Attending to Each Other: Centering Neurodivergent Museum Professionals in Attentive Facilitation

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ABSTRACT

This article introduces neurodivergent museum educators and their neurotypical allies to ways we can build supportive, inclusive environments, develop interpersonal engagement skill sets, and deconstruct ableist notions of learning by imagining museum education experiences centered on the concept of *attentive facilitation*. In this approach, we infuse the practice of compassionate facilitation with attentiveness – the ability to "allow" what arises in the experience to be expressed. Attentive facilitation is constructed through the values of social interaction, allowing for authenticity and building capacity for interaction. Attentive facilitation has positive impacts on all involved: museum learners can connect more deeply not just to learning itself but with facilitators; neurodivergent museum educators can build soft skills that can carry over into internal staff interactions and personal life, and neurotypical museum educators can deepen their understanding of and support for neurodivergent staff and museum visitors. This set of values prioritizes neurodivergent museum educators through the cultivation of staff experiences. This article shares the roots of our initial conceptualization of attentive facilitation, to be expanded on in the future as we continue to develop, transform, and reassemble our knowledge of our museum education in practice.

Neurodivergent museum educators centered: an introduction

To pay attention, this is our endless and proper work. (Mary Oliver)[1]

Neurodivergent museum educators exist and must be included when considering how to structure our workplace culture and how to devise approaches to training museum staff.[2] The word *neurodivergence* describes naturally occurring differences in the human brain, including (but not limited to) a/Autism[3] and ADHD (Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder). Though this work centers the experience of an autistic museum professional, we recognize that the experiences and traits of those who are autistic and have ADHD may overlap with other neurodivergent people, and can be further compounded by having other marginalized identities. As neurodivergence presents in spectrums of interests, traits, abilities, and capacity for self-advocacy, not all neurodivergent people want to undertake a career in museum education. However, those who want to pursue it should be radically, attentively included in our profession. We ask, how can we make our profession accessible for a spectrum of different brains?

We, the authors, are former Explainers with the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum and current museum education practitioners and theorists. Sam is autistic and has ADHD; this study centers around their lived experiences, advocacy, and interpretation of museum theory and practice, supported by Becca, a neurotypical ally. The following introduction to attentive facilitation and its role in supporting and centering neurodivergent museum staff stems from 8 years of practice in multiple museum formats, graduate study, and conversations we have held throughout the years that were transcribed for this article. We chose to write this introduction in the first person to reinforce the idea that our lived experiences as museum educators are in conversation with pedagogy, which led to our own articulation of theory through practice.

Museums as institutions are often not structured to support and center neurodivergent staff members, including autistic staff members. For example, museums' sensory and social environments are often overwhelming not just for autistic visitors but also for autistic staff.[4] We may struggle to focus during social experiences and interpret or respond differently to social communication with colleagues. However, most museum researchers and practitioners who focus on neurodivergence, especially autism and ADHD, exclusively center visitors. Their research primarily shares how neurotypical museum staff can plan "sensory experiences" for autistic children and their caretakers.[5]

As museum educators, in addition to lack of reasonable workplace accommodations,[6] autistic people can feel alienated by the lack of understanding that they too can be professionals. Our peers may not expect to work alongside us because of internalized ableism and misconceptions about cognitive and developmental disabilities. For example, a common misconception is that autistic people lack theory of mind and therefore do not have the ability to master the communication methods used in our practice.[7] Autistic professionals are often judged by interviewers as "weird" or "different" and are not hired, or if hired, are disciplined for traits that are actually due to their neurodivergence, rather than their performance. Despite those perceptions, autistic people make immense efforts to "mask," or "camouflage," our autistic traits to compensate for social differences – especially in the workplace – even though camouflaging negatively impacts our mental health.[8] By radically reimagining the staff environment using the process of *attentive facilitation*, a practice rooted in and grown from anti-ableism, museums can become places where neurodivergent and neurotypical people work together to create an environment where everyone belongs.

Though not intentionally designed to be a space that centered neurodivergent staff, the Explainers Program at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum in the early 2010s fostered an environment of constant and compassionate feedback between peers in a social space. We noticed something special occurring in the program that transformed our personal and professional experiences. Though we are many years removed from being participants in the program, reflecting on the experience has been a regular feature in our pedagogical discussions. We have retroactively articulated our practices in this program as experiences infused with *attentive facilitation*.

Attentive facilitation is, at its core, the process of being attentive – the ability to "allow" what arises in the experience to be expressed. By creating social spaces, allowing for authenticity, and building capacity, attentive facilitation becomes a framework for fostering staff culture in education departments. Though the term "facilitation" is often used when discussing interactions with visitors, facilitating interactions between staff is just

as vital. In that sense, attentive facilitation becomes a framework for workplace culture rather than pedagogy that educators practice only in museum galleries. Starting with education staff as the primary beneficiary of attentive facilitation can trickle down to visitor interactions; thus, centering staff through attentive facilitation also benefits the museum visitor.

