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The Right to Be Human: Universal Design for Learning and Literacy Sponsorship as Liberatory Pedagogy

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THE RIGHT TO BE HUMAN: UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING AND

LITERACY SPONSORSHIP AS LIBERATORY PEDAGOGY

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A Thesis

Presented to the

Faculty of

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by

Jeremy Mathew Lunasco

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ABSTRACT

This project explores the possibilities of implementing a critical and liberatory pedagogy within the confines of the prison. Building upon the fields of critical prison theory, literacy studies, and (dis)ability studies, I assert that implementing small, organic, and tactical changes though the principles of Universal Design for Learning allows the prison educator to make impactful moves with liberatory goals. I conclude by reimagining what a prison education mission statement that takes this perspective looks like then imagine the liberatory applications of the principles of universal design for learning within the prison.

DEDICATION

To Mom, Dad, Chelsea, Jordan and all my loving family, friends, and colleagues who supported and encouraged me through producing this project and throughout grad school – I appreciate it. And to my Grandma and Grandpa who I lost in the middle of all of this. I love you and I miss you and I wish I could come over for dinner one more time.

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CHAPTER ONE

JOURNAL ARTICLE

When educators prioritize fostering student agency and freedom within their classroom, they often look to enact liberatory pedagogy. However, what happens when we attempt to implement a liberatory pedagogy in the restrictive environment of prison? While we know that the prison denies liberation in physical ways, the prison also denies liberation in subtle ways by imposing communicative and educational restrictions, including limiting access to educational materials and opportunities. For example, on January 8, 2018, the American Civil Liberties Union learned that *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* by Michelle Alexander, was banned in at least two New Jersey state prisons. The ACLU denounced the ban on *The New Jim Crow*, a book detailing how the incarceration of African Americans in the current criminal justice system serves to create a modern-day racial caste, as an unconstitutional action that worked to keep incarcerated individuals unaware of the prison's history of injustice. Within hours, New Jersey lifted the ban (Borden).

This ideological policing is noted within Alexander's book, which compares the social control of today's supposed colorblind mass incarceration to the racially prejudiced laws of the Jim Crow Era (4). The controversy over *The New Jim Crow* is an example of the way prisons regulate the education and literacy of

incarcerated individuals, by regulating the resources available to them; this regulation in turn limits the resources available to prison educators. The prison complicates literacy sponsorship and constrains prison educators who are interested in a liberatory or critical pedagogy to the point where it becomes difficult for them function due to bureaucratic interference. The eventual allowance of *The New Jim Crow* shows that, while not in the prison's best interest, it is possible for the prison institution itself to lessen its control over their own educational policies, but such change is slow and unreliable due to administrative control and indifference even if such changes come from outside pressure. As such, change falls to the responsibility of the prison educator and requires a drastic reimagining of the way that the prison educator operates.

In this project, I ask how prison education can be liberatory. Some prison educators may not be interested in social justice or liberatory pedagogy, and the prison will be a challenging space to implement a progressive pedagogy, but even in the most restrictive of educational contexts, there is still room for the critical pedagogue to function by enacting liberatory pedagogy in contextually appropriate ways. I examine how prison education can be a space for liberatory social justice when taking literacy sponsorship and (dis)ability studies into account in conjunction with critical prison theory. I have divided my project into three sections: first, I examine the prison institution as a literacy sponsor and identify how the prison sponsors literacy. Second, I examine how prison educators work as literacy sponsors; I build upon Anna Plemon's notion of the

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prison educator enacting small, tactical, organic moves to create change. Last, I discuss the possibilities of making small, organic, tactical moves within the carceral setting through the lens of Universal Design for Learning in order to change the way that both the prison and prison educators sponsor literacy. Ultimately, my proposition is that if we attempt to implement the principles of Universal Design for Learning within the carceral education setting, then we are enacting small, organic, tactical moves to enact change. Additionally, this creates an effective venue of literacy sponsorship for the incarcerated to have stable educational opportunities in a setting defined by instability; *the pedagogical act of creating a space for agency becomes a liberatory act*. Such an educational practice is accessible, purposeful, and functions as a liberatory pedagogy, particularly within the prison.

Commodification and Control:
The Prison as Literacy Sponsor

Before understanding how we can make prison education a liberatory experience, we must see how prison controls the educational experience through the literacy sponsorship of the incarcerated. While the idea of literacy sponsorship can be applied to a wide variety of settings outside the classroom, literacy sponsorship has come to be a fundamental idea in any sort of pedagogy, regardless of context. The idea, as developed by Deborah Brandt in "Sponsors of Literacy," identifies literacy sponsors as "any agents, local or distant, concrete or abstract, who enable, support, teach, model, as well as recruit, regulate,

suppress, or withhold literacy – and gain advantage by it in some way" (166).

Literacy sponsorship has come to be a fundamental part of English composition research, but Ann M. Lawrence notes that current research in "literacy sponsorship has tended to narrow Brandt's expansive notion of literacy sponsors to denote people exclusively" (304). While we often correctly view individuals such as teachers, tutors, friends, and family as literacy sponsors, to do so would limit Brandt's characterization of literacy sponsor. Brandt herself examines a wide variety of sources that influence reading and writing skills including parents, religious figures, therapists, cereal companies, government agencies, television programs, computers, and ballpoint pens ("Changing," 247). A few scholars have examined their own attempts to provide various kinds of educational opportunities as effective literacy sponsorship through educational opportunity with the incarcerated individuals themselves as the ones being sponsored. For example, Lori Pompa examines the possibilities of literacy activism and community-based writing collaborations using inside-out programs while Patrick Berry encourages prison educators to move away from future orientated narratives and towards complex literacy practices in prison. While useful, previous scholarship often lack heuristic approaches to implement change.

The prison's control of literacy practices has implications other than educational ones. Brandt notes literacy became more than the ability to read or write but "became an irresistible energy source – a public utility – that was harnessed for American capitalism in the twentieth century" (*Literacy* 188).

Literacy skills have become tied to economic mobility where literacy represents the social skills needed to flourish in an American capitalist society. Important to note is that these social and literacy skills are not developed in isolation. David Barton and Mary Hamilton discuss the social theory of literacy, the theory that literacy is a set of social practices shaped through individuals' interactions with different institutions and individuals rather than within individuals themselves (8). Within American society, the literacy practices needed for economic growth are tied to the practices of capitalism. The typical capitalist narrative is that hard work and perseverance will lead to economic capital; a person will work hard to climb the economic ladder to better their own economic situation. Within societal capitalist expectations, it is assumed that a person gaining literacy in something, whether it be reading and writing, or trade skills and fluency, will gain some economic capital that they can use to advance their own economic situation. In this sense, we understand a desire or attempt to become literate as an attempt to better an economic situation; it is not uncommon to buy into the narrative that developing literacy skills in college will lead to a good job afterward, as detailed by Harvey J. Graff in *The Literacy Myth*.

