Anti-Ableism in Teaching & Research

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Lecture for **Introducing Critical Disability Studies: Indian Contexts, Global Perspectives**

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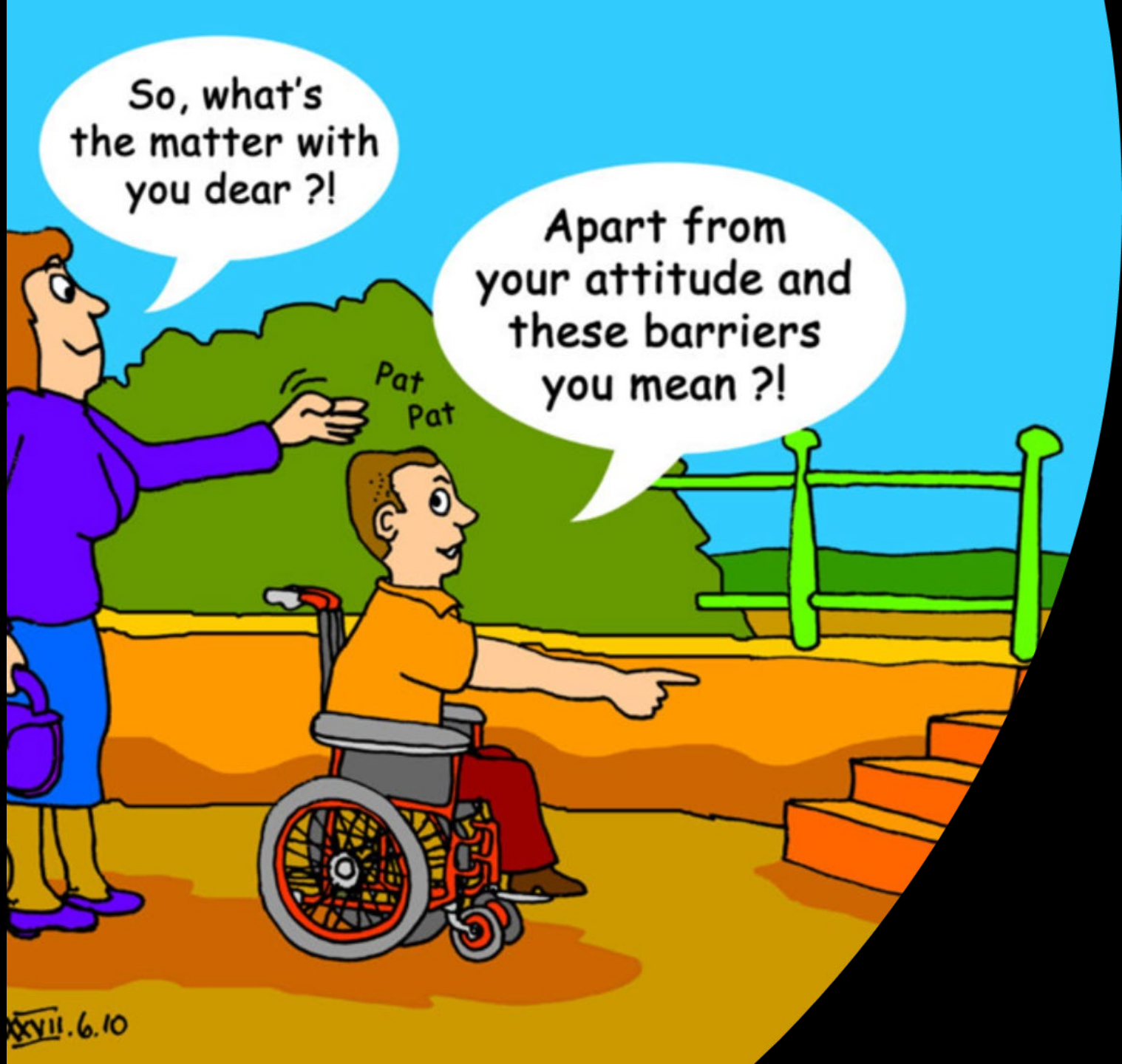


Some Key Questions We Will Consider Today:

- Who is the University designed for (and who is left out)? Or, put differently, who is the desired individual of the University?
- Who feels ‘safe’ and a sense of belonging in the University (and who does not)?
- How can we re-imagine the University to become inclusive of everyone or, put differently, what does the anti-ableist University look/feel/sound/is like?

What comes to your mind when you hear the word ‘access’?

