CHAPTER 2

Ways to Move

Presence, Participation, and Resistance in Kairotic Space

Goddamn it, how hard is it to write a 10 page academic paper on comparative race relations during the post–World War II rupture when I'm having an episode! Call up my mother, scream, cry, cuss out my roommate, kick over the table, turn back three months of sober, anti-violent, depression-coping skills and cut into the fiber of my body with stainless-steel scissors, tear down the house.

—Wendy Marie Thompson,
“Her Reckoning: A Young Interdisciplinary Academic Dissects the Exact Nature of Her Disease”

No significant differences or interaction effects [regarding attendance] were found for students’ special needs.

—Nitsa Davidovitch and Dan Soen,
“Class Attendance and Students’ Evaluation of Their College Instructors”

Several years ago, a colleague told me about a student in her Introduction to Women's Studies class who was behaving in a way that puzzled and annoyed my colleague. The student spoke out at odd moments, making remarks that didn't seem to relate to the discussion topic at hand. As the semester went on, her behavior became more unconventional. One day she brought a large bowl of ice cream to class.

“She just sat there, eating it!” my colleague told me, half laughing. “I don't even know where she got it! It was this big ceramic bowl! We were all staring at her, and then she said, ‘Does anyone want some? It's really good.’”

It was hard to know what to say. Finally I said, “That's weird.”

We paused. “She brought ice cream,” my colleague said.

My colleague and I struggled to know what to say because this student's behavior had taken us outside of our conventional understanding of what should go on in a classroom. Not only was she not following the tacit script for classroom participation, she wasn't even following the tacit script for classroom resistance. She wasn't sullen, or silent, or combative. She spoke up readily, but her remarks didn't follow a pattern my colleague could follow. She attended class, but she brought a bowl of ice cream. Almost at the end of the semester, the student brought my colleague a form from the school's Disability Services office: she had been diagnosed with a learning disability that also impacted her social interactions. She wasn't requesting any specific accommodations; her case manager had said to bring the form, so she was bringing it.

This account is similar to a genre that Melanie Yergeau identifies as the “autism anecdote,” discussed in more detail in chapter 1. Although the student in question is not labeled autistic, the similarity to the anecdotes described by Yergeau is clear. In relating it, I am hoping to call attention not to the student herself, who does not have a direct voice in the account, but to the institutionally affiliated persons and structures that contemplate, label, and diagnose her: my colleague's and my uncomfortable laughter and uneasiness of what to do; our unspoken assumption that classroom conduct should follow particular norms; and the hazy role played by Disability Services. My point here—and a forecast of the argument in this chapter—is that the student is not “the problem,” although she was cast in that role by the institutional authorities around her, including myself.

The Scene of Academic Discourse: Kairotic Space

This anecdote, and my rereading of it years later, highlights a number of the problems that access to academic discourse may present to students with mental disabilities. First, there is the issue of formal accommodations. We are accustomed to thinking of classroom accommodations in terms of measurable steps that help “level the playing field”: note-takers; extra time on exams; captions on videos; lecture slides posted online; Braille and large-print handouts; the presence of a sign interpreter. But what accommodations can be offered for the student who is earnestly participating, but in ways that do not fall into the (usually rationalist) pattern of classroom discussions and activities? Although the notion of a
classroom "discussion" implies that it is open to all perspectives, this setting is in fact controlled by rigid expectations: students taking part in a "discussion" are expected to demonstrate their knowledge of the topic at hand, raise relevant questions, and establish themselves as significant, but not overly dominant, voices in a crowd of at least fifteen—and usually many more—other persons. Further complicating the transaction is the fact that different teachers have different expectations for the "script" of a classroom discussion. One teacher might want straightforward paraphrasing of the reading; another might want provocative questions; yet another might want connections drawn between today's material and last week's. These expectations may or may not be communicated directly.

Classroom discussions are one example of a type of discursive setting that I call kairotic space. These are the less formal, often unnoticed, areas of academe where knowledge is produced and power is exchanged. A classroom discussion is a kairotic space, as is an individual conference with one's professor. Academic conferences are rife with kairotic spaces, including the question-and-answer sessions after panels, impromptu "elevator meetings," and gatherings at restaurants and bars on the periphery of formal conference events. Other examples from students' experiences might include peer-response workshops, study groups, interviews for on-campus jobs, or departmental parties or gatherings to which they are invited.

"Kairos" is a concept from classical rhetoric usually translated as "the opportune or appropriate time"; however, kairos really goes further than this. Cynthia Miecznikowski Sheard suggests that it incorporates multiple elements of context, including not only time but other factors including physical space and attitudes, none of which, Sheard argues, can be meaningfully separated (306). As this implies, kairos carries ethical and contextual as well as temporal implications, a point that has also been discussed by scholars including Michael Harker and James Kinneavy.

In a similar vein, although not referring to kairos directly, Jeffrey T. Grabill offers a concept he calls "infrastructure." Grabill's work is important here because he emphasizes the centrality of access to infrastructure, which many writings on kairos do not. Drawing on work by Susan Leigh Star and Karen Ruhleder, Grabill defines infrastructure as follows:

[I]nfrastucture means something more than a static, installed base. For Star and Ruhleder (1996), "infrastructure is something that emerges for people in practice, connected to activities and structures" (p. 112). In other words, just as a tool is not an artifact with "pre-given attributes frozen in time" (p. 112) but rather given meaning as a tool by specific users working on particular problems in specific situations, so too does the meaning and value of an infrastructure emerge. To ignore infrastructure, then, is to miss key moments when its meaning and value become stabilized (if even for a moment), and therefore to miss moments when possibilities and identities are established. (464)

Thus, a classroom's infrastructure comprises not only its tables and chairs, its technologies, and its participants, but also the beliefs, discourses, attitudes, and interchanges that take place there. Grabill's notion of infrastructure and my notion of kairotic space share this concern: when considering the spaces of academe, we must observe—and hopefully intervene in—the unfolding of power relations by means of "studying the unstudied" (Grabill 465). In this case, (some of) the unstudied are students and faculty members with mental disabilities.

I define a kairotic space as one characterized by all or most of these criteria:

1. Real-time unfolding of events
2. Impromptu communication that is required or encouraged
3. In-person contact
4. A strong social element
5. High stakes

I specify "all or most of these criteria" to indicate that the boundaries of such spaces are neither rigid nor objectively determined. So, for instance, an online discussion, a professor-student conference taking place via instant message, or a job interview held by telephone, could all qualify as kairotic spaces despite the lack of in-person contact. But an informal study session between two students who have been friends for years and who experience minimal risk in studying together might not. The key element is the pairing of spontaneity with high levels of professional/academic impact. Attention to relations of power is of great importance in understanding kairotic space, as is recognition that different participants in kairotic spaces will perceive those relations differently.

Consider the common instance of a professor and a student—perhaps her thesis advisee—having lunch together. Although the professor might feel very comfortable in such a space, and assume that the event is just a
friendly lunch (even a treat for the student), it is likely that the student will feel at least a bit on display, called upon to behave appropriately and to perform academically (although subtly) as well. Now imagine that this student experiences severe anxiety. He finds it difficult to meet his advisor’s eyes at appropriate intervals, and for appropriate lengths of time; in trying to attend to the eye-contact issue, he finds himself missing much of what she is saying. She asks him a question about his research, and he tries to explain the theories he has been considering, but cannot remember any of the researchers’ names. (Zorro? No, that’s not it. The name is something like Zorro, but if he says that, he will be laughed at, perhaps thought stupid.) In the middle of all this, a waiter arrives to take his order; he has not had time to peruse the menu, and in any case would need at least five silent minutes to absorb its densely printed verbal information. He says, “Do you have any salads?” The waiter responds, “Yes, they’re all there on the menu,” and then begins to list them rapidly, in a monotone. Suddenly, the student remembers the name of the theorist and blurts it out: “Zola!” His advisor and the waiter both look at him with puzzlement. He knows he is not making a good impression.

In their study of academic conferences, McCarthy and colleagues (2004) have observed the inequities of interchanges in such spaces:

[Opportunities to “give and take” tend to be unevenly distributed among the conference attendees, depending on one’s status in the community, level of participation in the formal conference program, and more subtle issues such as one’s native language and level of extroversion. (39)]

Of course, we can and should add “and disability status” to the list of issues that McCarthy and his co-writers have identified, since—as is common knowledge among persons with disabilities—our attempts to access kairotic spaces are often fraught. This fraughtness has much to do with time and how it is perceived by different persons. Crip time, a term from disability culture, refers to a flexible approach to normative time frames (Gilli: Zola). At a conference, adhering to crip time might mean permitting more than fifteen minutes between sessions; it might mean recognizing that people will arrive at various intervals, and designing sessions accordingly; and it might also mean recognizing that audience members are processing language at various rates and adjusting the pace of conversation. It is this notion of flexibility (not just “extra” time) that unites kairos and crip time. Even more than academic conferences, classrooms tend to be run under strict time constraints. Students are expected to arrive on time, absorb information at a particular speed, and perform spontaneously in restricted time frames (as in discussions or peer-response groups). It is often assumed that smaller or more discussion-oriented settings constitute better learning environments for all students. For example, Alison Roberts and Keri Iyall Smith, studying teaching in sociology classes, straightforwardly presume that small discussion groups “create a safe space” for students (294). However, if we consider the position of the mentally disabled student in such a context, we can guess that this environment might feel anything but safe.

Despite their importance, kairotic spaces tend to be understudied. One reason for this is that it’s difficult to collect data in them (Ventola, Shalom, and Thompson 361). Another, more compelling reason is that their impact tends to be underestimated by those who move through them with relative ease. The importance of kairotic space will be more obvious to a person who—for example—can hear only scraps of a conversation held among a group sitting at a table, or who needs more than a few seconds to process a question asked of her in a classroom discussion.

In the chapter “Divided Curriculum” from Claiming Disability, Simi Linton argues that higher-education curricula tend to split between applied fields and liberal arts, with “disability” usually shunted into the applied fields and treated as a medicalized “problem” requiring remediation. However, Linton also notes that with the growth of disability studies, the gap is narrowing and disciplinary divides are blurring. One example is the International Journal of Inclusive Education, many of whose writers take an explicitly DS stance while addressing familiar “special education” questions, including participation. Individual researchers, such as Joan Ostrove, Constance Pledger, and Patricia Silver, work from a DS perspective within disciplines that have traditionally taken a more individualized and medicalized view. And even within psychiatric fields, researchers have begun to call for supported education and to note the inadequacy of accommodations provided for students with mental disabilities (Collins and Mowbray).

In studies of classrooms, kairotic exchanges have been theorized from the perspectives of gender, race, class, and specific disabilities including blindness, deafness, and mobility impairments. In addition, some researchers have theorized the complex interactions of the classroom without reference to identity markers, focusing instead on the differences in
perception between professors and students. I propose that we can learn from these studies' conclusions, noting their typical failure to account for the specific issues facing students and professors with mental disabilities, but also drawing upon the strategies they suggest to redesign a more inclusive classroom infrastructure. In order to do so, I will examine the classroom with reference to topoi including presence, participation, and resistance. Following calls in DS methodology for "studying up," or investigating the paradigms and practices of those in dominant positions (Fine; Oliver; Price, "Disability Studies Methodology"), I examine work by teachers and researchers on these phenomena. I intersperse analyses of published research with accounts from my own classroom experiences and writings by students with mental disabilities.