In a capitalist society, literacy sponsorship in the prison is of particular interest since the prison limits mobility in physical and social ways. While we often examine how literacy is sponsored in positive ways, Brandt also notes that literacy sponsors may also affect literacy in negative ways that "regulate, suppress, or withhold literacy" (166). The prison educator serves as a literacy

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sponsor, but just as important is identifying the prison institution as the more powerful literacy sponsor, particularly in how the prison withholds literacy practices. For example, suppose a student outside of the prison takes a two-hour class once a week. If that individual finds an aspect of the class they would like to know more about, they more than likely have some sort of access to do independent research; they could look it up on the internet or visit a public library. However, even if an incarcerated individual is getting the same amount of literal class time, two hours a week in this example, the incarcerated individual is unable to do the same extra-curricular research someone outside of the prison can; the incarcerated student typically would not have the same access to technology or facilities such as a public library. Even if they did, the technology or facility may be lacking due to funding or administrative indifference. They might not have access to a pen and paper without paying for them while making as little as $20 a month to pay for everything including food and toiletries, if they are even able to have a job (Conan). They might not have a quiet space to work and concentrate, and their cell is most likely small, cramped, and overcrowded with two or three people assigned to a space. Prison sweeps might take away any writing or books they may have in their cell, and a lockdown could cancel any scheduled class time. College education programs may be available to students, but often times they are self-funded by the student; incarcerated individuals are no longer eligible for Federal Pell Grants nor federal student loans, so paying for college becomes a difficult if not impossible task (Federal Student Aid). All of

these aspects affect the literacy education of the student and it isn't so much what is being sponsored but instead how literacy is prohibited.

The prison's withholding of literacy presents a problematic situation where the prison's efforts to control literacy becomes an attempt to control the economic opportunities that incarcerated individuals have upon their release; most jobs would expect the ability to read, write, think critically, and have the social skills to function within their work environments. Among other factors including job discrimination and the denial of assistance programs, the denial of literacy contributes to recidivism, the return of the formerly incarcerated to prison, due to lack of economic opportunity and stake in a viable social role and in turn perpetuating the current system of mass incarceration (Duwe and Clark 474-5). In turn, private prisons use recidivism to profit off of incarcerated individuals and provide a steady supply of bodies to fill cells while cooperation between government funded prisons and corporations lead directly to companies profiting off of the criminal justice system. Further, if we view literacy as social practice, the inherent divisive and inaccessible nature of the prison works to deny the practice of these social skills, as social skills are impossible to be developed in isolation.

Traditionally speaking, the prison isn't interested in providing educational opportunities for the sake of the incarcerated as much as commodifying them in the interest of those on the outside. Even if the prison denied that the controlling access to literacy is an effort to control the economic opportunities of

incarcerated individuals upon their release, there is no such thing as a neutral

position; complacency is the same as endorsement. Brandt notes that marks left

by literacy sponsors have widespread and long-term effects ("A Commentary on

Literacy" 331). These marks linger and become perpetuated to the point of

normalcy; we do these things simply because we do. The issue has become that

our current prison system and the way it works has become normalized with

problematic aspects becoming business as usual. Unpacking the way that prison

education has worked previously shows the way that incarcerated individuals are

commodified and their literacy education limited.

As noted by Thom Gehring and Carolyn Eggleston in *Teaching Within*

Prison Walls: A Thematic History, prison education took an authoritarian, top-

down approach; prison education itself became institutionalized due to Reagan's

"Tough on Crime" policies (87). Due to the prison's ever-present influence on

literacy, the institution's forced collaboration with the prison educator shapes the

way that prison educators shape their pedagogy. Gehring and Eggleston further

note:

> One pattern of negative collaboration exists when the education
>
> leader looks to the non-educator administrator for education
>
> leadership. This problem emerges whenever one department
>
> denies its own function (i.e. education) and retreats in favor of
>
> another (i.e. security or prison industry). This default is an inevitable
>
> legacy of institutionalized systems. (81)

Along with an authoritarian approach to education comes the banking concept of education where the pedagogical expectation is that students will uncritically memorize information and demonstrate the ability to repeat that information rather than question it. A problem with this banking model is that literacy practices themselves are not static, unchanging skills but instead "becomes a target of unending rounds of obsolescence, upgrades, overhauls, and replacements" ("Changing Literacy" 251). Because of its changing nature, literacy education fails if taught in a banking method if for no other reason than the non-static nature of literacy as technological and societal evolution changes who we view is literate. Ultimately, this non-static literacy can be morphed and changed to fit a wide variety of contexts and situations. Brandt gives the example of two working-class women appropriated the literacies learned from their bosses, who were educated, higher class men, for their own uses, ultimately concluding that "we see in these accounts how individual acts of appropriation can divert and subvert the course of literacies, how changes in individual literacy experiences relate to larger scale transformations" ("Sponsors of Literacy," 182). If the prison inhibits the literacy education of the incarcerated, then the opportunity for the incarcerated person to gain literacy skills and take those skills elsewhere are denied.

Even some of the most open-minded prison systems, such as California's Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, still rely on problematic ways of implementing educational policies and denying social literacy skill. For example,

San Quentin State Prison is the home of progressive programs such as distance learning for Associates and Bachelor's degree education, the *San Quentin News* newspaper, and the *Ear Hustle* podcast yet is also the home of California's death row (San Quentin State Prison). As of 2018, the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's (CDCR) Office of Correction Education states the following educational goal of its prison education programs:

> The goal of [the Office of Correctional Education] is to provide offenders with needed education and career training as part of a broader [California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitations] effort to increase public safety and reduce recidivism. (Office)

> Note that the CDCR's reasons to provide educational opportunities are to increase the safety of the public and reduce recidivism rather than provide literacy skills to be used as a resource for incarcerated individuals for their own gain upon release.

As such, the prison remains complacent in commodifying incarcerated individuals in favor of maintaining the optics of public safety, thus perpetuating and justifying a societal and systematic denial of literacy for the sake of making profit by structuring the prison's sponsorship of literacy in a way that benefits the sponsor more so than the individual; in this way, the prison is an entity that affects individual learners and larger society simultaneously under the guise of normalcy. One aspect of the goals of prison education for the CDCR that could be seen in a positive light is its emphasis on career education. Upon closer

inspection, still evident is the commodification for the sake of capitalism as career and technical education programs include industries situated as service to others, such as plumbing, roofing and auto mechanics as well as labor-intensive careers such as construction (Career and Technical Education). This approach to education seems to fall into Berry's critique of a future-oriented pedagogy for incarcerated individuals. While technical education is a valid manner to reduce recidivism and allow the formerly incarcerated to succeed after release, these careers are in service of American capitalist society and limit the possibilities for the formerly incarcerated.

