CRIP CAMP CURRICULUM

Lesson 4: Language, Power, and Ableism

Note to Educators

As educators, we each create our own facilitation style. These lesson plans encourage you to maintain your personal style while expanding your practice with participants. You are encouraged to adapt activities to match group and individual needs. This might mean making a written exercise verbal or inviting participants to use technology they have with them to complete the activities if it facilitates their participation.

This is something to think about every time you prompt the group to do something. Making a space accessible isn't only your responsibility as the facilitator, because access is a community responsibility. But, as a facilitator, you can model what access and care look like in action.

We encourage you to start each lesson with an access check-in. This is an opportunity for participants to check in with their bodies and minds, to note any specific needs they may have, and to share what support or understanding they need. For example, does someone need to refill their cup of water? Does anyone need to take medication? Who may be more comfortable laying on the floor or standing up? Does anyone need different lighting in the room? Do the chairs in the room work for people's bodies?

Each person goes around the room and shares how their body and mind may need something. As the facilitator, you can help by going first to give an example. After you are done you may say "check," so everyone knows you are done sharing. You may also remind participants that saying "all my access needs are met, check" is a great way to show that they have what they need to be present for the activities and lessons.

Access check-ins function as a reminder that access needs can change from one moment to the next. An access check-in is also a reminder for you, as a facilitator, to create and maintain, as best you can, a space where participants can ask for accommodations.

In these lesson plans we sometimes use the term "disabled people" instead of "people with disabilities." This is "identity first" language vs. "person first" language and it is a choice made in the context of the US disability community. You may shift the language if you know what is generally preferred or accepted in your community and you may choose to make this a discussion with your group.

About This Lesson

The activities in this lesson plan add up to more than a 45 to 60 minute session. This is intentional to allow for choice and flexibility. Activities can be done over several sessions and you may choose to select and edit the activities so they meet the needs of your participants.

It is okay if you don't always know an answer. Saying "I don't know," or "this is new information for a lot of us, including me," helps build a power-with relationship of honesty with participants.

In this lesson we introduce the concept of ableism by beginning with other "isms" (including racism, sexism, and more). Participants may ask questions about how ableism compares to other forms of discrimination. It is important to affirm for new learners that their understanding of discrimination and oppression is moving in the right direction; however, comparing oppressions does not help end oppressions. Comparing oppressions is not a useful teaching approach and must not be the approach utilized in this conversation. This is because ableism impacts people across differences of race, class, geographic location, age, gender, and other identities; and the intersection of these identities changes the nature of impacts. Intersectionality is the first principle of disability justice and it is important to do Lesson 2 and go over disability justice before doing this lesson.

Instead, this is an opportunity to point out that those who use power over others often encourage "comparing" oppressions as a tactic to keep those with less access to power fighting with each other, instead of finding solidarity to fight and change the systems that oppress them all. Comparing pain or trauma or oppression is not something to do because it reaffirms more trauma.

As a facilitator in the learning environment you are not the person responsible for providing or managing therapeutic interventions around trauma. Be sure to notify any support networks or individuals, such as guidance counselors or school psychologists, that you are doing these lessons so they are prepared to help participants as needed.

You are encouraged to do this lesson plan after you have done the Lesson 2, Power and Disability Justice: An Introduction lesson plan.

At the end of the lesson plan, you will find the CASEL Social Emotional Learning Competencies and the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy that support this lesson.

Instructional Goal:

In this lesson plan participants will understand how language is connected to power and ableism.

Learning Outcomes:

By the end of the lesson participants will be able to:

- show how language is powerful but ever-changing and malleable
- explain the concept of ableism
- identify examples of ableism in everyday life and in film
- recognize the difference between an action's intention and its impact, and understand the implications of this divide

Materials:

You can find these materials at the end of the lesson plan as well as through the links provided. All materials are also accessible on the education page at www.cripcamp.com.

- CRIP CAMP film on YouTube: https://youtu.be/OFS8SpwioZ4
- "Why is the Film Called CRIP CAMP?": shorturl.at/iuEKQ
- Ill Doctrine video "How To Tell Someone They Sound Racist": https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0Ti-gkJiXc
- Examples of Ableism Handout

Preparation:

Review the Examples of Ableism Handout and watch the two short clips. When possible, have participants watch the full film, either in a group (this could be done over two sessions) or on their own.