Frame/ing Access

Common Approaches

- Access as a(n individual's) 'problem' in need of fixing
- Access as a technical matter
- Access as an afterthought ('retrofitting')
- Access as an one-size fits all

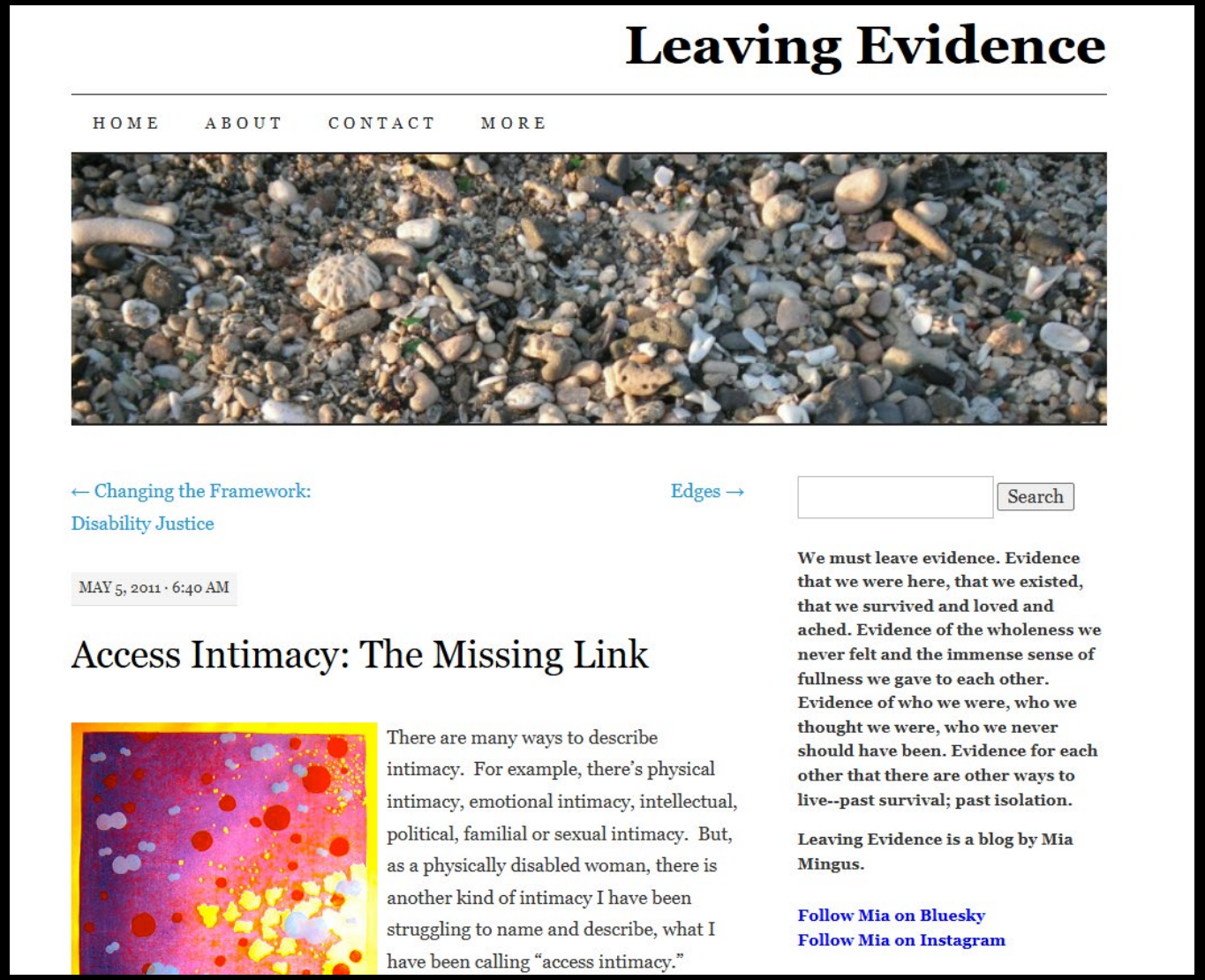
An Anti-Ableist Approach

- Access' disruptive potential
- Access as a social justice matter
- Access as a starting point
- Access as an intersectional matter

Access Intimacy

Access intimacy is that elusive, hard to describe feeling when **someone else "gets" your access needs**. The kind of eerie comfort that your disabled self feels with someone on a purely access level. Sometimes it can happen with complete strangers, disabled or not, or sometimes it can be built over years. It could also be the way your body relaxes and opens up with someone when **all your access needs are being met**.