The CDCR's goals for prison education differ from the goals of the prison educator interested in liberatory pedagogy and social justice. Liberatory pedagogy itself is rooted in the work of Paulo Freire and his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*; one aspect of liberatory pedagogy calls for the educator to have an open dialogue with students to bring about a self-awareness about their own situation (35-6). This pedagogy calls for the pedagogue to respect the humanity of the student as a person undeserving of oppression. Freire calls for oppressed individuals to have some degree of political power in order for a liberatory pedagogy to be enacted as change, as that change must come from the very people who are oppressed. However, in the context of the prison, the humanity of the incarcerated person is at the very least, questioned and at the very worst, denied. How then can a liberatory pedagogy with an eye toward social justice be enacted within an institution that is inherently interested in division, oppression,

and marginalization? How is a Freirean approach to liberatory pedagogy that is reliant on the recognition of the humanity of its students to be implemented within an institution that works to deny the humanity of the incarcerated?

Small, Organic, and Tactical:
Maneuvering as a Prison Educator

These questions about implementing a critical pedagogy within the prison create a tension that prison educators must continually navigate. Some scholars have noted the difficulty that comes along with the entanglement of educator and institution. Power dynamics within the prison are important to bear in mind as the prison is often interested in flexing its own power. Several scholars have discussed how the power structure of the prison changes the way we imagine critical education, such as by imagining abolitionist praxis as primarily pedagogical (Rodríguez), highlighting the importance of inside-out programs as a means of humanizing the incarcerated (Pompa), and shifting a focus away from recidivism (Castro et al). Robert Scott notes his own teaching experience in the prison led him to identify a tension where he was "a part of the system that can resist the system" but also that "prison educators have to recognize that they are not separate from the power structure – they cannot escape it, they can only respond within it" (26). Scott ultimately echoes Freire and notes "teaching must not be something done *to* the incarcerated student, nor misconstrued as something done *for* the incarcerated student, but with *them*" and that "the

question of radical teaching hinges on whether the pedagogy treats the students like objects or subjects" (28, emphasis in original). Key to Scott's discussion of prison pedagogy was his emphasis on dialogue between students and educators in the prison classroom; those of us on the outside take it for granted, but the simple act of dialogue from one person to another reinforces a recognition of the humanity of both participants. In this way, dialogue is key to a critical pedagogy.

According to Freire, it is key that liberatory pedagogy be shaped by its students; as a result, many attempts by prison educators have aimed to return agency to their incarcerated students. One instance of this is detailed by Tobi Jacobi in "Slipping Pages through Razor Wire: Literacy Action Projects in Jail." Jacobi details two literacy action projects she facilitated, including the SpeakOut! Women's Writing Workshops. The SpeakOut! Women's Writing Workshops sought to restore the agency of incarcerated writers by enabling the incarcerated women a space to express themselves in ways typically regulated and denied by the prison, a goal in opposition to the literacy goals of the prison. The workshop was a community-based collaboration focused on the social aspects of education and literacy. Not only were the both the incarcerated and traditional students practicing the skills of reading and writing, but they were also active and important parts of the pedagogy, namely with the incarcerated students contextualizing themselves within the prison. Most importantly, these were projects not done to, or done for incarcerated individuals, but instead with them, echoing Freire's sentiment of liberatory pedagogy.

Other scholars have noted the difficulty of enacting a liberatory pedagogy within an inherently dominating context. James Kilgore in "Bringing Freire Behind the Walls: The Perils and Pluses of Critical Pedagogy in Prison Education" notes that he could not enact liberatory pedagogy the way the wanted and was forced to modify and change his pedagogy for a prison GED program he taught. He notes that he "built on learners' experience to make mathematical content more accessible," as indicated by his own success in teaching probability when he contextualized it within gambling, a medium his students were familiar with (65). Kilgore made the adjustment to alter his pedagogy while staying within the constraints of the prison, choosing a moderate pedagogy when a more radical pedagogy would have been shut down quickly. Kilgore worked within the constraints of prison which forced him to nuance his practice of critical pedagogy by tempering his expectations and modifying his pedagogical approach to fit the situation without upsetting the norm.

The most effective and strongest approach to working within the constraint of prison was suggested by Anna Plemons in her study of the Community Arts Program (CAP) at California State Penitentiary, Sacramento. Like Robert Scott, Plemons recognizes that the instructor cannot effectively be separated from the institution that they function within. She makes the case that literacy education in prison is a form of creative resistance that is scaffolded by small, organic, and tactical moves such as the moves made by James Kilgore. CAP is a program that offers non-credit courses in the arts taught via a combination of volunteer

and incarcerated teachers (Plemons 40). In some ways, CAP is a very tempered and humble program; the non-credit courses cannot be used towards a college degree and the focus on art shifts the pedagogical focus from an overt critical education to a pedagogy focused on the individual. CAP simultaneously does work in educating its students in artistic literacy while being a modest enough program to not draw the ire of the institution itself.

Plemons invokes the mythical image of the trickster, in particular, the trickster's ability to function within boundaries while challenging those boundaries. The critical pedagogue who teaches in the prison can become the mythical trickster through careful and meaningful action. CAP is an example of a trickster program, functioning within the boundaries of the prison while challenging those boundaries of the prison; courses within CAP may be non-credit bearing but are still classes and educational opportunity nonetheless. Building off of Paula Mathieu's *Tactics of Hope: The Public Turn in Composition* who in turn built off of Michel de Certeau's tactical interventions in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, Plemons lays out the strategy to remain engaged within a difficult and complicated context suggesting that critical educators in prison can implement small, tactical, organic moves of resistance that seemingly fall in line with institutional expectations.

According to Plemons, the intention behind the actions of the prison educator is important in that there is no such thing as a neutral action; complacency with institutional structures perpetuates those structures. But just

as important as the politicized awareness of the educator is the awareness of incarcerated student as well. Plemons notes that "fundamental to an organic, tactical position is the understanding that the people inside can (and must) participate in organically constructed ways of their own choosing" (48). This echoes the Freirean notion that the oppressed must be active participants in their own education as well as Jacobi's pedagogical approach where educational practices were done with rather than for her incarcerated students. While the small and tactical aspects of these moves can come from the educator, the organic aspect must come from the student themselves. Plemons notes that this organic interest on the part of the student offers a semblance of agency in a controlling environment (48). If these moves come only from the teacher, it could come off as contrived or forced. Within the context of a prison, it is not as simple as a student learning some sort of literacy then quickly gaining access to economic mobility as the student is physically imprisoned and socially labeled as criminal and outcast.