Presence and Absence

Attendance should be one of the easiest variables for students to control.

—Steven E. Gump
“The Cost of Cutting Class”

In *Speech and Phenomena: And Other Essays on Husserl’s Theory of Signs*, Jacques Derrida argues that presence is not the phenomenological notion of a coherent body, object, or sign existing in a coherent moment, but rather a diffuse series of repetitions whose imaginary original referent is endlessly deferred. The phenomenological understanding of presence (specifically Husserl’s), Derrida argues, presumes “the systematic interdependence of the concepts of sense, ideality, objectivity, truth, intuition, perception, and expression” (99). Although Derrida’s theory has been widely applied in areas such as literary analysis and gender studies, most pedagogical research continues to value a stable, rationalist notion of presence, both in the ways that texts are produced and in expectations for participation in kairotic spaces such as the classroom. “Presence” is usually taken as empirically obvious, and as an a priori good. When its questionable epistemological status is mentioned at all, the purpose is often to brush it aside, as in this passage from Gordon Harvey’s “Presence in the Essay”:

[W]e should probably find a different, more general word for “the personal” in essays. I suggest “presence,” since this is the concept we invoke when we feel life in writing, when we feel an individual invested in a subject and freely directing the essay—not surrendering control to a discipline’s conventions, or to a party line, or to easy sentiments and structures, or to stock phrases. It’s unfortunate that “presence” is the name that Derrida detectives have given to their evil Moriarty; but we needn’t use the phrase as they do, to mean some truth or self existing wholly apart from writing. We can use it to mean simply a certain feeling in the reader, subjective but discussable, caused by something in the writing. (650)

Harvey’s nod to the problematics of presence, however dismissive, is useful because it clarifies his essay’s own position: not just in favor of presence, but in favor of a *rationalist* discourse of presence, one that “freely directs” discourse and is not “surrendering control” to other voices. This “free,” individual writer is “invested” in the work, and her investment is signaled by her ability to provoke “a certain feeling in the reader.” Such a perspective forthrightly comingles presence with the vexed concepts of the individual, freedom, and control.

When presence appears more literally on the scene of academic discourses—that is, when it is used to refer to whether or not students physically attend classes—the conflation of presence, goodness, freedom, control, and individuality is used to construct pedagogies that presume that, first, presence is the sine qua non of learning in higher education; and second, that the “choice” of whether or not to be present belongs to the individual student. Studies of classroom attendance generally agree that presence is correlated with higher grades. From that finding, researchers often move automatically to the conclusion that students therefore “should” attend classes since that factor is one they can “control” (as in the quotation from Gump). When this research is examined from a DS viewpoint, however, disturbing omissions arise: some studies ignore the fact that disabled students face barriers to attendance; others make vague gestures such as including “special needs” as a background factor, but fail to consider disability in any detail; yet others use methods which in themselves presume that certain disability-related traits, such as “neuroticism,” are iminical to academic achievement.

Most common is the first type of approach—that which simply ignores the possibility that any sort of disability, let alone mental disability, may play a role in students’ presence in class. Typical of this approach is Marvin Druger’s “Being There: A Perspective on Class Attendance,” pub-
lished in the *Journal of College Science Teaching*. Druger states that “‘being there’ is the essence of learning and maturing, and this is something that we need to reinforce in our teaching” (351). Notably, Druger equates presence (“being there”) with “experiencing” a class:

If students are not in classes regularly, they miss the experience. Even if the instructor is a terrible lecturer, students learn from the experience. We tend to forget information, but we don’t easily forget experiences... [if] students don’t participate, they will miss the experiences, and nobody can ever adequately explain to them what they missed. (350–351)

From the perspective of mental disability, the problems with this argument are readily apparent. First, simply sitting in class does not mean that the attendee is “experiencing” the class. Students with difficulty concentrating, who are falling asleep due to anxiety- or depression-induced insomnia, or who struggle to follow the “logical” structure or typical speed of most lectures are indeed experiencing something, but not what Druger means by “the experience.” Second, this view presumes that all learners learn in the same way: among people. While this sort of learning may be effective for most learners, Druger takes most to be all. A student with social anxiety, or one on the autism spectrum, for example, might get a great deal more out of a learning process that does not involve close contact or interaction with others.

I learned this latter point, somewhat to my chagrin, with a student—I’ll call him Jeff—whom I tutored through the Disability Services office at UMass-Amherst. I was Jeff’s writing tutor for over a year, and during the first few months I struggled to involve him in various collaborative and dialogue-based exercises that I considered synonymous with learning to write better. We tried brainstorming, listing, sketching, dialoguing, walking around campus, even phone calls—a huge array of activities that I thought would unlock his latent ability (and, I assumed, his need) to write in recursive, building-over-time drafts. Jeff kept telling me that these methods “didn’t work” for him, although he patiently tried them all. His method of drafting was to think by himself for a long time, and then to write a complete essay—beginning with the first word and ending with the final citation on his “Works Cited” page. As a writing teacher steeped in process-oriented pedagogies, I was horrified by this approach. I would go through Jeff’s drafts with him and make various suggestions.

Each time, Jeff would revise exactly as I suggested, and exactly to the extent I suggested—no more, and no less. Finally, I was forced to concede that what I had assumed to be true of all writers was not true for this writer. His drafting process was indeed a process; it just wasn’t one that I could easily observe and participate in, since most of it took place via thought rather than physical action, and when he was alone. He was earning fair grades on his writing, and I finally admitted—to myself and to him—that I was pushing him to try other strategies not because his writing “needed” it in terms of the way it was valued by his teachers, but only in terms of how I valued his process. Shortly thereafter, we shifted our focus to a different subject area, one that required more review and “quizzing,” which better suited his actual needs as a learner in college.

What I want to emphasize about this story is not just my own slowness to learn how Jeff learned—although that’s important—but that Jeff continued to try to apply my methods long after he realized (and had told me) that they just weren’t working for him. As his tutor, and an employee of Disability Services, I was an authority, and I exercised that authority by pushing him toward noneffective styles of drafting for quite a while. Pretty much the only authority Jeff could have exercised in that situation would have been to choose to stop attending sessions—that is, to remove his presence from the kairotic scene of our tutoring sessions. I’m thankful he did not, for it permitted me to learn what I needed to, and also (finally) to become a more effective tutor for him. Jeff exhibited great motivation in continuing to attend sessions led by his chipper, “process”-obsessed tutor. If he had not been so motivated, he would have risked being labeled with one of the terms typically used to describe students who are not accessing academic discourses in approved ways: resistant, having a “bad attitude,” or—had his patience run out—simply absent. And hence, not motivated.

*Motivation* is a term that comes up often in studies of student attendance, and frequently, the presumption made about motivation is that it is closely correlated with students’ presence or absence in the classroom. For example, Randy Moore’s study of students in an introductory biology course for nonmajors argues that attendance is directly related to motivation because it requires a personal effort that relates directly to the course and learning. Students who are motivated enough to attend class consistently are also probably motivated enough to study outside of class, read and
study the course textbook, turn in assignments on time, and attend help sessions. Together, these activities greatly increase students' time-on-task and, as a result, increase learning and improve grades. (370)

To further reinforce this presumed causal relationship, Moore provides its corollary in the next paragraph: students "not motivated enough to attend class regularly" will "seldom" be motivated enough to perform other activities such as studying, reading, and attending help sessions, which "produces less learning and lower grades" (370). I don't disagree that nonattendance may produce lower grades, since teachers routinely penalize absences; however, I'm troubled by the quick slide Moore makes from attendance to out-of-class studying behaviors to "increase[d] learning." In fact, a highly motivated student may often miss class; may spend a huge amount of "time-on-task" yet not retain what he has studied, or not be able to perform his knowledge in approved-of ways; and may find that his learning "increases" when he is alone but falls apart when he works in a small group or a crowded lecture hall. To be clear, I am not arguing that we should ignore the importance of attendance, nor throw out the notion that academic "achievement" is, to at least some degree, possible to assess. I am arguing that most of our research and practice forms quick assumptions about the interdependence of presence, motivation, achievement, and learning—each of which is vastly complicated in itself, let alone in combination.

What about studies that do take a more nuanced view of the attendance phenomenon? Some researchers have considered differences in gender, race, "special needs," or personality type in their studies. The "special needs" approach is taken by Nitsa Davidovitch and Dan Soen, whose study was conducted in Israel. However, the authors do not explain what they mean by "special needs," nor how this term was identified to students on the questionnaires used. Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that "no significant differences or interaction effects were found for students' special needs." Although "special needs" was identified as a demographic category (along with area of study, gender, and age) and was not the focus of the study, still it is disappointing that so little attention is paid to this concept.

Studies that use personality inventories do pay explicit attention to disability—specifically, mental disability—because most personality inventories are structured in ways that both mark and pathologize mental disability. This is the case with the Five-Factor Personality Inventory, also called the "Big Five" and, more recently, the NEO PI-R, developed by Paul T. Costa Jr. and Robert R. McCrae. Woodfield, Jessop, and McMillan report that this tool is "dominant" in the field of personality psychology (a), and it comes up quite often in educational research (it will appear in the section on "Participation," below). The five factors are Extraversion, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Neuroticism, and Openness to Experience. Each factor is grouped with a number of attributes that define it further: for example, facets of agreeableness include "generous, kind, sympathetic," while facets of neuroticism include "anxious, self-pitying, unstable" (McCrae and John, n.p.). Unsurprisingly, such studies find that neuroticism tends to correlate with lower attendance rates as well as lower academic achievement in general. As Caspi and colleagues put it, "Neuroticism is the opposite of emotional stability, a dimension which generally predicts university success... emotionally stable students perform better than neurotic students" (133). (Ironically, neurotic is a highly dated term, and fell out of general psychiatric use in 1994, with the advent of DSM-IV [Aho 245]. Yet it persists in educational models that direct current research and practice.)

Although my temptation is to brush off instruments like the NEO PI-R, understanding that their agendas are vastly different from a DSA agenda, it's worth examining with more care the various ways that educational use of this instrument fails students, for it is frequently applied in university settings. My concerns about using the NEO PI-R to make decisions in educational contexts are these: First, the broad category of "neuroticism" collapses together all kinds of mental disabilities, missing important features of difference (Morey and Zanarini). Second, defining "neuroticism" by means of "self-pitying" reifies the myth of disabled persons as self-pitying and narcissistic; third, I am concerned about the implications of using five orthogonal (nonoverlapping) categories that define traits such as anxiety against traits such as being "enthusiastic," "appreciative," "generous," or "forgiving" (McCrae and John, n.p.). While the factors are meant to delineate dimensions of personality—thus, one respondent to the instrument questionnaire will probably exhibit some degree of all five factors—it is an inescapable fact that, according to this type of measurement, anxiety is defined as different from, occupying a different lexical space than (for example), generosity. Fourth, for all
their careful measurement and observation, educational users of this model have little to say about how we might make attendance less of a barrier for our more anxious, neurotic, self-pitying students. Woodfield, Jessop, and McMillan call for “the identification of what universities can do to improve the attendance records of all its students, but particularly those groups most vulnerable to absences” (19-20)—and yet this vague call is not followed up with any concrete suggestions, nor have universities themselves widely taken it up. In fact, the impulse seems to be moving in the opposite direction: personality tests are becoming more and more popular, not as grounds for intervention and support, but as predictors of academic success, with some educators even suggesting that they could be used as admission criteria (Harrison et al.; Conard).

Where and when do students’ voices enter the debate on attendance? Some researchers do investigate students’ points of view, more often by means of questionnaires than interviews or other more narrative methods. One of the most carefully constructed of these is the 2001 study by Paul Friedman, Fred Rodriguez, and Joe McComb, which included an initial phase through which students’ own reasons for being absent from class were collected twenty-three distinct reasons were identified and then administered a detailed questionnaire that incorporated these reasons. Friedman, Rodriguez, and McComb did not ask about disability status when assembling student profiles but, perhaps as a result of constructing a questionnaire based upon student perspectives, the “Reasons for Absence” list includes a number of items that implicitly reference disability. Among the reasons listed on the questionnaire (including “Other”) are these:

I was sick.
Emergency arose—I met an urgent, unexpected need.
I wanted to take a break when class was meeting.
The class was hard to reach (e.g., far from where I live or work, parking is inconvenient).
The teacher digresses, is repetitious, confusing, or goes too quickly, so I don’t learn much when I attend class.
The teacher’s speech or handwriting is not intelligible.
The teacher is rude or doesn’t like me.
I didn’t want to participate in a scheduled activity.
I dislike (an)other student(s) in that class. (127)

While any of these reasons could apply to nondisabled students (and Friedman et al. seem to assume all their participants are nondisabled), note the space this questionnaire makes for the possibility that a class might not be a useful learning environment for cognitive or emotional reasons, as well as the possibility that illness, need for rest, or sudden unanticipated barriers might be important factors as well. This is a welcome change from teacher-centered studies of attendance that make facile assumptions about absent students’ attitudes, lack of motivation, and failure to spend “time on task.” Friedman, Rodriguez, and McComb make the familiar point that attendance is highly correlated with academic achievement; however, they also emphasize the importance of the factors “The teacher notices or cares that I am there” and “I like participating in this class” (129). Rather than presuming that students must attend class and that absent students are deficient, Friedman, Rodriguez, and McComb begin to make substantial suggestions for ways that kairotic spaces themselves, not students, might be remediated.

Testimonials from students on presence as a feature of undergraduate education, beyond aggregated survey responses, are hard to find. One of the few available is “Drawn Out of Dejection” by Timile Brown, published in Disability Studies Quarterly. (I should note that I taught Timile in several classes, and was her independent-study instructor as she composed this essay; my experiences working with her are discussed in more detail in the section on participation.) She writes:

I was a freshman in college, and I wanted some help. I wanted to know why I was feeling this way. Why I couldn’t get out of bed in the morning. Why I cried for no reason some days, out of nowhere. Why I couldn’t cry at times when it made sense to cry. Why I felt sick all of the time when I didn’t have a cold or the flu. Why I couldn’t concentrate. Why it made me physically ill when I thought of having to sit in the classroom around other people. Why? What is wrong with me?

As this passage illustrates, what teachers often assume to be “poor motivation” may in fact be a more complex situation: a student who, for a variety of reasons, cannot get to class—perhaps cannot get out of bed. When Brown did make it to class, as the essay later narrates, the experience could be agonizing:
Dr. Mantage was a great teacher, and I wanted to give him my undivided attention. He deserved that. But I just couldn’t. My mind had a mind of its own. It wouldn’t let me concentrate. I missed the lesson on Marcus Garvey! What is it that he did? He . . .

Now, my heart is pounding. It’s getting warm in here. Why am I so tired all of a sudden? It’s as if something is touching me. I can feel it drawing the energy from my limbs. My head hurts. Now a migraine is coming. I hate it when I get those. We have to write a paper on Marcus Garvey by next class. It’s not a big paper, but if I don’t learn the lesson in class, I won’t understand the reading and then I can’t write the paper, and if my migraine gets worse I’ll see spots in my eyes and then I won’t be able to read at all . . . Panic. The room is spinning. Ringing. Loud ringing in my ear. What is that? Does anyone else hear that? Oh no, I can’t breathe. Take a deep breath, Timile. Maybe you’re just having an asthma attack. You just got a little worked up and it triggered your asthma. You are okay. No, I’m not. It’s getting worse. That pain in my chest. Maybe I’m having a heart attack. But I can’t. I’m only 18. I hope no one is watching me. Please God, don’t let anyone see me like this. Please let me make it to the end of class. Where’s my phone? What time is it? Only two minutes left in class. Oh no! I missed the whole lesson. Where was I? How did I miss 48 minutes? What day is it? Gasping for air, I have to go. I have to go! I speed walk back to my dorm room. Terrified that there is a witness . . .

My mom called them my hankty moods. When I would isolate myself in my room, away from everyone else, or when I didn’t feel like talking to anyone, I was being hankty. But hankty wasn’t cute or funny here. Not in college.

What Brown’s mother called “hankty,” college instructors and administrators have other terms for: lazy, unmotivated, low-achieving, or—to borrow one of the neuroticism descriptors from the “Big Five”—self-pitying. Why do we so rarely hear from students about how it feels to miss classes? Certainly, there is plenty of teacher lore about the elaborate excuses we sometimes receive, usually couched as jokes. But why do we have so little understanding, either in the methodological form presented by Friedman, Rodriguez, and McComb or in the narrative form presented by Brown, of what presence and absence really mean in the classroom, their weight, their significance, their consequences? And how might we move beyond the circular logic of “attendance = high grades = students must attend class” toward more inclusive ways of understanding presence in education?

In “On Autistic Presence,” Stuart Murray argues that persons on the autism spectrum confound traditional notions of what it means to “have presence,” and that their narratives can “form a conception of autism that extends beyond the ways in which the condition is labelled in medical and other institutional contexts” (4). One such institutional context, of course, is that of school: the conventional narrative of the autistic student constructs her as the “hand flapping, self-stimulating, echolalic young child displaying no interest in others and obsessed with rituals” (Murray 2). Murray argues that the presence of persons on the autism spectrum confounds such narratives and “stops the condition [of] being only subject to the workings of metaphor and fascination” (9). In written narrative, which is the focus of Murray’s study, I believe this to be true. It is potentially true in the narratives constructed by our presence in kairotic space as well; however, in kairotic space, persons with mental disabilities are especially vulnerable to being overwritten by dominant narratives. The moments are fleeting, the timing is precise and quick, the cues for appropriate behavior both rigid and subtle. In the next section, I turn to the question of what happens when persons with mental disabilities are written by teachers and researchers—and when they write their own narratives—in kairotic classroom space.

Participation and Discussion

One key issue to recognize is that the classroom is not a safe space.

—Peter N. Goggin and Maureen Daly Goggin, “Presence in Absence: Discourses and Teaching (In, On, and About) Trauma”

Participation in the classroom (and attendant spaces, such as office hours) has been affiliated with many ideals, including engagement, attitude, citizenship, and leadership—to name just a few. Studies of participation range widely; some assume that all students and instructors come from similar cultural or experiential backgrounds, while others are carefully attuned to difference. Some take an explicitly rhetorical stance, while others assume that pedagogies can be objectively and universally
applied. A vast literature exists in disability-oriented pedagogical journals such as *The Journal of Special Education*; however, this literature tends to view “participation” as an issue of whether students are getting to class and completing their work successfully, rather than how they are *experiencing and navigating* kairotic spaces such as classroom discussions. Conversely, a fairly substantive literature on classroom participation appears in more general journals, such as *College Teaching*, but these studies usually ignore disability altogether, addressing kairotic exchanges in terms of other markers such as race and class—when such markers are considered at all. Among what I have termed *mental disabilities*, the disabilities most often considered in higher education research are learning and cognitive differences; psychiatric disabilities are addressed much less often.

It’s not difficult to find articles proclaiming that students should not “disrupt” the classroom. An example of this point of view comes from Lloyd J. Feldmann’s “Classroom Civility is Another of Our Instructor Responsibilities,” which states unequivocally that “incivility” in classrooms is a rampant problem and must be eradicated. Feldmann defines incivility as “any action that interferes with a harmonious and cooperative learning atmosphere in the classroom,” and classifies it in terms of four categories: “annoyances,” such as arriving late or answering one’s phone during class; “classroom terrorism” such as going off-topic or holding “private conversations” during class discussions; “intimidation,” such as threatening to give negative teacher evaluations; and “involv[ing] or threaten[ing] violence” (137–38). Clearly, some of Feldmann’s objections are justifiable and important; threatening violence, for example, is a serious problem (and, not incidentally, is experienced disproportionately by those of minoritized identities). However, I want to call attention to the fact that what an instructor experiences as an “annoyance” or “rudeness” might in fact be a student participating in a way that performs, or attempts to accommodate, her own mental disability. For example, a late arrival could mean the student is lazy and thoughtless, but could also mean the student has any one of a number of disabilities that interfere with navigation. Whispering to a classmate or passing notes may be efforts to “catch up” on discussion that is progressing too fast to follow; they might also signal that a student cannot speak in front of the group but deeply wishes to express some idea. Even that bête noire of college instructors, the dreaded cell phone, might represent not “incivility” but any one of a number of strategies to enhance participation, including an attempt to diffuse the stress of sitting quietly in a classroom in the first place.

Not surprisingly, Feldmann’s argument that classrooms must be “civil” hews closely to the rationalist imperative that tacitly governs so much of academic discourse. In addition to advising instructors to “take action immediately” to quell incivilities, Feldmann specifies the importance of *omitting emotion* from such exchanges:

We [instructors] must always remain calm, analytical, and unemotional. Unless carefully planned, expressed emotion tends to make any situation worse. . . . The cardinal rule here is to keep your cool. (139)

My problem here is less with Feldmann’s insistence that instructors be always “unemotional,” which is obviously rather silly, but rather with its presumption that “incivility” is not *always already* about emotion. Returning to Andrea Nicki’s point, it is one thing to struggle with emotional upheavals in kairotic space, which everyone does, and quite another to have a disability that is *composed of* lack of calm or difficulty apprehending socially sanctioned levels of intensity. Feldmann’s one reference to the possibility that an instructor might not enjoy his privileges of being a “big white older male” (and apparently one with easy access to calm and objectivity) is to urge “non-BWOM” instructors to work hard to “overcome” these limitations (139).

Less strident than Feldmann’s, but retaining the presumption that classrooms will be filled with rational subjects, is Robert Brooke’s study “Underlife in the Writing Classroom.” This study was one of the earliest to recognize that what instructors assume is disruptive behavior—non-participation, or even anti-participation—could in fact be a form of active participation, albeit with a different agenda. Brooke defines underlife as those behaviors which undercut the roles expected of participants in a situation—the ways an employee, for example, shows she is not just an employee, but has a more complex personality outside that role. . . . [B]oth students and teachers undercut the traditional roles of the American educational system in order to substitute more complex identities in their place. (141)
In the classroom Brooke studied, students engaged in “private conversations” during discussions (145), made comments on people’s roles in the classroom, and engaged in nonsanctioned activities such as reading the student newspaper or writing journals while they were supposed to be taking notes on discussions. Brooke’s analysis, which draws on Goffman’s Stigma and Asylums as well as literature in writing instruction, demonstrates that these “disruptions” can have a positive role: they seek to “provide the other participants in the classroom with a sense that one has other things to do, other interests, that one is a much richer personality than can be shown in this context” (148). Naturally, these positive efforts may not enhance the instructor’s agenda; however, they are not simply destructive impulses.

An important distinction between Brooke’s reading of underlife and mine is that Brooke treats all such activities as coming from equally situated participants, without regard to differing levels of access. For example, he does not consider the possibility that such unscripted behaviors could stem from lack of ability to follow social cues; from anxiety, confusion, or exhaustion; or from difficulty adhering to the prescribed pace of classroom activities. However, I believe we can and should extend the notion of underlife to include these situations, and recognize that students with mental disabilities may disrupt conventional agendas of participation not out of laziness or malice, nor even rebelliousness, but through sincere efforts to participate in ways that reflect their own abilities and needs.

The notions of participation (as well as presence) have been deeply infiltrated over the last twenty years by the rise of kairotic spaces that do away with literal, fleshly presence—classes held entirely online, or supplementary spaces to conventional classrooms including blogs, discussion boards, and online course-management systems. Digitally mediated spaces are important not only because they have become almost ubiquitous in higher education, but also because their development is closely entwined with disability in education. Online courses are often touted as ways to accommodate mobility, sensory, and other kinds of impairments—sometimes including impairments of the mind. Indeed, it would seem that online spaces offer great promise for those with mental disabilities, since they diffuse kairotic space and enable it to flex in unexpected directions—in other words, they are capable of “crippling” it. However, digital technologies are not simply new-and-improved modes of access: the impression that they will “confer unalloyed benefits upon people with disabilities” presumes that disability is a “static, biologically originating deficit of a given individual, as opposed to a contingent phenomenon that is constituted through social structures and discourses” (Goggin and Newall 263). Moreover, as Jason Palmeri has shown, pedagogical applications of digital technologies tend to rely on a static divide between “dis” and “abled,” with some technologies regarded as “assistive” and others as “normal” (58).

As a result, studies that explore participation in online kairotic spaces often replicate rationalist notions of this concept. This is the case in a 2005 article by E. Michael Nussbaum and colleagues, which examined the effect of “note starters,” or specific prompts such as “My argument is ...” or “I need to understand ...” on online discussions. Presuming that “productive argumentative discourses should involve some level of student disagreement” (116), Nussbaum and his coauthors studied this pedagogical strategy as it affected differing personality types, which they measured using the “Big Five” inventory. The authors focused on assertiveness (a subfactor of extraversion), openness to ideas (one of the big five) and anxiety (a subfactor of neuroticism), hypothesizing that those traits would be particularly relevant (117–18). They found that the note starters did increase disagreement for students exhibiting all three types of traits; however, “students who were anxious benefited less from note starters” (125). The subfactor of anxiety, in fact, proved complex enough that Nussbaum and his coauthors to treat it at length in their discussion:

> Anxious students might be somewhat afraid of how other students might react if challenged. . . . [T]he findings suggest that note starters do help initiate arguments but may do little to alleviate “face” concerns, especially for anxious students. In retrospect, this finding makes sense. Note starters may prompt students to take opposing viewpoints, but a student may still be anxious about making a foolish argument or making others look foolish. (128–29)

To their credit, Nussbaum and colleagues argue that because of this finding, “other steps may need to be taken to make [note starters] more effective for students high in anxiety” (129). However, they miss a key problem in their understanding of classroom participation: their adherence to the rationalist belief that conflict is a— if not the— key ingredient for “productive” participation in kairotic space. If the rationalist assumptions of ableist pedagogies are simply imported into online discus-

---

76 Mad at School

Ways to Move 77
account in terms of participation, Timile was putting tremendous effort into her participation; however, the picture presented to her professors, including me, was generally that of silence—metaphorical when she was absent, literal when she came to class.

In the last decade, some work on academic discourse has managed to move beyond the notion that argument must equal disagreement, and that silence equals nonparticipation. Two important works on silence are Mary M. Reda's *Between Speaking and Silence: A Study of Quiet Students* and Cheryl Glenn's *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence*. Glenn acknowledges that sometimes students are silent because they have been silenced; at other times, silence may operate as a powerful rhetorical strategy. She argues, “Both the spoken and the unspoken can resist domination; both the spoken and the unspoken can invite consideration. . . . Silence [can be] a rhetorical art of empowered action” (156). In addition, a qualitative study by Paul Michalec and Hilary Burg found that when silence/listening was included as an explicitly valued means of participation in classroom discussions, students identified this factor as a valuable learning resource (320). This research opens space for deeper consideration of mental disability in the classroom when one of its manifestations is silence: perhaps we can view such silences as forms of discourse in themselves.

More intractable, however, are the “uncivil” forms of participation that do not remain silent, but vocally or behaviorally interrupt the conventional script of classroom discourse. Teachers often call such forms of participation “resistant.”

**Resistance**

To vastly oversimplify the matter (for a moment), theorists of resistance in education tend to divide resistance into two kinds: bad and good. “Bad” resistance is like Feldmann’s notion of incivility: it seeks to impede the flow of knowledge. “Good” resistance is a creative form of disruption: it seeks to interrupt dominant agendas and question authorities in ways that enhance the flow of knowledge. Sometimes instructors will view resistance against general hegemonic norms as “good” while also attempting to prevent resistances against the norms established in their own classrooms. At other times, however, and particularly within the tradition of critical pedagogy, instructors will view resistance more flexibly, and seek to include disruption of their own classroom-based agendas as part
of the learning process. An example of this latter approach is that taken by Cecilia Rodríguez Milanés, who describes her efforts to construct “a
dialogic pedagogy” (116) through means such as coauthored grading con-
tracts, classroom votes on policy matters, and asking students to help
choose course texts. However, as Milanés emphasizes throughout the ar-
ticle, this pedagogy was difficult to implement for a number of reasons,
including students’ own resistance to the unfamiliar approach.

Milanés’s story exemplifies three types of classroom resistance out-
lined by Elizabeth Flynn, who describes the types as follows:

The first involves planned and positive action in opposition to res-
istance, which I will call “strategic resistance”; the second in-
volves resistance that deliberately disrupts liberatory practices,
which I will call “counter-strategic resistance”; and the third in-
volves resistance that is a spontaneous and emotional reaction that
may have multiple and conflicting motivations and effects, which I
will call “reactive resistance.” (18)

Quite often, when practitioners write about “resistance,” they mean only
the first of the three types named by Flynn. Their goals tend to be lofty,
the names of their pedagogies inspiring, and their reaction to students’
discomfort in “feminist” or “liberatory” classrooms impatient. I am
more interested in the work of teachers who recognize the subtle inter-
changes between the various kinds of resistance. Milanés is one; another,
discussed below, is Michelle Payne, in Bodily Discourses: When Students
Write about Abuse and Eating Disorders. I am also interested in privileg-
ing students’ own accounts of classroom resistance, because the great
majority of work on this topic is written from the instructor’s standpoint,
and often relies on descriptions of students such as “they looked at me
blankly” or “I could see the hostility in their eyes” without any counter-
point from students as to what might be behind those putatively blank or
hostile looks. My aim here is to show that our accounts of classroom re-
sistance will be enriched if we recognize the role—tacit or explicit—that
mental disability plays in them, and also that an accessible classroom
neither forecloses emotion nor is overrun by it, but makes constructive and
creative space for it.

While many writers on pedagogies of resistance prefer to leave emo-
tion out of the equation, Flynn argues that reactive (spontaneous, emo-
tionally charged) resistance “in its positive manifestations is necessary for
successful teaching” (33). She also points out that her definition of reac-
tive resistance is similar to the definition of “outburst” offered by Kath-
leen Dixon and William Archibald in their introduction to Outbursts in
Academe: Multiculturalism and Other Sources of Conflict. However, the
meaning of “outburst” actually goes further than Flynn’s “reactive resis-
tance,” because Dixon and Archibald recognize that an outburst is sub-
ject to multiple interpretations, not only by different participants in the
scene, but also by one participant over time. In other words, it is a
kairotic event.

An outburst is a response to a conflict that expresses a person’s ori-
entation to that conflict and to the social and political conditions
that underlie it. . . . Outbursts are not reducible to mere expres-
sions of “resistance” to “oppression.” An emotional display made
in a classroom or at a conference might feel good at the moment,
feel bad later, advance one’s cause, and set it back simultaneously.
Furthermore, one person’s outburst may create the conditions for
another person’s silence. (Dixon and Archibald xi)

This recognition of the apparitional, shape-shifting nature of an outburst
is important because it acknowledges the often-forgotten point that, in
kairotic spaces, the “meaning” of an emotion or reaction is never stable.
Moreover, people with mental disabilities will often find themselves on
the losing end of such interpretations, either by being told that their out-
bursts are inappropriate, overly emotional, or simply nonsensical; or—
on the other hand—by responding to highly emotional situations with
panic, decompensation, or shutting down.

The latter concern is one I couldn’t shake as I read Milanés’s article,
because it relies heavily on the assumption that consensus and negoti-
ation are discussion-based events. My rereading is not intended to di-
credit Milanés’s pedagogy, which in fact does include practices that may
be helpful to students with mental disabilities (such as holding intense
conversations individually rather than in groups, or seeking feedback
both orally and in writing), but to point out how the classroom she de-
scribes might inhibit full participation for students with mental disabil-
ities. I’m thinking of one of the stories her article tells, a moment that
Dixon and Archibald would call an outburst. I quote the story at some
length here, with the intention of rereading it within the framework of
disability studies.
[T]here were about a half dozen students that liked to chat with each other but not with the whole circle. They tended to congregate near the door for an easy exit. . . . Every couple of days I would interrupt their private conversations and call attention to their rudeness, noting that other class members had listened to their input during the discussion. Anyway, on this particular day, as the rest of the class moved the desks into a circle, a few students gathered around me to hand in late papers or incomplete assignments. These few, their faces displaying grave concern, wanted to give me excuses before turning their papers in. As a class we had come to consensus on what were legitimate excuses, and what I was hearing didn’t sound like any of those. I asked these students to see me after class, but I was bothered. Hadn’t the contract, the one we wrote together, clearly outlined the guidelines and due dates for papers? I was anxious about getting to work, and so I asked someone to begin the discussion with a go-around, where everyone in the circle speaks to a sentence/passage or whatever. The half dozen conversationalists were having a grand old time on one side of the room, and then one young woman from the other side flipantly said, “Start with me—I didn’t read it so go on to the next person.” There were chuckles and then a lull—even the talkers’ attention was seized. Here it was, I thought, they’re testing me.

Somehow, the people who had crowded around me with late papers and lame [sic] excuses, the disregard for the contract (which stipulated that all reading was required before coming to class), the chattering, the smirks—it all came to a head and I felt compelled to talk at the class . . . [Milánês’s ellipsis]. Okay, so I yelled at them. There. I shook myself. I took out a copy of the contract, waved it at them, and reread out loud some of the requirements, reminding them that they had authored this contract. I asked them why they had put me in this position, this position of authority (my neck veins were bulging by then). I told them again that I didn’t like that position and that I was trying to be democratic not authoritarian. I was angry, and after about five minutes of scolding them for not being more responsible, I shut my mouth. Guilt began to pulse at my temples. There was silence. I like to think that some of them hung their heads in shame, for that was exactly what I was doing. After some awkward moments and nervous coughing, one of the students began the discussion, the work of the day. (122–23)

Milánês’s account is unusual because it offers close description of a classroom moment during which no one, including herself, behaved in a composed manner. For this, I admire it. I also admire Milánês’s response to the event, which was to talk to students in a more informal setting, afterward, to discuss what had happened, and to get feedback from a colleague as well. The article later reflects on this and other outbursts in the classroom: “So I yelled. They [students] yelled at each other from time to time when discussing something or other, but I found that in both classes tolerance reigned. That is not to say that hostility never reared its ugly head, but when it did, we talked it out, talked around it, negotiated the disagreement at hand, and moved past it” (123). I suspect that teacher-researchers (me among them) have a habit of glossing moments of classroom conflict to portray ourselves as having at least a little—sometimes a lot—more composure than we really did. But it is precisely because Milánês has provided this richness of detail (shaped and authored though, of course, it is) that we can reread for the interstices in her story where mental disability tacitly enters, or is excluded from, the “negotiated” outcome.

To reread, then: First, why might those half-dozen students have been sitting together? While one interpretation is that they were forming a sort of gang and willfully using the power of numbers to oppose Milánês’s agenda (“the work of the day”), we can use Brooke’s concept of underlife to recognize that their habit of clustering, their “private conversations” and “rudeness,” were forms of underlife. Further, we can consider the possibility that the clustering and private conversations are ways of coping with the confines of the classroom, a space in which one must exhibit at all times focus, attentiveness, and engagement with the sanctioned topic. Now, this is not to say that the clusters of students were whispering about that day’s reading (they probably weren’t), nor that all or any of them had mental disabilities (a possibility, but not a probability). It is, however, to point out that the hallmarks of approved participation in most classroom spaces, even those which earnestly strive to be democratic and to welcome all, sets up a space of nearly relentless focus, composure, turn-taking, and rational exchange—and that failure to participate in these strict ways is often labeled “resistant.”

Second, why were the excuses for the late work “lame”? Milánês’s
anger stems from the fact that the excuses did not adhere to the contract the class had coauthored: "I took out a copy of the contract, waved it at them, and reread out loud some of the requirements, reminding them that they had authored this contract." But what happens to notions of consensus and collaboration when considered from the perspective of mental disability? Were all members of the class able to apprehend the speed, social nuances, and communicative styles made available throughout this process? Did any of them feel too much anxiety, or too much pressure from social stigma, to include a concern such as "I can't sleep because of my nightmares / depression / mania, and so my work might be late sometimes—but I can't tell you when or why it might happen"? Who was absent, either materially or mentally, during the negotiations? Even in the most dedicated efforts to create consensus and a cooperative learning environment, the very structures that shape academic discourse remain rationalist.

Michelle Payne's case study of a student named Ann, who was abused by her father and her boyfriend, helps fill in some of the gaps I've pointed out here. In her writings and in interviews, Ann practices various forms of resistance to rationalist classroom discourse. Payne introduces Ann's work:

On August 30, 1994, eighteen-year-old Ann handed her Freshman English instructor, Katherine, her response to the first writing assignment of the year: Write an essay about something that has affected the person you are today. Ann had not met with Katherine in conference yet; in fact, the class had only met a few times. The writing she handed in described the night of Ann's junior prom when her boyfriend became so angry with her that he tackled her, punching her in the lower back as she hit the ground. As Ann describes him, her boyfriend tried to manipulate her into staying with him by threatening suicide, later telling her "that it didn't matter if he turned out to be a wife batterer, that [she] wouldn't stay with him long enough to see it happen anyway." After the attack, Ann became anorexic, losing over thirty pounds, exercising twice a day. (81)

Payne reprints the full essay, along with Katherine's comments, and argues that Ann's choice of when and how to disclose her abuse and eating disorder reflects a strong sense of agency, even to the way sentences are constructed: "There are points where her boyfriend has no agency, and Ann casts herself in the object position" (87). Payne also points out that Ann begins the essay by placing herself in the position of author, choosing what and how to disclose. From Ann's essay:

As I sat in my first session of Freshman English class earlier on this clear fall day wondering what I could write about that has affected the person I am today but that wasn't so personal I'd have a crisis writing about [it], and was still a significant event, I had kind of a difficult time. Finally, I decided to write about a point in my life when I wasn't very happy with the person I was and how I managed to make it through that difficult time. (83)

Although it would be easy to shrug off Ann's framing of her essay as a story of overcoming, I believe that the use of such "commonplaces" (Bartholomae 137, qtd. in Payne) can also signal a gesture toward claiming power on the part of a student/author. Another gesture is Ann's choice to describe an incident of abuse in detail: "I hadn't gone very far [away from his car] when I heard the footsteps of my boyfriend sprinting after me. I had just begun to turn around when he plowed me into the ground, prom dress and all. Not only had he ran me over full force, but he drove his fist into my back while he was at it" (84). Like Timile Brown, Ann uses concrete detail and narrative style to reconstruct a kairotic space in a way that allows her to shape, consider, and intervene in it.

When Payne observed Ann's behavior in face-to-face situations, she learned that Ann's rhetorical strategies formed an intriguing mixture of compliance and resistance, of silence and outburst. In person, Payne reports, Ann was a quiet person: "she rarely spoke in class, and during our interviews she seemed shy and hesitant, a demeanor that became increasingly more at odds with the persona I read in some of her later writings" (88–89). Recalling Milanès's account, we can imagine that Ann might be an unlikely candidate to speak up during classroom negotiation of a course contract. In fact, Payne provides an extended transcript of one classroom discussion during which "students' frustrations or annoyance seethed below the surface" (102), and during which Ann did not speak at all. However, she felt strong resistance, as the response she later wrote showed:
Ann did not speak during this class discussion, and the response essay she wrote later describes how furious she became as more students argued why the messages and situatedness of rap music could be ignored. . . . [Ann's essay said] “I was overcome by pure frustration. I knew I should have said something in class and wanted to, but I was past frustration. I was mad. I’m not sure why I got so angry, but I even had the little tremors and hot cheeks of true anger.” (108, 111)

The multilayered design of Payne's methodology allows her to access the (apparent) paradoxes that may arise when trauma, abuse, anger, and conflict enter the classroom: sometimes quiet students are practicing resistance too, and not just resistance to classroom authority, but to larger social injustices as well. As Payne suggests, “by analogy, [Ann] is arguing to have her own anger (at her father, her boyfriend) mean something beyond immaturity, selfishness, and irrationality” (111; emphasis added). In the carefully observed context of Payne's case study, then, a response that might be quickly labeled “neurotic” by the “Big Five” inventory, or “inappropriate” by a less thoughtful educator or researcher, takes on a different kind of coherence.

Even in classrooms like Katherine's, which offered multiple avenues for students to practice resistance, or Milanés's, which worked to incorporate resistance into an inclusive pedagogy, negotiating resistance remains difficult. Student essays that engage mental disability will often be read, as Payne acknowledges, as “weepy” and confessional (11). And, as Milanés acknowledges, there is no way to completely overturn the structural assumptions that there must be some “work of the day,” that students must demonstrate adequate engagement with that work, and that the teacher will assign a value to their work: “the university sees to that” (118). However, I emphasize that the situation is difficult but not impossible. At heart I am more of a reformist than a revolutionary—or rather, the kind of revolutionary I am seeks to create change while not destroying lives, for it is the very persons who are most disenfranchised by academic discourses (those who are nonwhite, working-class, disabled, and/or queer, for instance) who have the most to lose when teachers spout lofty radical goals but provide little of use in day-to-day survival. I’m a fan of the concept of microrebellion, which I see as different from merely “working within the system” or “using the master’s tools.” Microrebellions, as I understand them, get beyond the inside/inside notions of systems and houses to recognize that academic discourse is all-

ways already composed through and by the deviant. We—the “mad, bad and sad” (Snelgrove)—are in the academy already, few and stigmatized and silenced as we may be. As Bruegeman and colleagues write, “We are sitting beside you. No, we are you” (369). We can take concrete action. The final section of this chapter is dedicated to describing how such actions might unfold.

A Way to Move: Redesigning the Kairotic Space of the Classroom

College professors should be aware that simply posting office hours on their door and sitting in the office during those hours does not provide adequate opportunities for interaction. Professors need to be aware of students' personality differences and their effects upon students' behaviors.

—Ibtesam Halawab, “The Impact of Student-Faculty Information Interpersonal Relationships on Intellectual and Personal Development”

My suggestions for ways to redesign the classroom's kairotic spaces to make them more accessible for persons with mental disabilities are grounded in the principles of universal instructional design (UID; also called universal design for learning [UDL], or simply universal design). The “universal” part of the moniker expresses an aim rather than an accomplished fact: Universal design sets as its ideal a learning environment that is accessible to all learning styles, abilities, and personalities, but acknowledges that such efforts must always be partial and engaged in a process of continual revision. (Some, including Jason Palmeri, refer instead to “participatory design.”) “Design” is understood broadly, indicating not just material criteria (such as large-print handouts or extended time on tests) but attitudes as well. Patricia Silver, Andrew Bourke, and K. C. Streffin explain the purpose and value of universal design:

If this approach becomes part of the institution's instructional methodologies, students with disabilities in higher education will no longer need to rely as heavily on support systems that are secondary to the primary instructional programs. In the typical service delivery program, modifications in an instructor's approaches or assessment procedures for students with disabilities require that students identify themselves as disabled, request specific accom-
modations, and wait for these specific adjustments to be implemented—a process that often takes weeks to complete. This traditional case-by-case instructional approach is quite conservative when compared to UID, which places accessibility issues as an integral component of all instructional planning. (47)

As Silver, Boucke, and Strehorn indicate, one important value of universal design is that it dilutes the intensity and necessity of “disclosure” at the beginning of the semester: all students are seen as diversely situated learners, and the classroom is set up with this assumption in mind. However, it’s important to note, as Silver and colleagues do, that support services will remain necessary so long as the ideal of universal design is not reached—and, as more than a decade of serious applications of universal design has shown (their article was published in 1998), this ideal is more an ongoing series of adjustments than a goal to be reached.

This view of universal design as a “way to move” rather than a fixed set of practices is also taken by Jay Dolmage (24). Dolmage notes that many resources available on universal design can make it seem like a set of concrete (and burdensome) activities that must be added to the classroom. However, Dolmage argues, universal design is best understood through intentional verbs that can be applied in various ways—for example, those drawn from Ohio State’s faculty tip sheet on universal design, which emphasizes “permit,” “listen,” “update,” “guide,” “clarify,” “review,” and “allow” (qtd. in Dolmage 24). Dolmage explains further:

Registered as action, [UD] is a way to move. In some ways, it is also a worldview. UD is not a tailoring of the environment to marginal groups; it is a form of hope, a manner of trying. (24)

Understanding and acknowledging that universal design must be responsive as well as prepared, flexible as well as accommodating, brings up an inevitable question: Won’t this still mean that our students must disclose their disabilities, discuss their needs, help us understand their ways of learning? Yes, they will. However—and this is the key difference between universally designed instruction and conventional “remediation”—under the principles of universal design, all students are encouraged to consider, share, and assist with the implementation of this information. Universal design is not for a few “special” students, but rather a way to move forward with all our learners (and ourselves) in as accessible a way as possible.

But here’s another problem: haven’t I been arguing, throughout this chapter, that students with mental disabilities are among those who may be least able to “share” such information in discussions, conferences, or even on paper? How can we implement universal design principles without relying on the same rationalist assumptions that have shaped classroom “participation” for a hundred (or a thousand) years? My answer is both a suggestion and a disclaimer: We can open as many different channels of communication as possible, in hopes that at least one will be accessible enough for a given student to use it, and trust that our own attitudes will have much to with student response. As Ibtizam Halawah’s investigation into student-faculty relationships shows, students’ perception of faculty’s concern for and commitment to their learning has a strong impact on their academic success. Too, we must accept that universal design is not one specific procedure, nor a recipe for success, but rather, as Dolmage emphasizes, “a form of hope” (24). I am a teacher, and I have no magic to offer, beyond the magic of persons working hard to understand one another and learn together—which, I believe, is magic enough.

Before launching into my suggestions, I must also offer a disclaimer, or rather a series of them: Beeping cell phones in the classroom do annoy me. Even worse, I have been known to send text-messages during classes. (I also chew gum sometimes.) Students whispering to each other during discussions make me anxious, occasionally irritated. All of my syllabi include attendance policies, and one class—a creative-writing workshop—permits very few absences. I use a lot of printed handouts that surely are less accessible for some of my students than others. In short, I am no paragon, and my own classroom approaches are continually under revision. (After writing this chapter, I’m feeling particularly uncomfortable about the idea of attaching grade penalties to absences.) The best I can offer is not perfection, nor even frequent success, but consistent effort. This list reflects some of my efforts—those I practice myself, and those that I have learned from, as a person with mental disabilities, when I navigate kairotic classroom space.

1. FOCUS ON WHAT’S FEASIBLE.

I realize that some of my ideas, listed below, might sound absurd to a teacher who is accustomed to face-to-face office hours, does not have access to chat or text-messaging, or would be overwhelmed by trying to navigate multiple online spaces simultaneously. These suggestions are
meant to be used as a kind of tasting menu rather than a course-by-course meal. Each suggestion should be modified or ignored based upon a teacher’s own context, abilities, and style. For my own frenetic, visual/verbal ways of learning—not to mention my anxiety during face-to-face interactions—holding two or three conversations via chat is considerably more effective and energy-efficient than holding one oral/aural conference in person. But of course, your mileage will vary. The point is not to do just what I do, but to assess each particular instructional context and consider ways that the avenues of communication can stretch and flex. And set limits: you are not establishing yourself as a constantly available answer machine, but rather as someone who can respond in different ways at different times—within your own abilities.

2. MAP THE CLASS EXPLICITLY.

Syllabus statement.

College teachers in the United States are required by law to include a “disability statement” on their syllabi. This statement is often written in second person and presumes that responsibility for accommodation lies with the student: for instance, “If you have a documented disability, you should register with the Office of Disability Services to obtain reasonable accommodations.” While working within legal and institutional guidelines, we can change or add to the required language in order to emphasize the universality of learning differences and our openness to negotiating these. For example, in addition to the language I am required to include, I have added the following sentences to the statement on my syllabi: I assume that all of us have different ways of learning, and that the organization of any course will accommodate each student differently. For example, you may prefer to process information by speaking and listening, so that some of the handouts I provide may be difficult to absorb. Please communicate with me as soon as you can about your individual learning needs and how this course can best accommodate them. If your school’s required statement includes outdated language such as “special needs,” address this issue with the person or office that mandates the language.

Beginning-of-class remarks.

Spend some time on the accommodation statement when you review the syllabus with your class. I generally include a few interactive syllabus exercises—for example, it is the first document we annotate (see appendix

A) in my classes—so that students have multiple chances to interact with it. My practice is to read aloud and then elaborate on my syllabus’s accommodation statement, giving examples of my own needs as a learner in order to emphasize that such needs are not a question of needing “more” support, but needing different kinds of support. One of the first things I tell students is that I have difficulty processing aural information; therefore, a question I can’t respond to immediately should be written in a note, communicated via email, or they should make sure I write it down.

Since I began actually speaking about accommodation rather than just pointing to that section of the syllabus, I have noticed an increase in the number of students who discuss their learning needs with me early in the semester—some of which involve documented disabilities, some not. The most memorable of these instances occurred during a recent semester in a first-year composition class. Having delivered my opening-day speech about learning styles, communication, and access, I was approached after class by a student whom I had already mentally marked as a “potential problem.” (Not a reaction I’m proud of, but in the spirit of Milanés’s account, I believe it is important to describe and question our less-composed teacherly moments, because they are valuable learning opportunities.) I’d noticed this student staring out the window for much of the class, hanging her head back, and closing her eyes for long intervals. After class, she approached me and explained that she had a disability that made it very hard for her to stay awake for any extended period of time. I am guessing that the content and structure of our first class may have opened an avenue for this student to raise the issue, since I subsequently learned that she had not approached her other instructors that semester until a couple of weeks later, when she had her forms from the Office of Disability Services in hand. Finding accommodations for her particular learning needs was difficult for me, and sometimes we struggled, especially when navigating situations like small-group workshops. However, it was immensely easier on both of us than it would have been if I hadn’t known about her tiredness from the very beginning of class.

Important to notice here is the shifting location of problem: my observations of the student during our first class led me to the assumption that she would be a “problem,” but after she spoke to me, I realized that my perception of her actions was in fact a problem. Once we had that conversation, we were able to shift focus to the actual problem at hand, which was how she could best access our classroom.
Description of your class’s kairotic spaces.

It is traditional to state explicitly what students must do in terms of completing reading, papers, and exams; however, it is much rarer for an instructor to offer explicit information about an upcoming class’s kairotic spaces. A model for establishing “norms for class discussion,” based upon the Courage to Teach (CTT) model, is offered by Michalec and Burg in “Transforming Discussions from Collegiate to Collegial.” According to Michalec and Burg, the students in their study found value in receiving explicit information about the “norms” that would govern class discussions (318).

Questions that may be useful for instructors to consider or discuss with their students include these: Will information be shared primarily via lectures? Will lectures be supplemented with online notes or slides? Will the class be discussion-based—and what does “discussion” mean in your classroom? Will students be giving presentations—and again, what does “presentation” mean in your classroom’s context? How much group work is involved? How firm or flexible will deadlines be? If you can give students a clear sense, within the first week, of how the class will unfold kairotically, students will have more time to either transfer to a different class or communicate their concerns to you. Many barriers will still exist, of course: sometimes students cannot change their schedules because of their jobs, majors, childcare needs, and so on; sometimes a concept you think you have explained clearly will be murky to one or more students. Again, the key is not to solve all problems but to deepen and broaden the channels of possible access.

Explaining participation in our own classrooms may require some reflection for teachers, for until we are forced to do so, we often treat participation like Justice Stewart’s famous (and later recanted) definition of obscenity: we assume we know it when we see it. Be as direct as possible. What behaviors indicate to you that students are participating? What are your pet peeves? What alternative modes of communication would you like to try, and how can your students help you implement them? What are your own abilities and limitations in kairotic spaces? The more often I have these conversations with students, the more I learn about myself: for example, I tend to place high value on questions students ask of each other; I prefer not to speak much during oral/aural discussions, instead offering a “wrap-up” comment to recap main points and guide students toward the next reading or activity; and (again because of my own aural-processing difficulties) “side conversations” distract me a great deal. I have found that when I provide clear goals for a discussion (about which more below), and acknowledge my own limitations, the conversation progresses much more easily than when I simply open up the floor and assume students already know what I expect.

The role of presence.

If presence is a necessary component of the class, be direct about that. I teach one class for which I accept very few absences: a workshop in creative nonfiction that meets once per week. The class as I have designed it is primarily composed of students’ kairotic exchanges; in other words, most of the course content is built by the workshop members as the semester goes on. I emphasize this aspect of the class at the beginning of the semester, and explain why this is the policy. In part because of my concerns about “presence” as they intersect with class attendance, I have also begun offering the class as an independent study.

When possible, make use of nonphysical classroom spaces. Because I teach in a computer classroom, I tend to alternate between oral/aural and online modes of discussion; within online spaces, I alternate between synchronous and asynchronous formats. Maria J. Lavooy and Michael H. Newlin found, in a study of web-based learning over seven semesters, that students consistently selected courses, whether “live” or online, that enabled some form of synchronous interaction. Taking part in a synchronous discussion that does not require one to “jump into” an oral/aural conversation can benefit all students, particularly those for whom the timing and social pressures of face-to-face situations are difficult to navigate. I have used course-management software and also free “blog” spaces (WordPress and LiveJournal) to construct spaces that enable both synchronous and asynchronous discussions.

3. Provide direct instruction for participation.

Annotation.

Like Anne Fitzsimmons, I view annotation as an “ethical practice,” in that it is a component of kairotic space that enables students to move from being passive receivers of texts to active interveners in texts. The first document we annotate in my classes is the course syllabus (appendix A); I also provide direct instruction on what I mean by annotation (appendix B). Drawing upon Fitzsimmons’s guidelines, I use a broad definition of annotation so that a course reading, a policy document, a...
peer's draft, or the classroom itself can each be construed as a text in which a student's annotations can intervene. (Fitzsimmons asks students to annotate her class each day by writing her a note at the end of the period. Annotations often provide the basis for discussions, whether oral/aural, online, small-group or large-group; they also provide opportunities for me to check students' understanding, as when I begin a discussion by asking where they wrote “?” or “I don't get it” in their annotations and focusing on those areas. Finally, I encourage students to develop their own styles of annotation. Most choose to follow the model I provide, which involves handwriting notes in the margins of a document; however, others, for reasons ranging from learning style to ability to economic concerns (needing to resell books), have chosen to use Post-its, color-coding, typed notes on a separate page, or tape-recorded voice notes.

"Annotation" in my view includes not just "new ideas," but also thoughtful paraphrasing. In their study of oral discussion in an inclusive middle-school classroom, Cynthia Okolo, Ralph P. Ferretti, and Charles A. MacArthur found that one successful strategy was "revoicing," or paraphrasing what someone else had just said (162). This strategy has several advantages: it models rhetorical listening; it affirms the speaker's words without using evaluative language; and, if requested directly, it can also provide an avenue for a more "quiet" student to enter the discussion, since in some cases it may be less stressful to paraphrase another's words than to come up with an "original" comment. Oral paraphrases can be facilitated via heuristics like the "note starters" described by Nussbaum and coauthors: for example, "I hear so-and-so saying that ... Another part of the text that supports her point is ...

Valuing quiet, enabling voice.
Establish systems to take pressure off "quiet" students. When I have a sense that discussions are getting off-balance—with three or four students commenting often and other members of the class remaining quiet—I sometimes set up a "calling around" discussion, in which each participant responds to some question or idea, then calls on the next person of her choice, until each member has added a thought to the conversation. This practice can offer a space for students—like Ann—who would like to establish a presence in oral discussions but can't find the right Kairotic moment to enter.

Another alternative avenue of participation is to ask for volunteers to take notes on a particular discussion, then post them for the class to access; in some cases, students who have difficulty entering spontaneous oral exchange are skilled at listening and "translating" information. Yet another way is to ask each student to do a bit of writing at the end of a discussion, to share on paper something he did not say but wanted to say; such writings can go into a student's folder of "private reflections," shared with peers, or turned in for the instructor's comment. (Note: if you sometimes collect writings, but sometimes do not, always let students know before they begin whether the task at hand will be private, sharing optional, or sharing required.)

Yet another feedback strategy, offered by Matt Tincani, is that of "response cards" during lectures. Tincani suggests that, at different points during a lecture, students can use preprinted cards or write their own with brief responses to questions (generally yes/no or one-word); all cards are held up simultaneously (130). This allows each student to experience a brief interaction with the material without putting an individual student on the spot. Instructors can respond to cards in various ways—as quick comprehension checks, prompts for small-group discussions, or material for later follow-up questions from students. Graham and coauthors describe a similar system using electronic handheld devices or "clickers." Clickers are now common in larger classroom settings, particularly in the social and natural sciences.

4. EXPERIMENT WITH MULTIPLE CHANNELS OF FEEDBACK.

Requesting feedback.
Establish a system of regular feedback, using multiple modes, to ask students about their learning processes in your class. Examples include impromptu writes, text messages, individual conferences, online chat spaces, or letters. Whenever possible, organize the system so that students' diverse communication styles and possible difficulties "sharing" information are given room. Vary between written, oral, sketched, and diagrammed; private, small-group, and class-wide; anonymous and identified. Assume that some students may need to be asked for feedback several times before they are ready to take you up on the suggestion; and, if you use impromptu writing as a mode of communication, build in a way to stretch the time available (for example, invite students to finish their writings later and bring them to the next class). Keep the basis of the system simple and direct; for example, while varying modes of communication, select a few consistent prompts, such as "I've learned ... I'm struggling with ... I want to ask ..." For those instructors now won-
Like Dolmage, Dunn regards universal design in the classroom as a “way to move” (Dolmage 24), that is, as a flexible and ongoing series of adjustments and experiments adhering to an underlying belief in access. In this section I offer a range of examples from my own and others’ classrooms that illustrate different ways we have found to move.

For example, I hold office hours both in person and via real-time computer chat. During my office hours, I open a chat program and log in with the username I’ve designated for teaching purposes. When no one is physically present at my office hours, I can carry on two or—depending on the conversations’ intensity and complexity—even three conversations at a time. If I need to just chat with one student at a time, or a student arrives in my office, I’ll ask the others to wait, operating on a “first come, first served” basis. Typically, it’s more convenient for students to “wait” online, so that they can pursue other activities, than to stand or sit in a bored line outside my office.

Mixing up the mode and style of communication heightens the chances that a student will find at least one mode that works for them. And, based on my own experience, she is then more likely to continue to use it. In one case, a student who text-messaged me a couple of times in response to direct suggestions then continued to “check in” periodically via text message—in one case, offering an extended response to a reading on a day that she was too ill to get out of bed. However, contrary to popular opinion, I am not deluged with text messages (and this is at a school where students, as a group, tend to be extremely communicative with professors and most instructors’ office hours are filled nearly all the time). In my experience, students’ communication styles are diverse enough that I rarely experience an overload in any one location or mode. Teachers in different contexts will, of course, have to make decisions about what is appropriate for their particular situations; my suggestion here is simply to try out alternative channels of communication and see what works.

In addition to classroom communication, multimodality can be practiced through exercises and assignments. Essays can be “written” using sound and image in a digital format; a mathematical proof or chemical principle can be rendered as a short story (or vice versa); exams can be designed as collaborative as well as individual exercises. Dunn’s Talking Sketching Moving provides a wealth of such strategies. For example, she describes an exercise using “rhetorical proof cards,” which she makes up in packs that student groups “play with” together (60). Each card,
prepared by the instructor, includes a note that might be included in a hypothetical argument (e.g., on capital punishment): the information on a card might be a quotation, a fact, or an “emotional news story” (60–61). Working in small groups, students shuffle, discuss, and reassemble the cards in different configurations to construct an agreed-upon argument. Dunn explains that “the act of physically moving these cards around and a discussion of the effects of doing so makes the abstract job of organizing an effective argument into a visual, oral, and kinesthetic task to which students with a variety of talents can contribute” (63). Such an exercise could also be carried out individually or in pairs.

A related exercise, familiar to many writing teachers, is the one I call “Cut and Paste,” in which the writer cuts up an in-progress draft and shuffles the pieces around. Theoretically, this could be accomplished on a computer screen, but may be more beneficial for kinesthetic and other kinds of learners if carried out physically and in a larger space. As she shuffles the pieces, the writer may choose to take notes, add or delete ideas, engage in conversations with peers, add color-coding, or perform other revisions.

Time should be set aside at the end of the exercise (which has no definite moment of conclusion) so that students can number the portions of their essay, write a note to themselves, staple pieces together, or otherwise remind themselves of what they want to “keep” from the session. Like Dunn’s, this exercise can be carried out individually or in groups.

5. INCORPORATE MENTAL DISABILITY INTO APPROACHES TO DISABILITY.

Disability studies has been incorporated into a vast range of undergraduate and graduate courses; however, as with DS research, references to mental disability—let alone focused examination of it—are still rare in our courses on disability in history, literature, law, art, cultural studies, and science. (This broad generalization excludes courses in psychology that focus on mental disability as a component of human “abnormality.”) Exceptions do exist, of course, and I believe that the growing acknowledgment of madness in academic discourse will result in more courses that “knit” (Garland-Thomson, “Integrating” 16) mental disability into our approaches to teaching disability studies.

The independent study I conducted with Timile Brown, described above, is one example. This course, titled Writing and Depression, exam-
ined depression from standpoints including feminist, clinical, psychoanalytic, and autobiographical. Another example is the course Madness, Medicine and Mythology taught by Geoffrey Reaume, which he describes in the article “Mad People’s History.” Reaume emphasizes that the central consideration of such classes is that they offer not just “a history of ideas about madness . . . [but] serious inclusion of the people whose stories make up this history” (271). Other courses, such as Susan Burch’s Madness in American Literature, are beginning to dot the curriculum. As yet, however, we are far from widespread inclusion of mental disability as a significant component of DS pedagogy.

6. MAKE USE OF “SAFE HOUSES.”

In her now famous Profession article “Arts of the Contact Zone,” Mary Louise Pratt calls for recognition of what she calls “contact zones” in the classroom. Probably the most often-quoted line from this article is her definition of contact zones: “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (34). Pratt’s idea has given rise to voluminous articles that take it up in various ways, and even a whole pedagogical approach termed “contact zone pedagogy.” Less often mentioned is Pratt’s concern about her theory’s potential pain on students. Pratt argues for what she calls “safe houses,” that is, “social and intellectual spaces where groups can constitute themselves as horizontal, homogeneous, sovereign communities with high degrees of trust, shared understandings, temporary protection from legacies of oppression” (40). Pratt suggests that such spaces might include “ethnic or women’s studies” (40). Now, it is obvious that no group, no matter how similarly identified, will necessarily be safe for all participants; I tend to think in terms of “safer” spaces rather than “safe” ones. However, Pratt’s point is important, and applies to instructors as well as students. Safer kairotic spaces could take many forms, including gatherings of friends, sessions of private writing, or—as is suggested by Jane Thierfeld-Brown, who works with students with Asperger’s syndrome—“safe rooms” on her college’s campus for students to visit if they need a break from the constant stimulation of more public space (Farrell). (The annual conference of the Society for Disability Studies establishes a “quiet room” for a similar purpose.) “Safe(r) houses” will take as many forms as their users; they are one form of the ongoing adaptation required by universal design.

7. UNDERSTAND THAT YOU WILL NOT BE ABLE TO FULLY MEET EVERY STUDENT’S STYLE AND NEEDS.

As teachers committed to creating more accessible kairotic spaces for those with mental disabilities, we are not “solving problems”; we are finding ways to move. If we view universal design as a process of “solving problems,” we run the risk of feeling angry and frustrated at students who will not be solved (a closed-ended project akin to “cure”). And we must understand that our efforts are only one part of the larger design. To presume that one can achieve a perfect classroom design that will turn out perfect learning outcomes is not only unrealistic, it is demeaning to our students. We must try, think, query, flex, observe, listen, and try again. And when we are too tired, we must be willing to let it go for a while. Access is not going to happen overnight.

I want to close with another anecdote, this one about a close friend of mine, who recently finished a master’s degree in molecular biology. As she planned her final year of course work, she ran into a problem: her last required course was being taught by a professor whom she knew to run discussion-based seminars. My friend is severely hearing-impaired, and uses speechreading but not sign language for communication. Her ideal class would be lecture-based, preferably led by a speaker who uses a microphone and detailed slides. In groups of three or four, she can generally follow about half to three-quarters of the conversation; in larger groups, her comprehension drops to about one-tenth of what is said. If she sits near the back of a classroom (set up in rows), she will miss nearly everything the instructor says; if she sits near the front, she has a better chance of comprehending the instructor but will miss everything said by persons sitting behind her.

I encouraged her to take the course anyway: it was her last requirement, it was a topic that excited her, and the university was required by law to provide adequate accommodations. “If you can’t get CART [computer-aided real-time translation],” I said, “at least you can get a note-taker. You could sit next to the note-taker and follow the gist of the conversation through what they write. Or you could get a small mike that people pass from hand to hand—it hooks up to a receiver that you wear. One of my friends in grad school used that.”16 I was full of suggestions.
However, this was not what my friend wanted. She didn't want an accommodation; she wanted a class whose ordinary workings accommodated her hearing and her learning style. To be honest, I felt a little frustrated with her refusal to explore the possibilities of accommodations. However, I took away from the conversation a deepened understanding of how nonmechanical "accommodations" really are. True accommodations are not added on to a classroom environment; they are built into its infrastructure, with flexibility and ongoing revision part of its very foundation. I cannot anticipate the needs and styles of every student who will walk into my next classroom. Nor can I become a fundamentally different kind of teacher than I am: I will never be much for lecturing; I will always incorporate small- and large-group discussions; I will rarely be at my best during a long procession of individual conferences; and my own modes of communication will probably continue to be heavily visual and verbal. What I can do is explicitly name universal design as one of the ongoing goals of my classrooms, and be aware that meeting this goal requires regular input and advice from my students. And I can also acknowledge that not every student will want to be a part of this dialogue, that some will choose not to engage in it for their own reasons, and respect that. Accommodations are not charitable offerings; they are spaces we open to the best of our abilities, and revise, and revise again.

CHAPTER 3

The Essential Functions of the Position

Collegiality and Productivity

As a senior manager said to me recently, "We got the toilets right, what more do you want?" While we remove some of the physical barriers we actually haven't changed the underlying attitudes.

—Christopher Newell,
"Flourishing Rhetorically: Disability, Diversity and Equal Disappointment Opportunity"

Across the board, the candidate with the best interpersonal skills—all else being equal—is offered the job.

—Walter Broughton and William Conlogue,
"What Search Committees Want"

In the summer of 2003, I had just completed the first year of my first tenure-track academic job. I still read the "Careers" section in the Chronicle of Higher Education, in part to enjoy a sense of relief at actually being employed (with health insurance!), and in part out of a sneaking fear that I might be back on the market anytime. It was in this frame of mind that I encountered a column written by "Ms. Mentor" (Emily Toth), titled "Can I Dazzle Them With My Energy?" On this day, she was responding to a question about a new buzzword that seemed to be cropping up in many postings for academic jobs: "energetic." "It looks like an attempt to insert age discrimination into hiring," the questioner, "Linda," wrote. Ms. Mentor responded that not only did the term energetic raise questions about age, but also regionality, ethnicity, and disability. In fact, to my excitement, she discussed disability in some detail in her response. But as I read, my reaction slid from interest to dismay to open-mouthed disbelief. The first section of
unknown diarist” from a class titled “Literary Suicide” in order to see if the student would be willing to co-author an essay exploring the issue further (Berman and Schiff 294). I do not dispute the authors’ claims that writing can have healing properties for students with mental disabilities, and I applaud Berman’s desire to co-author with his student rather than simply render him as a character in the article. However, I also want to call attention to the rather avid energy with which we, as teacher-scholars, seem to seek out these students, to identify or diagnose them, and the regularity with which we fail to identify or diagnose ourselves. It seems to me that, at times, our efforts to “listen” are in fact a form of nonconsensual fetishization. While this is not always the case, I am troubled by how seldom teacher-scholars writing on mental disability even pause to consider this possibility.

For further discussion of the problem now commonly referred to in minority studies as “add-and-stir,” see Erelles, “In Search of the Disabled Subject”; Harding; Martin.

Chapter 2

1. This statement is meant to indicate the general habit of educational studies to omit mental disability; by no means is it unqualified. Studies and narratives that do focus on mental disability are included below.

2. I discuss online learning spaces in the next section, “Participation.”

3. It should be noted that the NEO PI-R is designed for use on individuals without “overt pathopsychology” (Costa and McCrae). However, a critique of it in terms of mental disability remains relevant, for its very design is rooted in the notion that humans can be divided into two camps: the “normals” and those with “psychopathology.” In other words, the instrument reinforces an individualized and medicalized model of disability while also claiming to leave disability out of the equation.

4. Tobin Siebers has explored in depth the problems of presuming that persons with disabilities are narcissistic in the article “Tender Organs, Narcissism, and Identity Politics.”

5. For the purposes of this chapter, I am referring to “participation” as what takes place once a student enters the classroom, whether virtually or physically. In some educational literature, “participation” is used to refer to whether students actually come to class or not—an issue I have identified as “presence.”

6. Feldmann’s study was published in fall 2001, and hence predates the new discursive aura that has arisen around terrorism since September 11, 2001; it also predates the mass shootings at Virginia Tech (2007), Northern Illinois University (2008), and the U of Alabama–Huntsville (2010). I discuss the recent emphasis on violence in academic discourse in chapter 4.

7. Although not cited by Nussbaum et al., many works explore the possibilities of listening, agreement, and locating common ground in the classroom. Examples include Teaching Community: A Pedagogy of Hope (bell hooks) and Rhetorical Listening: Identification, Gender, Whiteness (Krista Ratcliffe).

8. I am grateful to Timile Brown for reading and commenting upon this chapter, including my account of her, which has been revised in response to her feedback.

9. I give full credence to Timile’s account, but also note that I have had different experiences with this school’s support services, and have served as a member of its Office of Disability Services Community of Practice. My efforts to foster greater recognition and more effective accommodations for students with mental disabilities have been met with interest and concrete efforts. I also note that my privilege as a faculty member may be a factor in the differences between my and Timile’s experiences.

10. I have elaborated further on the value of “overcoming” stories as potential gestures of agency by students with disabilities in the article “Disability Studies Methodology.”

11. Although Adam J. Banks’s Race, Rhetoric and Technology does not engage disability directly, his multidimensional theory of access and approach to design as an emancipatory practice offer important insights for all teachers, especially those interested in accessible classroom design.

12. Disclosure is highly charged and complex. Other aspects of disclosure are addressed in the introduction, which discusses language and terminology, and chapter 3, which discusses disclosure from the faculty member’s point of view. Further rhetorical consideration of this issue as it pertains to students is available from Amy Vidal’s qualitative study “Rhetorical Hiccups: Disability Disclosure in Letters of Recommendation,” which focuses on an unusual data set: letters of recommendation written on behalf of a student with a traumatic brain injury.

13. Sometimes an unfamiliar mode will lead to humorous exchanges. For example, I once exchanged a couple of text messages with a student who was searching for the room where her final project had been stored. I gave her directions, then walked into our classroom two days later to find her regaling a group of her peers with the tale of what it was like to receive a TM from a professor: “It was like getting a text message from Moses.” Although I enjoy being compared to Moses, I also look forward to the day when my TMs with students are seen as a more ordinary part of our communication together.

14. When I was taking tenth-grade chemistry (and struggling miserably), my teacher, Francis Broadway, gave us an unexpected assignment: “Illustrate Le Chatelier’s Principle in a short story.” Le Chatelier’s Principle states, basically, that a system at equilibrium, when subjected to a change, will reach a new and different equilibrium. I received an A+ on my story (and a C in the class). More to the point, I cannot describe how affirmed I felt by this assignment, and the fact that I was able to perform it successfully. Perhaps even more to the point, I still remember—twenty-five years later—the name of the principle and what it means.

15. See also Dunn’s cowritten webtext with Kathleen Dunn Ders, “Reversing Notions of Disability and Accommodation.” This article provides many examples of multimodal exercises as well as a section on accessible web design.

16. This device is called a frequency-modulation (FM) microphone.
Chapter 3

1. The official press release announcing this measure may or may not be indicative of the Bush administration's general attitude toward disability rights. However, it is interesting to note that the release, titled “President Bush Signs S. 3466 into Law,” is one sentence long. By contrast, a proclamation made on the following day, to designate September 27 “National Hunting and Fishing Day,” is six paragraphs long.

2. Carol Moeller has written and spoken insightfully about the intersections of “productivity” with academic discourse and mental disability. One such presentation was “Psychiatric/Psycho-Social Disabilities for Critical Consciousness: Human Costs of 'Productivity' and 'Speed,'” presented at the Society for Disability Studies Conference in 2009.

3. I discuss this commonsense belief in more detail in chapter 4.

4. Based on my own anecdotal experience, I have found that students are more likely to be amenable to this suggestion than are faculty colleagues. However, I have had successful meetings with both students and colleagues via instant messaging. The impact of instant-messaging in workplace environments, including academic spaces, is receiving increasing attention. Examples include the several contributions to the panel “I Think, Therefore IM” from the 2002 Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, as well as Joseph M. McCarthy and danah m. boyd’s research on the use of a “chat” program at an academic conference (discussed in more detail below). There is also a long-standing stream of research in educational disciplines, including rhetoric and composition, regarding the use of online synchronous communication (“chat”) in the classroom; an issue discussed at more length in chapter 2.

5. The Affordable Care Act, signed in March 2010, is designed to prevent denial of coverage based on pre-existing conditions: for children starting in 2010, and for adults starting in 2014.

6. Lecturers at the University of Michigan have since unionized, and have won significant gains. See http://www.lemunion.org for more information.

7. I leave “violent behavior” aside for now, although I note the familiar way it is coupled with mental illness. Chapter 4 addresses the supposed link between mental disability and violence in detail.

8. A similar rhetorical separation often occurs when the topic is students with mental disabilities; see chapters 2 and 4 for more discussion of this phenomenon.


10. SDS is not experienced so positively by all persons. Cal Montgomery, whose work is discussed further in chapter 6, has called SDS an “access nightmare.” In addition, each annual meeting of SDS is regularly followed by discussion on its listserve of various access problems that occurred. However, the very existence of such conversations, which are usually absent from other professional societies’ discussions of conferences, is encouraging.

11. The APHA publishes a different “Accessibility Guide” each year for its annual conference. The version used in this study was the 2007 guide for a meeting taking place in Washington, DC.

12. This assumption that the agonistic exchange is a key—even the only—path to knowledge is often reflected in pedagogical as well as conference designs. I discuss its application in pedagogical designs in chapter 2.

13. For a more detailed description of proactive displays, see McDonald et al., “Proactive Displays.”

14. In the six years between the “backchannel” experiment and this book’s publication, the emergence of Twitter has created a digital backchannel at virtually every academic conference. Some conferences, including the Conference on College Composition and Communication, establish a hashtag and display the feeds at the conference.

15. Actual numbers are no doubt higher than reported numbers. However, it’s pretty evident that faculty with disabilities are underrepresented. Moreover, as discussed in more detail below, the low reportage rate indicates other possible concerns, including fear of disclosure.

16. In the final chapter of Moving Beyond Prozac, DSM, and the New Psychiatry, “Epilogue: Postpsychiatry Today,” Bradley Lewis offers a similar pragmatic and paradigmatic sketch of ways to change the discipline and profession of psychiatry, arguing that smaller “strategic efforts” can effect immediate change while also “lay[ing] the groundwork for a future larger-scale paradigm switch” (265).

17. In 2008, Sean P. Murphy published an edited collection of ethnographies by instructors at teaching-intensive schools (Academic Cultures: Professional Preparation and the Teaching Life). Murphy’s introduction cites the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching classification, which reported in 2005 that, of the 4,582 schools it counted, only 278 (about 6 percent) were classified as “research university”; the remaining 94 percent were classified as “associate’s colleges, master’s colleges and universities, baccalaureate colleges, special focus institutions, tribal colleges, and other institutions” (8). Murphy urges that we should value this diversity in higher-education employment, rather than consider it “a problem to redress,” and that we should better prepare graduate students to make choices in the current academic culture, rather than pretend that everyone is headed toward—or would prefer—a research-intensive job (7–9).

Chapter 4

1. Since these two highly publicized events, more mass attacks have occurred in the United States, some of them in academic settings. The shootings by Amy Bishop at the University of Alabama–Huntsville (UAH) occurred as this book was going to press. A bit earlier, in April 2009, seventeen people were shot at the American Civic Association in Binghamton, New York, by “Vietnamese immigrant” Jiverly Wong (McFadden). The politics of stigmatization, especially along lines of disability and race, continue to unfold. For example, shortly after