(Mingus, 2011, n. p., emphasis added)



Leaving Evidence

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Access Intimacy: The Missing Link

There are many ways to describe intimacy. For example, there's physical intimacy, emotional intimacy, intellectual, political, familial or sexual intimacy. But, as a physically disabled woman, there is another kind of intimacy I have been struggling to name and describe, what I have been calling "access intimacy."

We must leave evidence. Evidence that we were here, that we existed, that we survived and loved and ached. Evidence of the wholeness we never felt and the immense sense of fullness we gave to each other. Evidence of who we were, who we thought we were, who we never should have been. Evidence for each other that there are other ways to live--past survival; past isolation.

Leaving Evidence is a blog by Mia Mingus.

Follow Mia on Bluesky
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Ableism

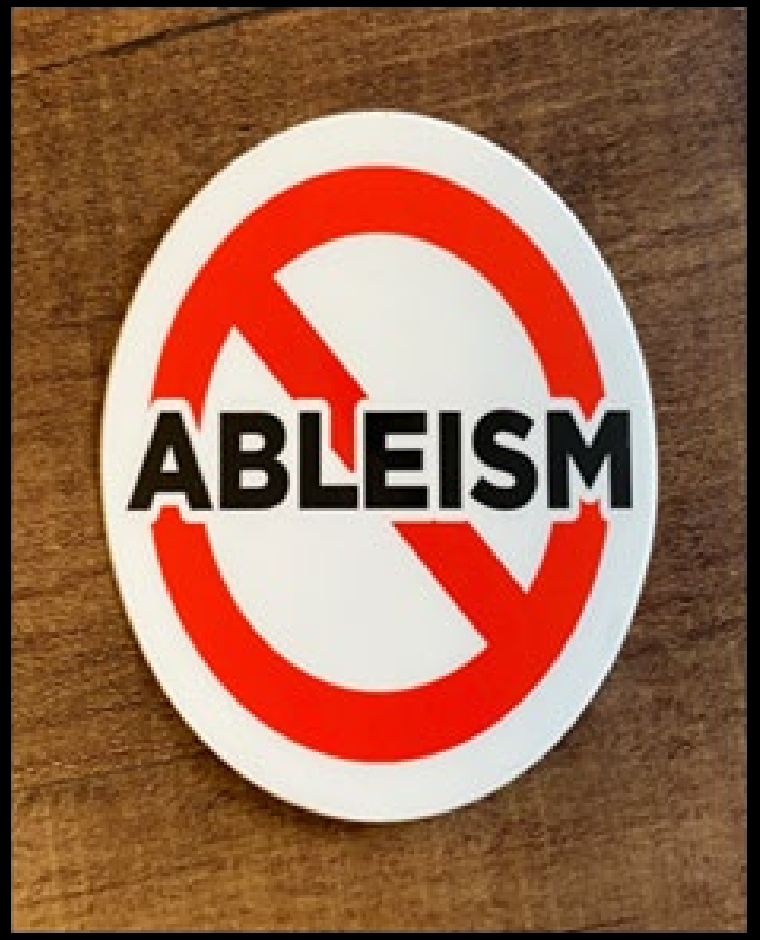
Ableism is a set of beliefs, processes and practices that produce - based on abilities one exhibits or values -a particular understanding of oneself, one's body and one's relationship with others of humanity, other species and the environment, and includes how one is judged by others (Wolbring, 2006a, 2007a, b, c, d). Ableism reflects the sentiment of certain social groups and social structures that value and promote certain abilities, for example, productivity and competitiveness, over others, such as empathy, compassion and kindness. This preference for certain abilities over others leads to a labelling of real or perceived deviations from or lack of 'essential' abilities as a diminished state of being, leading or contributing to justifying various other isms (Wolbring, 2006a, 2007a, b, c, d).

(Wolbring 2008, 252-253)

Anti-Ableist Pedagogical Principles

- Eye contact (is not needed)
- Sitting still (is not expected)
- Stimming (is welcome)
- Distractions (are welcome)
- Questions/responses (take your time)
- Means/channels of communication (choose your preferred one)
- Listen to your bodymind

(Ktenidis, 2025)



Questioning Ableism in Education

Disability Studies in Education's Central Questions

- Who decides who is normal and who is not (and by implication, is abnormal) in schools?
- In what ways are notions of normalcy related to academic, social, and emotional expectations within schools?
- How and why do certain groups of people become identified as disabled more than others?
- Who benefits from the current status quo and who does not? Who is included and excluded?
- Who has a sense of belonging – to school, and by extension, to society – and who does not?
- Which knowledge paradigms do we draw from when considering these and other questions?
- How can we forge different ways of thinking about disability and education without defaulting to the limited – even dangerous ways – of special education?

Connor, 2020, pp. 25–26

Critical Disability Studies and Research

A Wellcome Trust Institutional Funding for Research Culture Award

Home › iHuman › **Wellcome Anti-Ableist Research Culture (WAARC)**

Our three Priority Areas

Anti-ableist environments

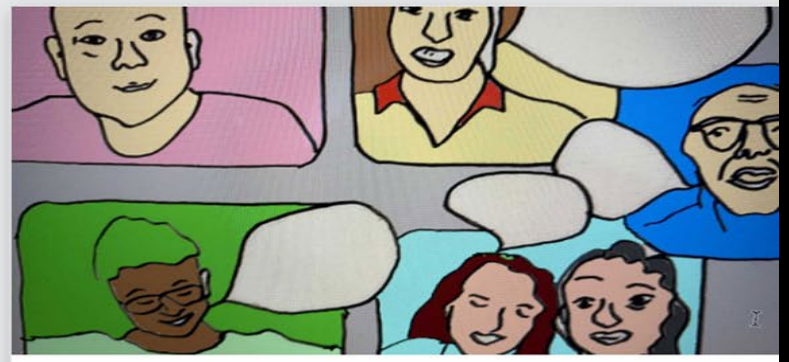
Experimenting with new ideas for inclusive recruitment and employment

A link to our page on anti-ableist environments →

Anti-ableist developments

Accessible university events and inclusive research methods training

A link to our page on anti-ableist developments →



Collaborative inquiry

Putting disabled people front and centre of research culture inquiry

A link to our page on collaborative inquiry →

Anti-Ableist Resources

Anti-Ableist Environments

1.1. Recruitment

Problem: The under-recruitment of disabled researchers and research support staff due to systemic barriers.

Strategic plan: A work stream promoting the inclusive recruitment of disabled researchers that will review job description, specification, marketing and publicity, essential/desirable criteria, training materials for panel members and involvement of disability organisations in the recruitment process. We work closely with our Project Partners to ensure that our proposals respond to current policy and legislation as well as adhering to key matters of disability justice.

Anti-ableist Developments

2.1. Access

Problem: Inaccessible research events are routinely held in universities that exclude disabled contributors.

Strategic plan: Devising guidelines for reviewing, revising, promoting and delivering accessible research and scholarship events via hybrid approaches across TUOS. We normalise accessible events. Building on work undertaken by Wellcome on the experiences of minoritised groups at research conferences, we revisit our previous work on accessibility guides and recommendations, co-creating this with disabled researchers and project partners and training will be provided to organisers of events e.g. the Public Engagement Team, and the guide will be implemented in the events to be hosted by TUOS, instead of enacting access retrospectively (or treating it as an afterthought). Accessibility is situated as a disability justice matter; not an 'additional need' to be met.

Anti-ableist Developments

2.2. Research Methods

Problem: Insufficient institutional knowledge about inclusive research methods that involve disabled people as co-researchers.

Strategic plan: A module entitled, ‘Inclusive Research Methods’ aimed at postgraduate taught/research students and Early Career Researchers delivered via hybrid methods. The module will be developed and delivered by the Sheffield Methods Institute (SMI) and our Research and HR Development Teams, hosted on TUOS My Development platform and will showcase existing participatory, inclusive and disability research in TUOS. The module will consider all research stages: project design, ethics, methods, analysis, dissemination, engagement and impact. Training will also include collaboration with professional services to develop good practice around paying disabled co-researchers, intellectual property and copyright in co-producing and co-disseminating open and inclusive research.

Collaborative Inquiry

3.1. Inclusive Research

Problem: A need to promote more inclusive disability research activity at TUOS.

Strategic Plan: The TUOS Participatory Research Network (PRN) will lead and manage an Open Call to all researchers in TUOS seeking to support research projects that put into practice inclusive methods with disabled people and their representative organisations, including a ring-fencing of part of this funding for PGR applicants.

3.2. Cripping the Concordat

Problem: A disconnect between current commitments around researcher development and the barriers faced by disabled researchers.

Strategic plan: Explore how the Concordat To Support the Career Development of Researchers can more effectively support the needs and research aspirations of disabled researchers.

Cross-Cutting Themes

Cross-cutting Theme 1: Institutional engagement:

What is Anti-ableist research culture? We will hold four online/offline hybrid events that raise awareness of WAARC amongst University of Sheffield colleagues, share emerging good practice and the results of our evaluation while highlighting the importance of research that engages with the analyses of critical disability studies scholarship. We seek to illuminate EDI in practice and remind colleagues of the importance of intellectual and institutional responses.

Cripping Research Culture Podcast

Cross-cutting Theme 2: Key Performance Indicators of Anti-ableist research culture

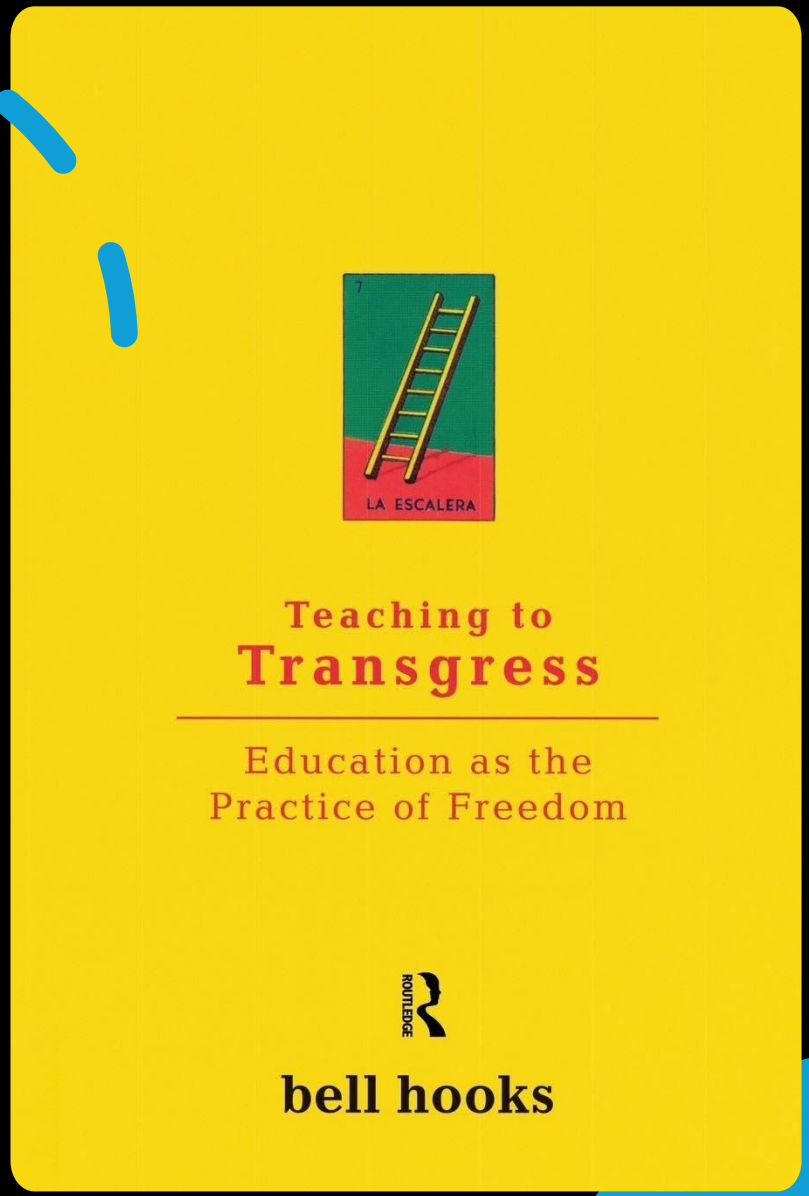
We are developing an Action Plan that will allow us to monitor the continuing development of the three Priority Areas for which we will seek ratification by the University Executive Board as a legacy of the project.

A Call for Action in Turbulent Times

The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy. (hooks, 1994: 12)

The intellectual tradition of the West is very individualistic. It's not community-based. The intellectual is often thought of as a person who is alone and cut off from the world. So I have had to practice being willing to leave the space of my study to be in community, to work in community, and to be changed by community.

(hooks, 2000, n.p)



Prompt Questions/Provocations

- If you became the Vice-Chancellor of your university tomorrow, what are three actions you would take to make universities more accessible?
- What forms can 'access intimacy' take in the context of Higher Education?
- How can access intimacy be protected from becoming individualised, shifting away the responsibility from the institution?