While the freedom of an incarcerated individual may be out of the question, the inspiration of an organic educational interest leads to at least some semblance of agency. This sense of agency, no matter how small, is key in that such an inspiration of agency within the incarcerated student inherently goes against what the prison itself is about - an institution interested in removing the freedom of the people inside its walls. Because of administrative constraints, it is not the actual content being learned that is liberatory. Instead, the pedagogical

act of creating a space for agency becomes a liberatory act. The success James

Kilgore had in teaching about probability for a GED through his students' prior

knowledge of gambling is along these same lines; rather than forcing an

abstracted mathematical lesson of probability, Kilgore chose to allow his

students' organic interest in gambling to inform his lessons about probability. A

focus on small, organic, tactical moves by the trickster in the prison as a way of

implementing critical pedagogy is certainly slower than any move that is made or

supported by the prison. Plemons ultimately notes that "appreciating the delicate,

tactical nature of what CAP is attempting to do requires a patience that often

chooses small actions instead of big ones, or sometimes (what appears to be) no

action at all" (45). The suggestion then that no purposeful move is too small in

the prison is a powerful one fitting for the prison context, particularly since the

prison is an environment where movement is quite literally regulated restricted to

small cells. If we can find a way to instill agency within the incarcerated

individual's education, we can find a way to enact social justice.

Universal Design for Learning As
Liberatory Act in the Prison Classroom

Since Plemons suggests that no action or movement is too small as long

as it is done purposefully and intentionally, this leaves a lot of room for ways to

implement a resistant and liberatory pedagogy. One useful lens to examine how

to make these small, tactical, organic moves is the lens of (dis)ability studies, and

more specifically, Universal Design for Learning. Within the context of the prison,

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UDL expands the possibilities of prison education, becomes a liberatory and resistant experience, and offers a useful analytical lens to examine literacy sponsorship. The implementation of UDL within the prison classroom would shift the pedagogical practice from one that focuses on the institution or educator to one that focuses on the individual identity of the incarcerated student for the sake of creating a space with some semblance of agency and freedom within a context where agency and freedom are regularly denied.

Universal Design is the practice of designing the various things we use every day in ways that they can be used universally by as many people as possible. A notable example of this is the dip in sidewalk pavement initially designed to allow wheelchair users to easily cross the street; designers noticed how an aspect designed to benefit one type of user became beneficial for all, subsequently encouraging the creation of objects to be used by as many people as possible. Taking inspiration from the architectural origins of Universal Design, UDL took the emphasis on usability with the noted goal of creating an accessible curriculum for all students while being "appropriate at all levels of education" and can be used in a wide variety of curriculum areas (Schreiber 89). Ultimately, UDL seeks to make the classroom a space that can be used by all in ways that lead to student agency and student success. At the same time, UDL provides us with a pedagogical heuristic to imagine ways to implement resistance until systemic changes are realized.

The principles of UDL aim to make education so that it can be used by a wide variety of students with a wide variety of abilities. Seeking to adapt UDL to the postsecondary level, the University of Connecticut suggested nine principles for Universal Design for Learning:

Equitable Use: Instruction is identical for all students when possible and is equivalent when not.

Flexibility in Use: Instruction is designed to accommodate individual abilities and allow for student choice.

Simple and Intuitive: Instruction is designed and implemented in straightforward ways.

Perceptible Information: Instruction is designed so information is communicated effectively to the student, regardless of condition.

Tolerance for Error: Instruction allows for individual student paces and abilities.

Low Physical Effort: Instruction minimalizes non-essential effort.

Size and Space for Approach and Use: Instruction considers the size and space that may be used by students.

A Community of Learners: Instruction allows for an environment of communication and interaction between students.

Instructional Climate: Instruction is welcoming and inclusive with high expectations or all students.

The advantage of these principles of UDL is that they can be implemented in small ways that do not have to push institutional boundaries since UDL is implemented for the sake of the student rather than the sake of larger institutional goals. The implementation of UDL in any classroom serves to restore agency to its students and challenge the ableist assumptions made within the classroom, where ability is normalized and taken for granted.

These principles of UDL are no stranger to the English classroom; James P. Purdy suggests that design thinking can help orient multi-modal pedagogy, while Meia Chita-Tegmark et al. discuss the possibilities for UDL to support a culturally diverse classroom. Anne-Marie Womak looks at how the principles of UDL are useful within the composition classroom by shifting the syllabus from an object of contract to one that affords accommodation by reimaging class document design, using non-combative, cooperative language, and using flexible course plans. Womak ultimately argues that accommodation is the strongest form of student empowerment and that "agency, for all students, comes from access" (500-1). Jean Kiedaisch and Sue Dinitz exemplify the possibilities of UDL in contexts of institutional constraint and apply the nine principles of UDL to the context of the writing center to create a more accessible and welcoming learning environment. They make the distinction that some of the principles have to do with the physical space of the writing center while others can be applied to pedagogy itself (51-6). To equate the environments and institutional constraints of the writing center with the prison classroom would be short-sighted, but there

is value in examining how Kiedaisch and Dinitz's writing center has been able to implement UDL in small, organic, and tactical ways to subvert the expectation the university has placed on it. Kiedaisch and Dinitz note that "many writing center scholars have called for this pluralistic approach to diversity, arguing that writing centers, often located on the fringes of the power structure, can lead the resistance to an assimilationist approach and can model how diverse views and practices can help change our institutions for the better" (57). This is similar to how the prison classroom is often viewed and approached; the prison classroom is on the fringes of an institutional power structure, where in this case the inside and the outside converge and becomes the intersection of the interests and goals of the institution, teacher, and student simultaneously.

Previous criminal justice educational discussions are often in service of current prison education systems rather than serving as a way to implement small, organic, and tactical changes as a form of resistance. The purpose behind implementing UDL within the prison classroom is not to label its students as (dis)abled, but instead as a way to make the prison classroom more accessible and inclusive for the sake of student agency aimed towards liberatory goals. This remains unaddressed in criminal justice scholarship. For example, Joanne Karger and Rachel Currie-Rubin note the possibilities of UDL to be used in incarcerated settings to promote a transformative experience for students with special needs in prison as a means of successful reintegration into society; while a useful resource, the reasoning behind their implantation of UDL is socially

focused rather than individually focused as well as focused on those the labeled

as "special needs" rather than for any student. However, we can use the

principles of UDL within a prison classroom without the labels of special

education for the sake of student agency.

A quick survey of various states' mission statements on incarcerated

education shows a continuing theme of labeling and a perceived lack of ability.

