what are the barriers to learning in our
courses? Why don't all students learn?

Why are the barriers there

What can we change?

What are the sources of information we have?

What we know, collectively.

Accommodations required

Student views

Ecology: Organism adapting to environment

What skills are selected for in higher education? Why?

How useful are those skills in other ecosystems, such as

Work

Play

Creative activities

Life

OK, Let's look for disabling aspects of the higher education environment.

Ecologists use a tool familiar to anyone who lives with or works with
preschoolers: the WHY?

Teaching practices What? and Why?

Accommodations What? and Why?

Disabilities What? And Why?

Abilities

Goal:

Work-arounds: practices designed to promote learning in spite of the limitations imposed by the ecology of the institution.

Hunch: the Work-arounds will be familiar UDL practices.

Let's work through a couple of examples, and then choose some others to explore.

ASL Interpreter: Why?

Deaf or Hard of Hearing

Why else? Instructor doesn't know ASL Instructor is disabled in a Deaf environment

Lecture Why?

What else could the lecturer do?

Notetaker: Why?

Can't listen and write at same time, or write in organized fashion.

Why else?

No written transcript or notes provided. Why? Lecture not prepared in advance.

Lecture disorganized

No audio or video record to review.

But why is there a lecture at all? Why not dialogue? Demonstration? How else could information, opinion, viewpoints, stories be presented?

Extra time on exams: Why?

Student too slow? Time too short.

Why is time too short? Ecosystem organized around class periods. The room will be occupied by the next class. Tight schedule. Why?

Why assess learning with exam? How else could learning be demonstrated?

Take home exam

On line

Continued next period

Is speed a virtue, to be graded?

What else shall we explore?

Audio books; scanning for reader:

Exam proctoring center:

Alternative to Multiple Choice Exams:

Tutoring: