

May 6, 2019, Monday 6-8:30pm -EBMC Teacher Sangha

—Deb Kerr and Mushim Ikeda

Inclusive Language for EBMC Teachers, Informed by Disability Justice and Cultural Humility

1. Background and Overview

Training for EBMC Teachers on the importance of using inclusive language. Mia Mingus coined the term “access intimacy:” the ease in relationships that happens when disabled people don’t have to continually push for basic needs. This training is in response to our hearing different instances of EBMC teachers:

- continuing to say "sit" when they mean stationary meditation practice or "sitting group" instead of "meditation group"
- including in their Dharma talks references to "crazy" people
- encouraging people to do mindful movement such as stretching without using access-informed invitational language (e.g., asking everyone to "stand up" and do thus and so without providing a variation from a seated position)
- saying things like, "Alright everyone, now stand in a circle and everyone hold hands" without giving people the right to pass in a way that people who don't want to be touched by others can feel that it's fine to opt out
- and of course there can be ongoing awareness needed in regard to using gender non-binary terms, and so on.

— —> I am a beginner in my awareness of DJ, and in my use of accessible language. I identify as a person with a disability, and I am also white, heterosexual and privileged in many other ways. I am very grateful to Jess Schlesinger for all the information she has provided, in trainings done at EBMC for Access-Centered Movement, for the EBMC Teacher Web, and to me personally. As Jess S. says: Disability Justice is a framework that was started in the early 2000's by disabled queer People of Color. White people are not leaders in DJ; and it is important that we all follow the leadership of disabled queer POC. This training on inclusive language is meant to be a beginning. It is not possible in one session to cover the complexity of DJ, the Access-Centered framework, or the complex intersections of race/disability/gender/etc.

2. Two primary ways language is used oppressively:

A. Privileging able-bodiedness as inherently “better than” (for our purposes here— especially via narrow views of what meditation is)

“Sitting meditation,” “walking meditation,” “sitting group,” “please remove your shoes” (without offering alternative), “now we’ll move into groups of 3” (without acknowledging some folks may not be able to easily move)

(EBMC has made some significant strides here, in our changed language around meditation practice, and in many other ways we are addressing our goal of radical inclusivity.)

Handout: [Access Alternatives Grid](http://teacherweb.eastbaymeditation.org) by Jess Schlesinger, available at teacherweb.eastbaymeditation.org

This is only to be used for the teachers in the room and not to be used for other trainings/etc. Jess S. is the founder of Access-Centered Movement, cocreator of the Access-Centered framework. The phrase Access-Centered specifically refers to this framework, which is rooted in disability justice. Contact Jess if you would like further training, or to take this to other organizations, and please support Access-Centered Movement.

B. Viewing people with disabilities as inherently “less than”

From: *10 Questions About Why Ableist Language Matters, Answered*
November 7, 2014 by Rachel Cohen-Rottenberg

“If you routinely use disability slurs, you are adding to a narrative that says that disabled people are wrong, broken, dangerous, pitiful, and tragic.”-Rachel Cohen-Rottenberg

“The economy has been crippled by debt.”
“You’d have to be insane to want to invade Syria.”
“They’re just blind to the suffering of other people.”
“Only a moron would believe that.”

“Disability metaphors abound in our culture, and they exist almost entirely as pejoratives.

You see something wrong? Compare it to a disabled body or mind. Paralyzed. Lame. Crippled. Schizophrenic. Diseased. Sick.

Want to launch an insult? The words are seemingly endless: Deaf. Dumb. Blind. Idiot. Moron. Imbecile. Crazy. Insane. Retard. Lunatic. Psycho. Spaz.

I see these terms everywhere: in comment threads on major news stories, on social justice sites, in everyday speech. These words seem so “natural” to people that they go un-critiqued a great deal of the time. I tend to remark on this kind of speech wherever I see it. In some very rare places, my critique is welcome. In most places, it is not.

When a critique of language that makes reference to disability is not welcome, it is nearly inevitable that, as a disabled person, I am not welcome either.”—RC-R

This is so pervasive in common speech, and has not been addressed as much at EBMC.

3. Viewing inclusive language use as a practice.

Inclusive language and language that is non harming is part of "right speech," and the practice of being mindful when speaking.

Can inclusive language for EBMC teachers become part of our practice, as one of our precepts?

"I undertake the training precept...to use speech that is non harming, and that allows my teachings to be as accessible as possible to everyone."

We will never "get it perfect" and that's okay.

Targeted people must be allowed to self-determine what terms they want used; then it is our role to respect those terms as much as possible. Sometimes, one person's preferred terms may contradict terms we've heard that others want.

So we need to do two things:

1. Relax around it,
2. Commit to learning and growing in our use of inclusive language. Put in diligent effort to try to remember terms requested by the Sangha, demonstrate cultural humility and openness to new learnings.

**Very important: we need to use mindfulness to scan inside ourselves for contraction / resistance / overwhelm: "Oh, that's too much to remember -- I'm doomed to never get it perfect and I'll look foolish/ I'll end up hurting people's feelings..." and then try to open and soften around the resistance and to heal the feelings of overwhelm by reminding ourselves that we can do our best, learn as much as possible, ask for forgiveness, keep trying to learn and grow.

4. Discussion and Feedback

"Is there other terminology requested by the Sangha that we don't know about?"

"At EBMC, what words or terms have you heard that you find culturally insensitive or inappropriate?"

(note contested terms and make suggestions on how to handle them.)