Note Delaware's mission for prison education through their Department of

Education:

> The mission of Prison Education is to offer a quality adult education
>
> program that will provide an educational foundation to *enable*
>
> *offenders to be productive workers, family members, and citizens*
>
> *while incarcerated and upon release from prison.* (Delaware
>
> Department of Education, emphasis added)

The Michigan Department of Corrections takes a similar position and notes that

their purpose is

> to provide educational opportunities for prisoners to *take*
>
> *responsibility* for developing their academic, work, and social
>
> competencies in order for them to become *contributing, productive*
>
> *members* of the prison community while incarcerated and
>
> *contributing members of their communities upon release from*
>
> *prison.* (Michigan Department of Corrections, emphasis added)

Nevada's Department of Corrections makes its educational aspects more explicit, but its focus is still a societal one:

> The Education Division within the Nevada Department of Corrections administers multiple correctional education programs throughout the prison system. In conjunction with local school districts, community colleges and universities the Division offers academic and vocational programs at all levels. *Did you know that more than 90 percent of all inmates in Nevada will eventually return to the world outside the prison walls?* Part of our mission is 'to provide opportunities for offenders to successfully re-enter the community through education, training, treatment, work and spiritual development.' *Since 1990, literature examining the return rates of offenders, or recidivism, has shown that educated offenders are less likely to find themselves back in prison a second time if they complete an educational program and are taught skills to successfully read and write.* (State of Nevada Department of Corrections, emphasis added)

We see common themes of reducing recidivism and protecting public safety in these mission statements without much addressing the needs of the incarcerated student; the focus on what incarcerated individuals will become highlights the expectation of education as a transformative experience, while the

usage of terms such as offender and prisoner reify the perspective that these are people needing of change.

Viewing these policies and ideas through the analytical lens of UDL gives us some perspective on the problematic nature of these viewpoints, exposing denials of agency, flexibility, and dialogue, aspects important to liberatory pedagogy. For example, Dennis Zaro builds off the problematic theory that "the majority of incarcerated individuals are in prison because of a cognitive deficit" and suggests focusing on the cognitive skills of the incarcerated individual would lead them to rethink the behavioral patterns that led to their incarceration; this would subsequently reduce recidivism (29). This perspective fails to allow students choices and fails to accommodate for their individual skills and perspectives, relying on a moral hierarchy with prison education and teacher as a moral authority. In this sense, prison education has traditionally focused on the redemption of the individual rather than larger societal structures. Erica Meiners and Roberto Sanabria have noted this pattern in prison education literature and have called the narrative structure that has come from it the redemption genre, that follows the structure of: "I was born, committed evil, served time, saw the errors of my ways (found God), and I am now on the true path" (635). Thus, the traditional system of prison education calls for the incarcerated student to understand themselves as the cause of their incarceration rather than to understand the societal influences that led to their imprisonment. Furthermore, we can see ways that Zaro's approach has failed following the principles of UDL

facilitates problematic methodologies. The incorrect assumption that most incarcerated individuals are incarcerated due to cognitive deficit rather than social issues fails to account for the principle of a tolerance for error; Zaro's suggested methodologies assume that there is one correct moral behavior and his writing prompts assume that students would reflect the correct behavioral patterns with other behavioral patterns labeled as wrong. In this instance, problematic ideas fuel problematic pedagogical philosophy and practice. This is intensified by a failure to account for some principles of UDL that result in a harmful classroom experience that might reinforce and confirm their negative experiences in educational settings before their incarceration.

The theme of problematic methodologies that service the institution rather than the individual continue with Paula Maccini et al's to provide a set of guidelines for teaching mathematics to "secondary students with learning disabilities and emotional disturbance within juvenile correctional schools" by suggesting six pedagogical methods (210). One of the methods they discuss is student grouping. This echoes the UDL principle of creating a community of learners, but such connections are only surface level and are not organic or tactical enough to be resistant; their suggestion for group work is for the purpose of peer tutoring rather than creating dialogue. While UDL emphasizes creating a community of learners so that students may interact with each other to accommodate for a wide range of abilities, an emphasis on peer tutoring seems to be doing something different. Maccini et al.'s emphasis on structure, peer

tutoring and the teacher taking a neutral stance on student grouping instead shifts instruction from the teacher and recontextualizes it within a student who tutors other students on the same information in the same way.

Along a similar route of suggesting using the strength of group work, Cathryn Chappell and Margaret Shippen examine how technology could be used for groupwork to produce positive outcomes for incarcerated students (22). Notably, Chappell and Shippen promote the use of technology in incarcerated education as it presents the opportunity for inside-out partnerships. Their emphasis on technology in the incarcerated classroom seems to be most in line with the principles of UDL with the acknowledgement of technology's ability to help those with alternative abilities with perceptible information, to promote individualized instruction as flexibility in use, and to facilitate inside-out programs as creating a community of learners. However, a key distinction to make here is the ultimate goals of the education itself. Chappell and Shippen note that education increases the educational and vocational skills of incarcerated students for their use upon their release, but the ultimate aim of prison education is to reduce recidivism, pushing the societal importance of prison education above the agency and growth of the individual student.

Reimagining a Prison Education

Unfortunately, the prison institution is an ever-looming presence and UDL must be implemented in response to the prison. For example, the principle of perceptible information and its desire to communicate information effectively

regardless of conditions may be difficult when aspects such as class time or internet access are heavily regulated if available at all. An extended lockdown would get in the way of the principle of community learning. The principle of size and space for approach and use will always be institutionally defined based on what the prison would allow. The common themes in both traditional prison education scholarship and the mission statements of various states' departments of corrections leave us plenty of room to adjust according to the principles of UDL.

Implementing these principles of UDL within the prison classroom requires the educator to be mindful and purposeful in the use, but as we see they can do a lot while being small, tactical, and organic. While the teacher could enact a resistant stance in their pedagogy, change must have a focus on both the educator and the institution in that philosophies from both must be sources of change. As discussed before, mission statements are often representative of an institutional philosophy and as educators, we may be presented with the opportunity to influence these mission statements. While more radical reimaginings of mission statements might be denied due to how progressive, maybe if we imagine small, organic, and tactical moves to implement the principles of UDL with liberatory goals, these movements may be small enough to be effective yet inconspicuous. But if we consider the principles of UDL and goals of liberatory education, what might a mission statement about incarcerated education look like? While a perfect mission statement might not be able to focus

on the incarcerated individual as empowered learners and agents, one that would be implemented in the modern day must also address societal concerns as well due to the societal expectations of the prison. Perhaps a reimaging of the CDCR's mission statement might look like this:

> *The goal of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and the Office of Correctional Education is to accommodate all students regardless of background, ability, or experience with the educational and career training to grow and become active, engaged community members upon their release. Our mission is to provide the same quality education to those who are incarcerated as those who attend traditional high schools and colleges. Creating informed and critical citizens reduces recidivism as well as creates individuals who are able to make a positive impact on our community.*

This revised mission statement attempts to enact some of the principles of universal design for learning in small enough ways to not be noticeable but also in large enough ways to be impactful. Demonstrating a willingness to work with all students regardless of ability or background demonstrates a Tolerance for Error. Attempting to create a welcoming and inclusive environment with high expectations attempts to enact the principle of Instructional Climate. A consideration of providing the incarcerated student with the same educational experience as students on the outside demonstrates Equitable Use. The

emphasis of creating participants in a community echoes the principle of a Community of Learners. The statement itself is presented in a way that is Simple and Intuitive, yet when these principles are enacted with liberatory goals in mind, we see how complex prison education could become.

Further, we can extend a reimagining from solely within policy to the principles of UDL themselves. What might a prison education with an emphasis in UDL as a liberatory pedagogical practice look like?

<u>Equitable Use</u>

Incarcerated students are going to come from a wide range of socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, so the educator must actively attempt to teach the same material to every student regardless of their previous experience. The educator in the prison must make their prison pedagogy equitable to their outside pedagogy, ensuring the same quality education is received by both those on the inside and the outside while at the same time adjusting those expectations to the needs of the student. Equitable use works to make the expectations for incarcerated students, no matter their prior education level, the same to ensure that every student would be able to use their own abilities in the classroom. Teachers should have the same expectations of students and realize their previous educational experiences could require different pedagogical approaches. Additionally, the teacher must provide adequate support for their students to succeed, be it through an understanding of

outcome and expectation or attempting to provide technological support where needed.

<u>Flexibility in Use</u>

The principle of flexibility in use could be difficult to implement in an institution that prides itself on rigidity. However, one source of flexibility could be the use of technology in the prison classroom. Technology ideally allows for teachers to personalize the instruction to the wide range of students by allowing a means for customization that could be addressed to each student, such as by easily adjusting documents to be easier to understand or by allowing students to type rather than write via pen and paper. However, an over-reliance on technology must be considered. An incarcerated student likely only has access to educational technology in the classroom, so a teacher must be flexible and understand the limits placed on their students and that those limits are not necessarily a reflection on the students themselves. Perhaps a teacher could exercise this by being flexible with how their students complete their assignments by reimaging how processes take place; instead of a written essay, a visual essay using artwork made by the students reimagines how an essay is composed in flexible ways. Another approach is to reimagine the timeframe for assignments, offering more time for completion when considering that homework assigned in prison might not be prioritized outside the classroom.

<u>Simple and Intuitive</u>

Any education does not need to be unnecessarily complex, but an emphasis on simplicity is key in prison education. In this case, a clear and simple education does not mean an unengaging or trivial one. One of the most obvious ways to implement a simple and intuitive pedagogy is to find ways to relate the material being taught to those learning it; take for example Kilgore's instance of using his student's knowledge of gambling to teach probability successfully for a GED preparatory course. Rather than sticking to a semi-concrete or abstract instruction on mathematical concepts, Kilgore was able to ground it in a concrete example of gambling to help his students understand the content. Maccini et al. suggest a similar take to teaching mathematics by taking mathematical concepts from concrete examples to semi-concrete examples to abstract examples, such as Kilgore's example of relating gambling to mathematical probability, but it is important to also remember the first principle of UDL and be flexible with teaching as not all students will learn the same way and that variances in learning styles are not incorrect ways of learning but instead different. A simple pedagogy may also be a pedagogy that might draw the least amount of attention; for example, the Community Arts Program is a seemingly humble program but has major liberatory implications. As we've seen, CAP is a simple program in that it has the simple focus of art, yet it allows the student a space to express themselves within an institution interested in silencing the incarcerated; its simplicity has made it complex.

<u>Perceptible Information</u>

Similar to pedagogy being simple and intuitive, it is important that instruction is communicated clearly and effectively to the student. An important aspect of this principle is how information is being communicated; an educator need not to make understanding information overly difficult nor can they talk down to an incarcerated student. The educator might need to realize that not all communicative methods are the same and that not all of those communicative methods might not be available in the prison; for example, a difficult concept might be easier to communicate and remember via written methods, but that would have to be written physically with pen and paper as the instructor cannot email information to the student after class. Additionally, for an educator interested in liberatory pedagogy in the prison and depending on what is being taught, they might not have the freedom to make such information explicit, so the educator would most likely have to help the student find a point of self-actualization about a liberatory idea; for example, CAP doesn't teach its students about how they have been institutionally silenced but instead enables space for expression. Important in this principle is not to manipulate the incarcerated student in order for the prison educator to get what they want since a self-actualization that is not originated from the self but instead instilled by the teacher is the reifying a system of oppression rather than being liberatory.

Tolerance for Error

As mentioned before, incarcerated students are going to come from a wide variety of socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, so the educator must be willing to work with the wide range of responses that they are going to receive in their classroom. These errors might not reflect the students' skill sets or work ethic but instead may reflect previous poor educational experiences as a result of previous opportunities or lack thereof. It is important that the incarcerated student do not feel punished for their errors, as their setting already emphasizes a punishment for either something that may have been out of their control or something that may have been a mistake from the past. Highlighting a tolerance for error could help alleviate the concerns of those incarcerated students who had negative previous experiences with an educational system that may have given up on them. In this instance, we see how UDL can be used not only to promote student agency but also to make changes in educational spaces that must function within a powerful institution. Enacting this principle may even entail the teacher to reimagine what an error actually is, shifting the definition of one of incorrectness to one of a manifestation of a logical attempt to enact an unfamiliar convention.

Low Physical Effort and Size and Space for Approach and Use

Low physical effort may be a principle not immediately obvious in its relevance at first, but an important one nonetheless. I think this principle could consider the physical comfort of the student. The prison is inherently an

uncomfortable place and is intentionally designed to be that way. If an educator is able to make their classroom as comfortable as they can, a student might not have to think about how their chair is uncomfortable or how the classroom is hot, affording them the opportunity be genuine in their learning process. At the same time, the prison is such a controlling and ever-present influence that it might be impossible to forget that a prison classroom is in a prison. The principle of Low Physical Effort could be enacted when planning a classroom space, such as by requesting chairs and tables rather than desks to make a more comfortable learning environment. This principle seems to be one that is the most subject to institutional control and out of the hands of prison educators

The principle of Size and Space for Approach and use is similar to Low Physical Effort but related to the physical space for learning. The prison by its nature is a confined area; often overcrowded, the prison allows for very little personal space. An incarcerated student may have limited access to a classroom or to a library, assuming their prison has a classroom or library. A consideration of space may be out of the immediate control of a teacher, but they could remember the context they teach in. Perhaps the teacher could request a pace with computers or a space big enough to rearrange furniture for groupwork. Considering a Size and Space for Approach and Use could have the teacher consider the space they function in as well. For example, expectations for homework may need to be adjusted as the incarcerated student may have no

materials to work within their cell and may not even have room to comfortably think and do their assignments.

A Community of Learners

Peer tutoring was mentioned by Maccini et al. as a viable pedagogical practice, but as previously discussed their emphasis on group work needs to do more. Shifting the focus of small group communication from one of peer tutoring to one of dialogue creates a more liberatory act. The prison works to silence those within its walls, often controlling or preventing communication between incarcerated individuals with one another as well as incarcerated individuals and those on the outside. If the prison classroom becomes an environment where dialogue is not only allowed but encouraged, it would go a long way in enacting a liberatory practice in a non-obvious way. Inside-out programs such as those described by Chappell and Shippen also create a community of learners between those on the inside and those on the outside by opening a venue of dialogue between the two groups. We've also seen this with Tobi Jacobi when she facilitated a literacy action project that connected incarcerated students with traditional university students. This may be another principle difficult to enact in prison, as inside-out programs must be institutionally supported. Creating a community of learners may be complicated when the prison is complicit in silencing and dividing the incarcerated by controlling their class time and social interactions. The educator could find ways to inspire dialogue outside of the classroom, recontextualizing educational conversation to other spaces where the

students interact with each other, such as the dining hall or during recreation time.

