



This Session Slaps: How to Engage, Talk, and Work with Students & Youth with Disabilities

Presented by:

DJ Ralston, M.A. - GWU, CRCRE

Melissa Diehl, M.Ed., CRC, GWU, CRCRE

Disclaimer

"The contents of this presentation were developed under grant [H326E200003](#) from the Department of Education. However, these contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government."

Learning Objectives

Participants will gain an understanding of:

- The distinctions in work values between the varying generations currently in the workplace (i.e. Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, Gen Z)
- The centrality of authenticity when working with students and youth
- The importance of establishing a rapport and working alliance with students and youth
- Effective strategies for establishing a rapport and developing a working alliance

Bio: Melissa Diehl – Pronouns: she/her/hers

- DJ's Work Bestie, Professional Netflix Binger, & Lover of Pasta
- Professional Background
 - Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Counselor
 - VR Statewide Training Coordinator
 - RSA Liaison
 - Technical Assistance – TACE, WINTAC, NTACT:C
- Education
 - Masters Degree – Rehabilitation Counseling
 - Doctoral Candidate – Human and Organizational Learning
- Areas of Expertise
 - Leadership and Professional Identity Construction
 - Training and Development
 - Federal Policy Oversight and Implementation



Bio: DJ Ralston – Pronouns: they/them/theirs

- Transgender, Reader of Many Books, & Muppet Enthusiast
- Professional Background
 - Vocational Rehabilitation
 - Public Workforce Development
 - Technical Assistance – Disability and Employment
- Education
 - Certified (Partner) Work Incentive Coordinator
 - Masters Degree – Rehabilitation Counseling
 - Doctoral Candidate – Human and Organizational Learning
- Areas of Expertise
 - Supporting LGBTQIA+ Populations including LGBTQIA+ Students & Youth
 - Social Social Security Work Incentives and Financial Empowerment
 - Relationship Building, Partnership Development, and Training Development



Pop Quiz



How many of the following words can you define and use in a sentence?

- Cap
- Dead
- Drip
- Era
- Extra
- Fit/Fit Check
- Rent-Free
- Rizz
- Simp
- Slaps
- Stan
- Sus
- Touch Grass

Pop Quiz ⁽²⁾

What is the number of the words from the previous slide you should use when working with students and youth with disabilities?



Talkin' Bout My Generation...

Generation (Noun) - An identifiable age group with shared historical experience.

Can you remember how old you were/where you were when:

- JFK was assassinated?
 - The Challenger Exploded?
 - The Berlin Wall Fell?
 - The Gulf War Started/Ended?
 - Columbine Shootings?
 - September 11, 2001?
 - Obama was elected?
- Baby Boomers
 - (Born Between: 1946 – 1964)
 - Gen X
 - (Born Between 1965 – 1980)
 - Millennials
 - (Born Between 1981 – 1996)
 - Gen Z
 - (Born Between 1997 – 2012)

What are Some of the Common Generational Stereotypes?

- Boomers
- X'ers
- Millennials
- Gen Z's



Photo: <https://stock.adobe.com/de/search?k=generations%20baby%20boomer>

Why do Generations (and the Generational Gap) Matter?

Two common types of diversity that can affect work (Weeks et al., 2016)

- Surface-level diversity, based on demographic level characteristics (i.e. race, age, dis/ability, gender identity etc.)
- Deep-level diversity, based on differences values and attitudes.
- Social Identity Theory reminds us that these two kinds of diversity are entangled and are often compounded by stereotypes and in/out group dynamics related to demographics characteristics and values and attitudes.

A generation gap describes the differences in cultural norms between younger generations and those proceeding them.

- The generation gap is often most pronounced when it comes to issues of values, attitudes, experiences, opinions, habits, behavior, interests and communication styles.
- When there are clashes in the workplace – they tend to be related to differences in values and attitudes.
- Generation differences affect both surface and deep level diversity. (Weeks et al., 2016)

Unpacking Our Mental Models

Mental Models are the frames we employ to help us make sense of and navigate the world. Largely based on our cultural and social experiences and interactions, such as those experienced by different generations, they shape our:

- reasoning
- what we think
- how we understand
- how we simplify complexity

In essence, **mental models**, often play a big role in **what and how we “know”** something, however, mental models can also mistake experience for objective fact. In other words, mental models also contribute to underlying assumptions.



Opportunity Knocks: Acknowledge and Examine Our Mental Models Including Generational Influence(s)



- Generational Labels (i.e. Boomer, X'er, Millennial, Gen Z) are not scientific facts and instead should be thought of as reference points or lenses comprised of cultural and social norms that can and do have the potential to shape our mental model (Dimock, 2023).
- Acknowledge and consider how cultural events and social norms of your generation may and/or do impact how you make sense of and navigate the world (i.e. your mental model)
- Examine the ways in which how you understand and make sense of the world and how this may show up in your expectations when you work with young people.
 - Communication Styles/Preferences
 - Norms and Values (both personally & professionally)
 - Technology

Opportunity Knocks: Acknowledge Implicit Bias



Photo Source: Luciano Lozano/Getty Images/Ikon Images
<https://www.npr.org/2020/06/20/880379282/the-mind-of-the-village-understanding-our-implicit-biases>

- Implicit bias is an inclination or preference towards or away from someone/something but it occurs automatically and unintentionally and is often shaped by experiences and learned associations
- Unconscious Bias is the result of our limited cognitive capacity
- It is our unintentional preferences formed by our socialization and experiences, including era or generation in which we were raised and our exposure to (social) media
- There are an overwhelming number of studies that have shown the significant impact unconscious bias can have on human cognitive processes

Opportunity Knocks: Strategies to Address Bias(es) on an Interpersonal Level (1)

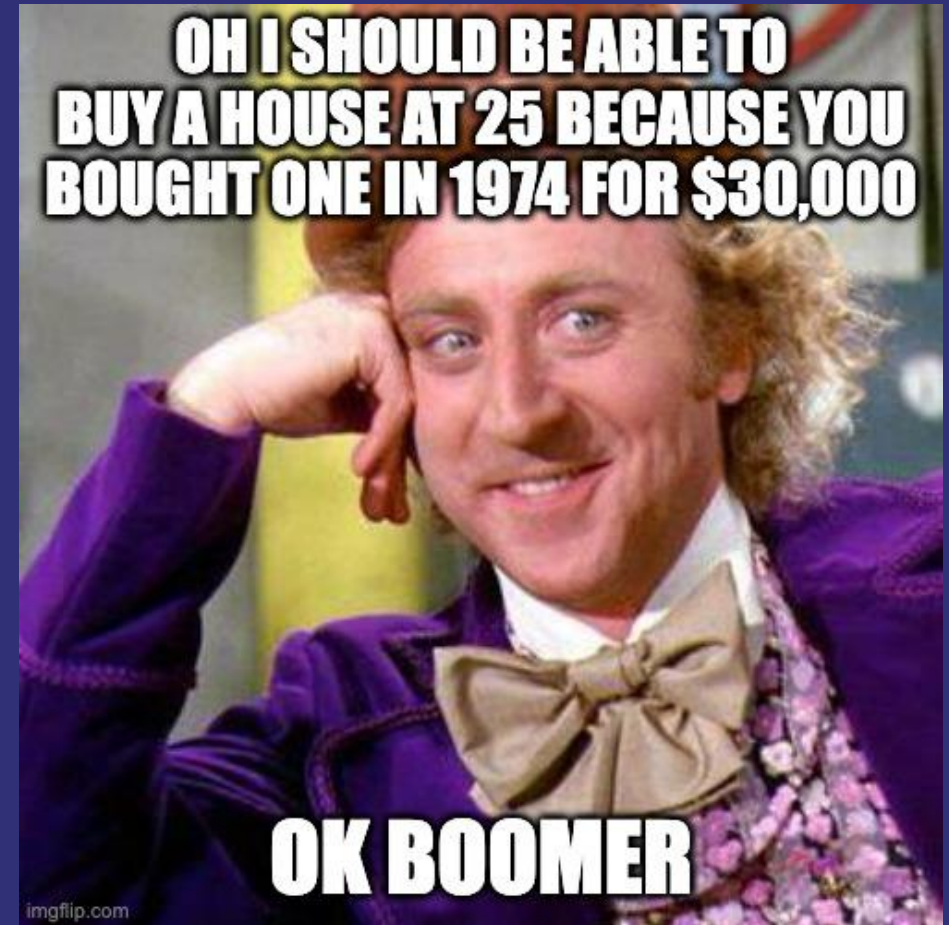
→ Perspective Taking

- Consider and empathetically understand lived experience of stereotyped group. While no one can never know what it is like to be a member of a specific marginalized group that they're not a part of – empathy goes a long way in breaking down biases.

→ Increased Contact and Interactions

- Allows opportunities to disprove negative stereotypes.

(Higgins & Stark, 2021)



Opportunity Knocks: Strategies to Address Bias(es) on an Interpersonal Level (2)



→ Individuation

- Obtain personal examples of a negative stereotype and actively recall multiple occasions when the negative stereotype was proven false.

→ Stereotype Replacement

- Requires that one first recognizes that a negative stereotype exists then work on replacing it with a positive label.

→ Counter Stereotype Imaging

- Builds on Stereotype Replacement by imagining an alternative description and calls for actively thinking about someone who proves the stereotype false

(Higgins & Stark, 2021)

Example: Generational Stereotype Replacement - Reframing By Strengths & Conditions



This Photo by
Unknown Author is
licensed under [CC BY-
NC-ND](#)

Baby Boomers	Gen X	Millennials	Gen Z
Work Strengths			
Strong Work Ethic	Independent	Tech-Savvy	Digitally Fluent
Optimistic	Innovative	Collaborative	Practical
Enjoy Mentoring	Strong Communicators	Focused on the Greater Good	Flourish in a Diverse Workforce
Conditions for Success in the Work			
Hierarchical Culture	Autonomy	Flexibility	Stability
Respect	Competent Colleagues	Meaningful Work	Competitive Wages
Loyal Employer	Trustworthy Employer	Empathetic Employer	Culturally Competent Employer
Chance to Mentor	Problem-Solving Opportunities	Training for New Skills	Mentorship

Data Source: Mazlo

Gen Z Learning Styles: What the Research Says

- Logic-based activities- encourage learning by trial and error.
- Experiential activities
- Gen Z students want their education to prepare them for entering the workforce.
 - They think internship experiences are important.
- Intrapersonal and social learning
 - Students want to work on their own, but also engage with others when desired
- Facilitated learning- opportunities for students to be actively co-create their learning
- Flexibility

Gen Z Learning Styles: What the Research Says ⁽²⁾

Mohr & Mohr (2017) recommend:

- Give student freedom and ability to choose
- Explain how assignments make a difference to students.
- Be sure students have knowledge of online resources so they can research on their own.
- Explain rationale for assigning group projects
- “Destiny assignments” could be beneficial- encourage students to document their own personal change or envision their future-selves.

Use caution and avoid stereotypes, as learning preferences can vary across the generation.

Engaging Students and Youth with Disabilities

Internal Keys to Engagement - Authenticity

- Bee Yourself Nothing is more cringe than adults using contemporary slang incorrectly – unless of course you combine it with a bad pun (Case In Point).
- Open and honest dialogue, trust, and actions that match and align with who you say you are, also known as authenticity, are paramount in relationships between students/youth and Adults (Blacker, 2010; Cooper, 2018; Fyfe & Mackie, 2024; Smith 2010).
- Authenticity in relationships between students/youth and adults, however, necessitates that adults engage in critical self-reflection (Fyfe & Mackie, 2024; Slovenko & Thompson, 2016)



Internal Keys to Engagement – Engage in Critical Self-Reflection

- Reflect on your own experiences of adolescence.
- Positive? Negative? Happy? Sad? Traumatic?
 - What do you remember about the relationships you had with adults in your life when you were a teenager?
 - What were some of the social norms
 - How might being a teenager today differ from when you were a teenager?
 - What do you think the impact is of the differences between teenagers' experiences today versus when you were a teenager?

External Keys to Engagement – Valuing Youth Voice and Sharing Power



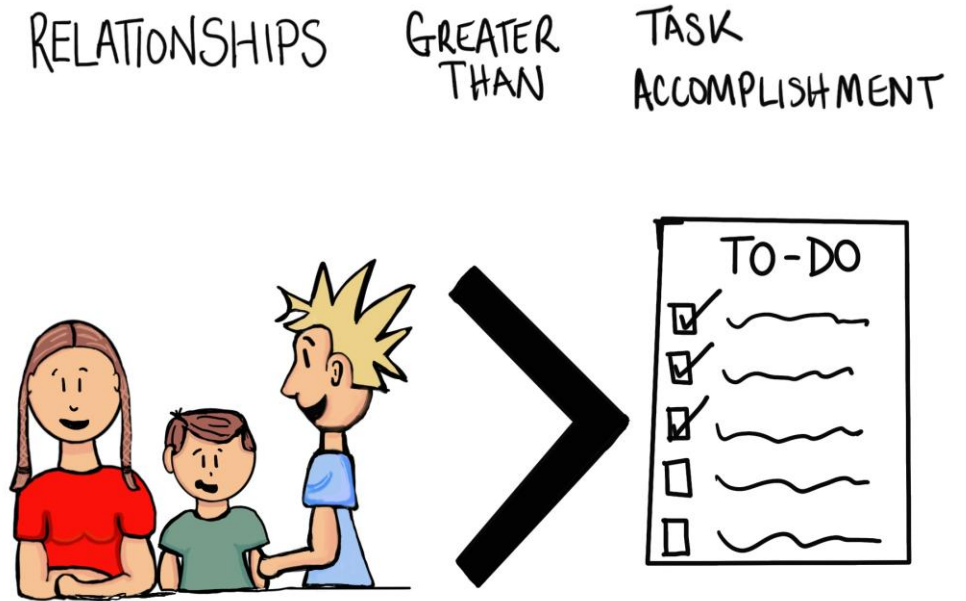
- Start from a place of acknowledgement and recognition that students and youth with disabilities are the experts of their own lives.
- When planning events and activities for students and youth how are you soliciting and incorporating their opinions and feedback in the design of programming?

External Keys to Engagement – Valuing Youth Voice and Sharing Power ⁽²⁾

- When working with students and youth, where and when do you typically meet them? Who determines the meeting location and time?
- In what ways are you soliciting, hearing, and incorporating the needs of the students and youth you are working with (as identified by those students and youth)?
- When recommending support strategies to address identified needs, are you discussing these support strategies with students and youth?
- How

External Keys to Engagement – Time & Power Dynamics

- Time and Consistency are Essential
 - The relationship you are building, especially initially, is more important than the to-do list. This means it might take more than one time slot, but that is ok. Consistent connection is key
- Intentionally reflect on the power dynamics of the interactions you have with students and youth by asking:
 - What and who are controlling the narrative in this situation?
 - What do you know about the student/youth you are working with? How do you know that? Why is that knowledge valid? Are there other sources of knowledge that should be considered?
 - How is success being defined? Who is defining it?
 - Why is one course of action recommended and not another? Who benefits most from the course of action recommended?



Talking and Working with Students/Youth:

Strategies for Establishing Rapport and a
Working Alliance

Talking and Working with Students/Youth -Establishing Rapport & Working Alliance: Iterative Approach - Overview

- **Career Planning and Management** as a key feature of making the transition from adolescence to adulthood is **best thought of as an iterative approach** starting with **self-exploration**. What is learned during the self-exploration phase can then be used to help inform the student/youth's **career exploration**. What is learned during the career exploration phase can then be used to help inform the student/youth's **career planning and management**.
- Using youth development as a framework, work with students/youth to support them **identifying their strengths, interests, values, and skills** in the areas of learning, working, leisure/making connections, thriving emotionally & physically, and being a leader.

Talking and Working with Students/Youth - Establishing Rapport & Working Alliance: Iterative Approach - Self-Exploration

- **Starting with the students/youths' interests helps establish rapport** and supports in building a working alliance.
- **Take the time necessary** help facilitate the student/youth's self-exploration across the key youth developmental domains.
- Begin by assisting students/youth to engage in self-exploration through tailored activities designed to help students/youth in identifying their personal strengths, both as they perceive them and as perceived by others, as well as the students'/youths' interests, values, and skills.

Self-Exploration: Exploring Strengths, Values, Interests, and Skills

→ Youth Development Domain: Learning

- In/Out of School? What is/was your favorite part of school? Subject? Why? Teacher? Why?
- What are/were your favorite ways to learn about new things (i.e. by reading books, YouTube Videos, shorter clips, hands-on practice etc.?)
- What did/do you find to be the most fun when learning? Why?
- What areas do/did you do well in? What came easy to you? (i.e. reading, writing, math, art, music, etc.)
- Do you have additional learning goals? If so, what are they?

Self-Exploration: Exploring Strengths, Values, Interests, and Skills ⁽²⁾

→ Youth Development Domain: Working

- Think about some of the adults you know who work, what kind of work do they do? What do they say about their jobs?
- Are there any jobs that sound cool to you?
- Do you currently have a job? If so, what do you like/not like about it? Why?
- Have you ever had any jobs in the past? What did you like/not like about those jobs? Why?
- Have you ever had any kind of special training? Received a credential?
- When you do something fun, does it feel like work?
- Have you had experiences doing any kind of work in a recreational setting that you found fun?
- What else do you want to know or might you need to explore different career opportunities?

Self-Exploration: Exploring Strengths, Values, Interests, and Skills ⁽³⁾

→ Youth Development Domain: Making Community Connections and Leisure

- What do you like to do for fun? What do you find fun about those specific things?
- Who do you hangout with the most? What kinds of things do you talk about, and activities do you do with those people?
- Who do you consider to be your closest friend(s)?
- Are you involved in any clubs, sports, or other organized recreational outlets?
- Who do you talk to when you need help, advice, and/or guidance?
- Are there adults in your life that you trust, admire, connect with?
- What businesses do you frequent regularly (i.e. grocery store, restaurants)
- Are you member of a faith community?
- Do you have any mentors? If so, who? How often do you see them?
- Are there other social connections you want to make now or in the future?

Self-Exploration: Exploring Strengths, Values, Interests, and Skills ⁽⁴⁾

→ Youth Development Domain Thriving Emotionally and Physically

- Do you have regular access to a doctor and dentist?
- Do you have any mental health support needs? If so, are you able to access what you need (i.e. medication, regular appointments with a professional)?
- Do you get daily exercise? What kind? Do you like physical activity?
- Are you able to get consistent amounts of sleep? Do you stay or late? Get up early? When do you feel physically and mentally your best during the day (morning, afternoon, evening, late night?)
- When you are stressed out, how do you cope? Do you have someone you can talk to?
- What is your current living situation? Is this ideal? What about in the future?
- What else do you think you need to ensure you become and/or stay emotionally and physically healthy?

Self-Exploration: Exploring Strengths, Values, Interests, and Skills ⁽⁵⁾

→ Youth Development Domain: Leadership

- Do you get opportunities to make decisions about your life?
- What are some ways you are “in charge” of taking steps to direct your own life?
- Do you have any personal goals? Do you have a plan and support to reach those goals?
- Are you part of any community groups or clubs?
- Have you had any opportunities to serve as a leader at school, work, or at home?
- In what ways are you currently a leader among your peers, friends and/or family?

Talking and Working with Students/Youth – Establishing Rapport & Working Alliance: Iterative Approach – Career Exploration

- Use what is learned during the self-exploration phase as a starting point for career exploration.
- Help students/youth to engage in career exploration activities including but not limited, work related interest-inventories, identifying work-related values, researching career clusters, labor market research, informational interviews, job shadows, paid and volunteer work experiences etc.
 - [Explore Work](#)
 - [Get My Future](#)
 - [O*NET My Next Move](#)

Career Exploration - Identification of Work Values Example Activity

Engage in Intentional Discussion about Workplace Norms and Values. Solicit Students/Youth thoughts as it relates to the following workplace norms and values. **The focus of this activity is helping the student/youth identify their values – it is not about workplace readiness.**

→ Common Workplace Norms

- Communication
- Collaboration
- Management Style Preferences
- Technology/Multi-tasking

Discussion Question: How might you use the information learned during this conversation to support the development of your working alliance with the student/youth?

→ Common Workplace Values

- Professionalism/Decorum
 - Physical Workspace
 - Work Attire/Dress Code
- Attitude and Enthusiasm
 - Expectations around Work Ethic
- Emotional Maturity
 - Discussions around sensitive topics (political views)
 - Work/Life Separation

Talking and Working with Students/Youth – Establishing Rapport & Working Alliance: Iterative Approach - Career Planning and Management

- Use what is learned through self-exploration and career exploration to **help the student and youth develop a plan** that includes setting both **short-term and long-term transition goals** related to education and work as well as in any of the other domains (i.e. connecting, thriving, leadership) where goals and/or resource needs were identified.
- If your agency cannot directly provide the identified resource need or support the goal in any of the domains - **help the student/youth (and natural supports) to identify and engage the entities that can.**

Questions?

References

- Blacker, H. (2010). "Relationship, Friendship and Youth Work." In *Youth Work Practice*, edited by T. Jeffs, and M. Smith, 15–30. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Cooper, S. (2018). *Participatory Evaluation in Youth and Community Work*. London: Routledge.
- Columbia University Center for Career Education (n.d.). *Etiquette in the workplace*. Retrieved on 25 April 2024. <https://www.careereducation.columbia.edu/resources/etiquette-workplace>
- Columbia University Center for Career Education (n.d.). *5 Workplace etiquette tips every professional should know*. Retrieved on 25 April 2024. <https://www.careereducation.columbia.edu/resources/5-workplace-etiquette-tips-every-professional-should-know>
- Deloitte. (2023). Waves of change: Acknowledging progress, confronting setbacks. *Deloitte Global 2023 Gen Z and Millennial Survey*.
- Dimock, M. (2023, May 22). 5 Things to keep in mind when you hear about Gen Z, Millennials, Boomers and other generations. *Pew Research Center: Short Reads*. <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2023/05/22/5-things-to-keep-in-mind-when-you-hear-about-gen-z-millennials-boomers-and-other-generations/>
- Fyfe, I., & Mackie, A. (2024). Are you for real? Investigating authenticity in community-based youth work practice. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 27(1), 1–16. <https://doi-org.proxygw.wrlc.org/10.1080/13676261.2022.2101353>
- Higgins, M. & Stark, R.K. (2021, January 4). Mitigating Implicit Bias: Diversity, equity and inclusion in action. *American Libraries Magazine*. <https://americanlibrariesmagazine.org/2021/01/04/mitigating-implicit-bias/>
- Malik, S. & Shahid, S. (2024). From differences to strengths: Strategies for embracing generational diversity at workplace. *Development and Learning in Organizations: An International Journal*. Vol. 38(3). Pp. 11-14.
- Slovenko, K., and N. Thompson. 2016. "Social Pedagogy, Informal Education and Ethical Youth Work Practice." *Ethics and Social Welfare* 10 (1): 19–34.
- Smith, H. (2010). "Engaging in Conversation." In *Youth Work Practice*, edited by T. Jeffs, and M. Smith, 31–40. Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan.
- Weeks, K.P., Weeks, M., & Long, N.L. (2016). Generational perceptions at work: in group favoritism and out-group stereotypes. *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal*. Vol. 36(1). Pp. 1-21.

Find us:

#transitionTA | transitionTA.org | ntact-collab@uncc.edu



Office of Special Education Programs
U.S. Department of Education

The contents of this presentation were developed under a grant (H326E200003) from the Department of Education. However, those contents do not necessarily represent the policy of the Department of Education, and you should not assume endorsement by the Federal Government.