Activity 1: Access Check-In and Introduction to Topic (5–10 minutes)

Begin with an access check-in, which includes a reminder that access needs can change from one moment to the next. An access check-in is also a reminder for you, as a facilitator, to create and maintain, as best you can, a space where participants can ask for accommodations.

Next, introduce the topic by sharing with participants that one of the things you will be discussing in this lesson is the importance of language as a tool for connecting with other people. During your time together you will examine how language is connected to power and what can happen when we use language to help or harm others. To do this work together you will be using some language that is not often used in class and it is important to remember that this discussion is about learning and unlearning. Sometimes when we learn new things it means we have to unlearn other things. It's ok to be confused and ask questions for clarification.

Review or create Group Agreements for the session. If needed, have the group share additions or ask for clarification.

Sample Group Agreements may include:

- One person shares at a time so others may understand each other
- Use "I" statements when sharing opinions and ideas
- It's ok to pass and not share

Activity 2: Language Is Alive! (10 minutes)

The goal of this activity is for participants to discuss how language is always changing and how they use new and changing language.

Invite participants to share what words they use to describe a fun time. Write their responses on the board. You may hear a range of terms, some in alignment with standard English, some in slang or dialect, and some in other languages.You may not be familiar with all of them and that is ok! The goal here is to help you and participants see how language is always shifting, borrowing, and merging; it is not rigid nor static.

View the list that has been created by participants and note any patterns or themes, or anything that stands out or surprises. Identify any terms that you are not familiar with and ask if participants would like to elaborate. Are there terms listed that have other meanings as well?

For example, you may note terms participants offer such as “lit” to mean a fun time, when this word is often connected to light and electricity.

Next, invite participants to identify which terms their parents or elders in their life use that are on the board. If they do not identify too many terms this way, invite them to generate a list of the terms their parents or elders do use to describe a fun experience.

Compare and contrast the terms offered. Help participants observe that these two lists show how language shifts and changes over time and by communities.

To extend this activity (additional time needed), task participants with tracing the journeys of some of the words they listed on the board. Look up words in Merriam Webster online and see if they have usage or etymology notes on some of the terminology. Here are three to consider:

“Lit”:
This entry includes an article written by Merriam Webster editors about usage of the term as meaning exciting or excellent, including when and how it appeared and who influenced its introduction. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/lit

“Groovy”:
This entry includes a long list of synonyms as well as usage notes.
https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/groovy

“Fun”:
This entry includes an article in the “Learn More” section about how and when the term became a word. https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/fun

Activity 3A: Isms and Ableism (45 minutes)

The goal of this activity is for participants to understand and define ableism, and to connect it to other forms of discrimination and oppression.

Write the term “-ism” on the board. Invite participants to discuss what they know about this term. You may ask them for examples of words they know that end in “ism.”

Write down their responses or have another participant do so. You may hear terms such as “racism,” “sexism,” or ”impressionism,” and “Catholicism.” Many of the terms offered may be negative, it’s important to include terms that are not all negative. The goal is to help participants identify how they are understanding the term.

You may offer a definition of -ism as: –ism is a suffix, something added to the end of a word to show that the original word is about a specific practice, system, or idea. The new words created may be attitudes, political ideas, religions, or artistic movements.

After sharing the definition, invite participants to look at the list they generated and ask if this definition is in line with how they understand the terms listed. Respond to any questions.

Whether or not “ableism” is included on the board, say: Today we are going to discuss another term that is an -ism, “ableism.”

Invite participants to write down on a piece of paper the first thing they think of when hearing the term “ableism.” Remind participants that there are no wrong answers.

Next, collect student responses and redistribute to the group. One at a time, participants are to read aloud what is written on their new piece of paper. After each response has been read aloud, ask the group if any feelings or thoughts came up for them. If you are doing this virtually, you may invite participants to use the chat box to send their answer to you (not to the class) so you can read each one aloud.

Say that ableism is not always easy to define because ableism is everywhere! Ableism is deeply connected to power, especially the power to exclude and harm other people. Remind participants that ableism is not new; it has always existed.

Offer participants this definition of ableism: Ableism is discrimation based on the belief that there is one right way to have a body/mind. Ableism includes actions, thoughts, policies, and systems that people engage in which dehumanize and isolate disabled people. Because ableism focuses on bodies, dictating what makes a “normal” or worthy body and what does not, ableism is something that can be experienced by anyone with a body (which is to say, anyone who is alive).

In the glossary at the end of this lesson there is a community developed definition of ableism which is more contextually complex and at a higher reading level. If you are working with a group where contextual analysis is an appropriate activity, you can pull up that definition instead of or in addition to the one above.

After reviewing the definition, offer a few general examples of different types of ableism.

Ableism in the physical environment:
The absence of ramps, accessible bathrooms, signage with Braille, large print materials, and more.

Ableism in social interactions:
The ways that groups and organizations exclude disabled people either intentionally or through a lack of awareness. For example, basketball can be played by running or wheeling around, but a league that doesn’t allow for wheels excludes people who use wheelchairs from participating. This exclusion has physical and mental health consequences as well as social ones.

Ableism in policies and laws:
Policies and laws that assume we all have the same mobility or we all process information in the same way are ableist as they make participation for many disabled people impossible. Policies and laws that allow discrimination based on differences in our bodies and minds are also ableist. For example, public transportation policies designed to save money by eliminating bus routes make reliable transportation difficult for all to access.

Internalized ableism:
The phenomenon where people with disabilities come to believe that disabled people (including themselves) are less worthy of access and rights.

Next, share with participants that they are going to view a section of the film CRIP CAMP and participants are going to try and identify examples of different forms of ableism.

Distribute the Examples of Ableism Handout and review it with participants. Let them know they may make notes while watching and will also have a few minutes after watching to make notes on their handout.

Play the first 10 minutes of the film CRIP CAMP. Next, offer participants a few minutes to complete their handout and write down examples of ableism.

After participants have had a chance to complete their handout, invite participants to share what they understood was ableism in each column.

You may hear a variety of examples. Offer the ideas below to help participants get started or help round out their ideas:

Examples of Ableism

Physical Environment	Social Interactions	Policies and Laws	Internal
Jim at work as an adult, having to change how he works to adapt to the non-accessible space.	Jim was not allowed to join the Boy Scouts while his sister was allowed to be a Brownie.	The fact that Jim has a job makes him unique enough to warrant a TV news segment about him. Employment discrimination against disabled people is ableism.	Jim is surprised that he doesn't know who is a camper or who is a counselor. Ableism in how we stereotype what a disabled vs. non-disabled person looks/acts/sounds like.
Jim as a child moving around the house.	Founder of Camp Jened said: the problem was not disabled people, the problem was us, so it's our responsibility to change social barriers.	Jim says he was "allowed" to try public school, because public schools were not required to be accessible, making more disabled kids institutionalized.	Jim is amazed to witness so many disabled people in one place at camp.
Denise describes the camp as a utopia because there was no outside/ non-disabled world. An environment where access was prioritized.	Jim's dad told him that he would have to go up to people because they won't go up to him.	Support for each camper, people pushing wheelchairs, everyone playing baseball was such a refreshing novelty.	Jim shares "I wanted to be part of the world, but I didn't see anyone like me in it."

Offer the following discussion questions:

- How did you feel as you were noticing all the instances of ableism?
- Were you reminded of anything you have experienced?
- What would it mean for us if everyone’s needs were met?

To wrap up this activity, pair participants together and have them discuss where they can identify ableism in their home, school, or communities. You may also have pairs design a map of this location that identifies ableist pitfalls as well as inclusive/non-ableist features.

To extend this activity (additional time needed), have participants choose one feature that should be modified for inclusivity and do research on potential solutions, to present to the class. Participants' research should follow your usual classroom guidelines for content reliability and proper documentation.

Activity 3B: Impact vs. Intention (15 minutes)

The goal of this activity is to offer participants an opportunity to consider the difference between the intention and the impact of our decisions and actions.

Begin by asking participants to indicate (with a raising of hands, making of noise, or other method) if they have experienced the following:

1. Used a term incorrectly.
2. Made a joke that was not funny.
3. Been called a name that was negative.
4. Been corrected about the words they use.

Share with participants you are going to view a three-minute video about how to tell someone they have said harmful things. This video is about responding to racism, but the concepts and methods are useful for other practices that cause harm. The person in the video is Jay and he speaks very fast, it is ok if the participants must view the video more than once to understand what he is saying. There are captions on the video.

Watch Ill Doctrine's video on "How To Tell Someone They Sound Racist" (3 minutes):
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b0Ti-gkJiXc

After watching the video invite participants to respond to the following questions:

- What is one important point of this video?
- What is another way to share Jay's statement about focusing on what people DID versus who they ARE?

Say to participants that this video helps us understand what many people call intention versus impact. Intention is what the person hoped would be the outcome. Impact is what actually happened when the person did what they did. Many times when we are learning new words, making new friends, and figuring out our place in the world, we try different ways of communicating, and introduce a range of topics to discuss. This is a common human experience. It is also a common experience to make mistakes and hurt others without realizing that is what is happening until after it has happened. These are times when understanding impact is important.

Ask participants the following questions:

- Think of a time when you did or said something that hurt someone else. How did you feel when you were told you hurt someone?
- Why is making mistakes an important experience to learn from?
- Why is impact often more important than intention?
- How does this discussion connect to ableism?

Activity 4: Cripping Language (20 minutes)

This activity will offer participants the opportunity to discuss the power of language and specifically the ways that communities may reclaim words that have been used in hurtful ways against them. Because this activity highlights the ways that words can be both helpful and hurtful, remind participants of your group agreements and the importance of thinking about the impact our words have on others.

Begin by showing participants the clip of CRIP CAMP director Jim Lebrecht discussing why he chose to title the film "CRIP CAMP": https://www.twitter.com/CripCampFilm/status/1242575312967340038

Invite participants to discuss what they think about the short clip. Ask them if they were surprised to hear the reason for the title. Use the following questions to promote discussion:

- Why is "cripple" understood as a negative term to describe disabled people?
- How is "cripple" a form of name calling?
- What was Jim's reason for using the term "crip" in the title of the film?

Tell participants that "crip" is an example of a reclaimed word, one that was (and sometimes still is) used in a negative way, but that is being claimed proudly by the communities it has been used against. Offer other examples of such words that connect with the communities you and your participants are part of. Some examples you may offer include:

Queer:
A term that historically was used to identify lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBTQ) people in a negative way. Today, the term has been used by LGBTQ communities to claim membership and change the negative history of the term.

Mad:
A term that historically was used to identify mentally ill people in a negative way. Today, the term has been embraced by some mentally ill people to claim membership.

Slut:
A term that still today is used to negatively identify a woman or person assigned female at birth who has body autonomy and makes decisions about her pleasure on her own terms.

Lil:
A term, shortened from “little,” used to refer to someone’s height or age in a way that shrinks them. Today some people identify with this term and use it as part of their nicknames, stage names, or usernames online.

Tell participants it may seem odd and hard to understand, but the same word can be both useful and harmful. One way we can stop thinking of words as just “good” or “bad” is by talking about power and impact. Reiterate for participants that when people who are members of a community use a term for themselves it is a powerful decision for them as people who are targeted and experience harm and oppression.

Ask participants:

- What happens when people who are not members of a group use the same term to identify that group? Who has the power in that case?
- Is the power being used positively or negatively for the members of that group?

End this activity by coming back to a discussion of the way that the term “crip” is used by the director Jim Lebrecht. Some questions you may use to prompt discussion are:

- What does it say to audience members when “crip” is used in the title of the film?
- What may be some responses by non-disabled people to the title?
- Could the word “crip” in the title be understood differently by different communities?

In some Black communities the term “Crip” may be associated with involvement or affiliation with a gang. This is an important comment to honor as it is valid. This is a great way to remind us that language is used differently not only by people who are disabled, but also by communities based on race, geographic location, age, and language spoken at home.

To extend this activity (additional time needed), have participants research and reflect on a term they would like to reclaim for themselves and create an informational text. This text might be an essay, a comic strip, a spoken word performance or another form. They should include properly cited, reliable research on the history of the term and its current usage, and clear and persuasive explanations of their reasons for wanting to reclaim it.

Activity 5: Closing Reflective Prompt (5 minutes)

The goal of this activity is to help participants synthesize their work around ableism.

Thank participants for their engagement and invite them to each say one word that describes how they understand and feel about ableism. Post the words for all to see and have participants generate ideas on ways to “reclaim” them in a sentence. For example, if one word is “angry,” a participant might suggest “angry...enough to point out ableism next time I see it.” “Hopelessness” might become “Hopelessness...is the absence of a plan. We can all make a plan.” Alternatively, invite participants to create images related to reclaiming one or more of the words.

Examples of Ableism Handout

Instructions: As you watch the film CRIP CAMP, identify when and where you witness ableism occurring. Place the examples in the appropriate section based on if it is shown in a physical environment (school, house, subway, etc.), social interactions (communications, group activities), policies and laws, and internally (a person's belief about themselves).

Physical Environment	Social Interactions	Policies and Laws	Internal

Resources
Glossary

Ableism
Discrimation based on the belief that there is one right way to have a body/mind. Ableism includes actions, thoughts, policies, and systems that people engage in which dehumanize and isolate disabled people. Because ableism focuses on bodies, dictating what makes a “normal” or worthy body and what does not, ableism is something that can be experienced by anyone with a body (which is to say, anyone who is alive).

Ableism (Talila “TL” Lewis)
“A system that places value on people’s bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence, excellence and productivity. These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in anti-Blackness, eugenics, colonialism and capitalism. This form of systemic oppression leads to people and society determining who is valuable and worthy based on a person’s appearance and/or their ability to satisfactorily [re]produce, excel and ‘behave’. You do not have to be disabled to experience ableism.”

A working definition by Talila “TL” Lewis in conversation with Disabled Black and other negatively racialized folk, especially Dustin Gibson; updated January 2020. This definition can be found at https://www.talilalewis.com/blog/ableism-2020-an-updated-definition.

-ism
is a suffix, something added to the end of a word to show that the original word is about a specific practice, system, or idea. The new words created may be attitudes, political ideas, religions, or artistic movements.

Power Over
A way of interacting with other people, places, or things where a person or group holds / has power over another person or group. The power is not shared, instead the person with more power has different experiences that give them more control, and they make all of the decisions for the group and not with the group.

Power With

A form of sharing power. Power is the capacity or ability to direct or influence the behavior of others or the course of events. When people share power to have similar outcomes and experiences they are practicing power with one another.

Structural Power

How power is held and experienced in the ways and ideas that lead to how societies and/or communities are built.

Systemic Power

How power is held and experienced in the ways people access resources.

Learn More

Read

Nic Moreno. 2016. “How—and Why—to Reclaim Your Slurs.” Available at: https://rb.gy/kxyvey

Watch

Random House. 2017. “Ta-Nehisi Coates On Words That Don’t Belong to Everyone | We Were Eight Years In Power Book Tour.” Available at: https://rb.gy/eqjjaq

Listen

Juliette Rocheleau. 2019. “A Former Slur Is Reclaimed, And Listeners Have Mixed Feelings.” Available at: https://rb.gy/0mc2pd

Social Emotional Learning Competencies (CASEL)

Self-awareness

The ability to accurately recognize one's own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior. The ability to accurately assess one's strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a "growth mindset."

Self-management

The ability to successfully regulate one's emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations — effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals.

Social awareness

The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

Relationship skills

The ability to establish and maintain healthy and rewarding relationships with diverse individuals and groups. The ability to communicate clearly, listen well, cooperate with others, resist inappropriate social pressure, negotiate conflict constructively, and seek and offer help when needed.

Responsible decision-making

The ability to make constructive choices about personal behavior and social interactions based on ethical standards, safety concerns, and social norms. The realistic evaluation of consequences of various actions, and a consideration of the well-being of oneself and others.

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts/Literacy

Reading (Informational)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.4

Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Writing

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.7

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

Speaking and Listening

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1

Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.3

Evaluate a speaker's point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, assessing the stance, premises, links among ideas, word choice, points of emphasis, and tone used.

Language

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.3

Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.11-12.4

Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 11-12 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.

History/Social Studies

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.