<u>Instructional Climate</u>

A large aspect of much traditional prison education scholarship is a focus on correcting the immoral prisoner to the correct and moral way of living; as a result, traditional prison education is setup as salvation and transformation of the incarcerated individual. The implementation of this principle would call for prison educational policies to address these labels placed on incarcerated students; they are often labeled as cognitively lacking (Zaro), place emphasis on their crime rather than their humanity by naming them as criminal or offender, or that they are learning impaired or emotionally disturbed (Maccini et al.). What these labels do is serve to rationalize a lower expectation of the students and assert that they are the perpetrators of crime when many crimes are often the result of larger societal issues. Zaro's methodologies create an instructional climate to shame the students, infantilizing them and suggesting that it is their thought patterns that are wrong instead of thinking about how society might have wronged them. Another example of this was within Jacobi's second literacy action project of the SpeakOut! Women's Writing Workshops as the workshops were reflective of the principle of instructional climate to create a welcoming and inclusive space within an institution that is inherently cold and divisive. Additionally, the principle of instructional climate includes high expectations of students; this ensures that incarcerated students are receiving a quality

education even though they are being taught in an alternative environment. In the case of the SpeakOut! Women's Writing Workshops, this aspect of instructional climate was reflected through the incarcerated women being encouraged to produce writing that was to be shared through a published journal.

Conclusion:
Fighting to Be Human

The prison is a complex social institution that we have come to normalize as a part of everyday life. However, when we take into account how the prison and prison educators are literacy sponsors of incarcerated individuals, Anna Plemons' notion of the small, organic, and tactical as a trickster move, as well as the principles of UDL we see there is room for the educator interested in liberatory education to make moves to push the boundaries of the prison as we have a valid framework to implement the changes, both on a micro level as educators and macro level institutionally, that are small enough to be discreet but also purposeful enough to have an impact.

But why is making these changes within prison education important? The title for my project was taken from a section I found to be fundamental in Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

Consciously or unconsciously, the act of rebellion by the oppressed
(an act which is always, or nearly always as violent as the initial
violence of the oppressors) can initiate love. Whereas the violence
of the oppressors prevents the oppressed from being fully human,

the response of the latter to this violence is grounded in the desire

to pursue the right to be human. As the oppressors dehumanize

others and violate their rights, they themselves also become

dehumanized. As the oppressed, fighting to be human, take away

the oppressors' power to dominate and suppress, they restore to

the oppressors the humanity they had lost in the exercise of

oppression (38).

Education is an act of love and this is the importance of my project. To

deny the education of the incarcerated student is to deny the humanity of them.

To deny the humanity of them is to deny our own humanity. As such, discussions

of critical prison education become a struggle and discussion in regard to our

own humanity as educators and as citizens.

CHAPTER TWO

CONFERENCE PROPOSAL

There is much scholarship on critical prison theory, literacy studies, and (dis)ability studies individually, but there is very little scholarship that combines all three fields. In my presentation, I examine the possibilities of implementing a critical, liberatory pedagogy in the prison via Universal Design for Learning. First, I examine how the prison institution itself functions as a literacy sponsor of the incarcerated and provide some common definitions providing some context to critical prison theory. Second, I introduce the work of Anna Plemons and assert that liberatory education can be implemented in the prison when the prison educator realizes their role in the literacy sponsorship of the incarcerated. Prison educators interested in liberatory pedagogy can do this via small, organic, and tactical moves to make moves discrete enough to not draw the attention of the prison institution, yet purposeful enough to make a significant impact. Third, I look to the field of (dis)ability studies and assert that making small, organic, and tactical moves through the lens of the principles of Universal Design for Learning provides a heuristic that may be imperfect but still uses Universal Design for Learning as points of references for making pedagogical choices and moves. Lastly, I imagine what a prison education mission statement that values universal design for learning as small, organic, and tactical moves might look like. I then provide some analysis to where the role of Universal Design for Learning comes

into play in the mission statement. My hope is that this presentation

demonstrates that the implementation of critical pedagogy is possible even in the

most restrictive of environments, inspiring educators interested in teaching a

critical, liberatory pedagogy to make such moves within their classrooms.

CHAPTER THREE

CONFERENCE PRESENTATION

Good evening, for those of you that don't know me, my name is Jeremy Lunasco. For those of you that do, my name is Jeremy Lunasco. My presentation tonight is titled Freedom by Design: Universal Design for Learning as Liberatory Pedagogy in Prison. In English education, we are often interested in promoting individual student agency and freedom. Liberatory pedagogy is one way that we can do this. I'm interested in how we as educators could implement liberatory pedagogy within the prison, an institution defined by constraint and domination. Tonight, I'm going to give you some background on the prison's role in the educational experience of the incarcerated, then I will discuss the possibilities of Universal Design for Learning as a liberatory experience in prison, and I will conclude with an imagining of what this might look like.

Before beginning, I'd like to provide a few definitions and assumptions about my project to give you some background.

> **Recidivism:** The return of a formerly incarcerated person to prison. Much current correctional policy is concerned with recidivism, and as such, societal expectations of reducing recidivism are something to keep in mind

> **Liberatory pedagogy:** A pedagogical approach interested challenging domination and promoting agency. Within the context of the prison,

educators are interested in liberatory pedagogy as a form of systematic

critique and method of social justice.

Critical Prison Theory: A critical approach interested in dissecting the

power structure of the prison as a social institution. My project is grounded

in critical prison theory as a school of thought and as a critique of the

prison institution.

Also, a few assumptions: Literacy is more than reading and writing, it is

also understanding and competence in a social context. This is especially

relevant in prison, an institution interested in controlling the social interactions of

those within its walls. Crime is not the focus of this presentation or my project.

This is a critique of a system, not those within the system. And as such, I

intentionally do not use terms such as "offender" or "convict."

For the lived experience of the incarcerated student, policies of the prison

effect their educational opportunities. Even some of the most progressive prison

systems rely on problematic ways of implementing educational policies. These

policies usually focus on society rather than the individual student. Take for

instance the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation's, or

CDCR's stated educational goal: "The goal of [the Office of Correctional

Education] is to provide offenders with needed education and career training as

part of a broader CDCR effort to increase public safety and reduce recidivism."

(Office)

The CDCR's reasons to provide educational opportunities are not to help the incarcerated student develop skills for use upon their release but instead to increase public safety and reduce recidivism. The prison commodifies the education of incarcerated individuals in favor of maintaining the optics of public safety. This perpetuates a societal and systematic denial of educational opportunity for incarcerated students.

So what role does the prison play in the educational experience of the incarcerated student? In one way, the prison controls the literacy development by controlling class time. However, the prison also limits literacy development in more hidden ways. Let's imagine how the educational experience of an incarcerated individual might look different than a traditional student's. Suppose a student outside the prison takes a two-hour class once a week. If they find something from the class they're interested in, they more than likely have some sort of access to do independent research; they could look it up on the internet at home or visit a public library. However, if an incarcerated individual is getting the same amount of literal class time, two hours a week in this example, they are unable to do the same extra-curricular research that a free person is able to do; the incarcerated student would typically have limited access to technology or spaces such as a library. Even if they did, the technology or facility may be lacking due to minimal funds or administrative indifference. They might not have access to a pen and paper without paying for them. They might not have a quiet space to work and concentrate. Their cell is most likely small, cramped, and

overcrowded with two or three people assigned to one space. Prison sweeps might take away any writing or books they may have in their cell and a lockdown would cancel any scheduled class time. College education programs might be available to students, but often times they are self-funded; incarcerated individuals are no longer eligible for Federal Pell Grants nor federal student loans, so paying for college becomes a tremendous if not impossible task.

Of course, the stated goals of the prison are going to be different than the goals of liberatory education. This creates a tension that the liberatory educators in prisons must learn to navigate. Several scholars have discussed how the structure of the prison changes the way we imagine liberatory education, such as Tobi Jacobi and Lori Pompa, who note the possibilities of the prison as a space for social justice. However, I feel the most effective and strongest approach was suggested by Anna Plemons. She recognizes that the teacher cannot effectively be separated from the institution that they serve and as such, the teacher must adjust accordingly. Plemons makes the case that literacy education in prison is a form of creative resistance that must be scaffolded by small, organic, and tactical moves. Plemons analyzes the Community Arts Program, or CAP, at California State Penitentiary, Sacramento; CAP is a program that offers non-credit courses in the arts, including creative writing, visual arts, poetry, music, and performance to incarcerated individuals. In some ways, CAP is a very tempered and humble program; the non-credit courses cannot be used towards a college degree and the focus on art shifts the pedagogical focus from overt critical education to a

pedagogy focused on individual artistic education. This focus on the small and localized is the strongest aspect of CAP – it simultaneously does work in educating its students in artistic literacy while being a modest enough program to not draw the ire of the institution itself. CAP is an example of a program that uses these small, organic, and tactical moves to create educational opportunity for its students.

Plemons' emphasis on the small, organic, and tactical suggests that no action or movement is too small as long as it is done purposefully and intentionally. This leaves us open to many ways of implementing a liberatory pedagogy. I argue that a useful lens to examine these moves is through Universal Design for Learning. In general, Universal Design is the practice of designing the things we use every day to be used by as many people as possible; a notable example of this is the dip in sidewalk pavement to allow wheelchair users to easily cross the street. Designers quickly learned that the curb cut was beneficial to a wide range of users as well, including people who may have difficulty walking or people pushing baby strollers. Universal Design for Learning, or UDL, is taking that same emphasis on accessibility and shifts it to the classroom to create a space that can be used by a wide range of students that lead to agency and success. This sense of agency, no matter how small, is key in that such an inspiration of agency within the incarcerated student inherently goes against what the prison itself is about – an institution interested in removing the freedom of the people inside its walls. In this instance, it's not the

content being learned that is liberatory. Instead it is the pedagogical act of creating a space for agency that becomes a liberatory act.

So what would a prison education emphasizing UDL as liberatory pedagogy look like? There are nine principles of UDL, but tonight we're going to focus on three.

First is the principle of Tolerance for Error where instruction allows for individual student paces and abilities. Incarcerated students come from a wide range of social, economic, and educational backgrounds, so the educator must create a space for their skills in the classroom. Any errors made might not be a reflection of the students' skill or work ethic but instead may be a reflection of poor educational experiences due to the lack of previous opportunities. Additionally, it is important that the incarcerated students do not feel punished for their errors, as their setting already emphasizes a punishment. A tolerance for error could address incarcerated students who had negative experiences with an educational system that may have given up on them and give them a space to learn.

Second is Equitable Use. Equitable use promotes education that is identical when possible, equivalent when not. Since incarcerated students are going to come from a wide range of backgrounds, the educator must attempt teach the same material to every student regardless of their previous experience. Perhaps the educator in the prison must make their prison pedagogy equivalent to their outside pedagogy, ensuring the same quality education is received by

both those on the inside and those on the outside. Equitable use could work to make the expectations for incarcerated students, no matter their prior education level, the same to ensure that every student would be able to use their own abilities in the classroom.

Lastly is the principle of A Community of Learners, which values an environment of communication and interaction between students. The prison works to silence those within its walls, often controlling communication between incarcerated individuals with one another as well as incarcerated individuals and those on the outside. If the prison classroom becomes an environment where dialogue is not only allowed but encouraged, it could enact a liberatory practice. One way to do this is by inside-out programs where prisons and universities work together create a community of learners by opening a venue of dialogue between the two groups.

If we take into account the principles of UDL and goals of liberatory education, what might a mission statement about incarcerated education look like? A perfect mission statement would be able to focus on the student as empowered learner and agent. However, a mission statement implemented in the modern day must also address societal expectations of the prison. To keep in line with the principles of UDL, it must also demonstrate a tolerance for error, display equitable use, and promote a community of learners. Perhaps a reimaging of the CDCR's mission statement might look like this:

The goal of the CDCR's Office of Correctional Education is to accommodate all incarcerated students regardless of ability or experience with the education to grow and become active and engaged community members upon their release. Our mission is to provide the same quality education to those who are incarcerated as those who attend traditional high schools and colleges. Creating informed and critical citizens reduces recidivism as well as creates individuals who are able to make a positive impact on our community.

Let's compare this with the current CDCR mission statement. This revised mission statement makes liberatory assertions without giving too much away. An emphasis of accommodating students regardless of ability or experience demonstrates a tolerance for error, attempting to provide the same educational opportunities as those on the outside demonstrates equitable use, and an emphasis on the importance of public reintegration demonstrates the importance of a community of learners.

In conclusion, a focus on the small, organic, and tactical gives us room to implement a liberatory pedagogy in prison and I think that Universal Design for Learning is a valid framework that we can use to make the changes that are small enough to be discreet but also purposeful enough to have an impact. But why are making these moves important? In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Paulo Freire notes that education is a vessel of love and to deny education is not only denying the humanity of those who are oppressed but denies our own humanity.

A critical prison education gives us the chance to transcend the walls. A critical prison education gives us a chance to humanize those we have dehumanized. And a critical prison education is a site of struggle for our own humanity as educators and as citizens.

Thank you.

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