The setting: the Explainers Program

The Explainers Program at the Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, founded in the mid-1990s, is designed to foster professional growth in high school and college students in a science and history museum. The program employs between 50 and 100 students each year to facilitate hands-on programs and demonstrations for the public. During a typical work shift, Explainers interact with peers at the Museum as well as hundreds of visitors. Activities include performing scripted demonstrations and interacting with visitors through casual, hands-on activities. The program attracted student staff from different backgrounds and interests, from STEM fields to art to public policy. Explainers learned to interact with the public, and program leadership created space for student staff to learn from each other and build professional skills.

"Sam and I were both part of the program due to work-study funding," reflects Becca. "We were all in a similar age group, and a similar social and economic background, relatively speaking, in part due to work-study." It was as staff in the Explainers Program that we first noticed what we now articulate as attentive facilitation.

What is attentive facilitation?

Sam developed the language for attentive facilitation years after leaving the Explainers Program, and through another discipline: ecology. "My fascination with the word 'attentive' grew from my reading *The Urban Bestiary* by Lyanda Haupt, a naturalist," they note. Haupt explains that the meaning of the word "observe," particularly the Latin root, "servare," means "to attend." Haupt writes, "observation can be more than watching" and that *to attend* "implies … a graced allowing, a room for the movement of the observed in its own sphere – a sphere that, as attendants, we are invited to enter."[9] As Haupt describes it, observing wildlife is about allowing for experiences with wildlife to arise. When entering an experience, then, we don't set an expectation of what we're going to see because we can't both predict behavior while also allowing for what exists in someone else to arise authentically. As "attendants," we want to both recognize and mitigate the discomfort our presence could bring, especially in situations where we have more power – in wildlife observation, as a perceived predator; in education settings, as perceived authorities in institutions with long histories of oppressing marginalized people.

Sam remembers reading Haupt's book on a flight to San Diego, where they were going to do naturalistic observations[10] of a museum program for young adults with autism.[11] Sam recounts,

> It made me very conscious of how my presence as an observer could disrupt the authenticity of the environment.[12] Observing that program, I saw participants attend to each other, developing trust and social bonds; and I observed the program's staff scaffolding for participants in their social interactions, while also learning from the participants throughout and

subsequently adjusting their approach to supporting them at the next opportunity.[13] And, in our ongoing conversations with each other, Becca and I realized that approach had also been part of our experience as Explainers.

The practice of compassionate and audience-centered facilitation is infused with the process of being attentive – intentionally "allowing" for learners to express what arises during the experience. Through attentive facilitation, participants enter into a mutual learning experience that drives them towards something deeper than moving along a pre-determined path.

The learning theories that underpin attentive facilitation are familiar, as many theorists and practitioners have already articulated and applied them to the visitor experience. Learning as a social experience between learners and a teacher has been explored by theorists such as John Falk and Lynn Dierking[14] and Lev Vygotsky. In particular, we draw from Vygotsky's[15] work to articulate attentive facilitation. Practitioners such as Nina Simon[16] and David Larsen[17] have explored authenticity in the visitor experience as a means of making the museum more relevant for visitors. Additionally, many practitioners and theorists have discussed the treatment of museum workers, such as those sharing their calls to action in *The Care and Keeping of Museum Professionals*.[18] Elaine Gurian also discussed that the way people who work in institutions treat others is foundational to cultivating civic peace.[19] The holistic framework of attentive facilitation grows out of known theories and incorporates these different methods.

Though attentive facilitation was not an identified component of the Explainers Program, we retrospectively noticed the elements of what could, if made intentional, be a transformative training and facilitation practice that centers neurodivergent museum educators. We saw how the values of creating social spaces, being authentically ourselves, and building our capacity through modeling authentic feedback led to a more inclusive environment for staff and a richer learning environment for visitors. The overarching values described by attentive facilitation afford a more equitable workplace culture rooted in anti-ableism. These values include:

Creating social spaces in places of learning

We recognize and value the role of social relationships and culture in the learning ecosystem for education staff. We acknowledge power dynamics and build trust before attempting to influence, educate, or provide feedback.

Allowing for authenticity

We recognize the interplay between staff as learners and experts, along with visitors, within an ecosystem of discovery and constructivist theory, allowing authenticity to arise and meeting peers where they are.

Building capacity to observe, learn, and interact

We recognize the importance of using inquiry, discovery learning, and modeling to train educators, using methods similar to those educators use to support visitors' learning.

Social spaces in places of learning

One of the essential tenets of anti-ableism is a focus on developing interpersonal relationships. This practice is particularly important for the development of neurodivergent staff members.

Our Explainers Program staff experiences were inherently social. Explainers were given space and time to be with each other in social contexts, whether formally organized by the museum, occurring during regularly scheduled breaks, or spontaneously emerging in unstructured spaces (such as passing each other in a hallway, or outside work). The program's demographics, and the privileges of time and proximity that it afforded, created ample opportunities for social connection.

In her book *The Social Work of Museums*, Lois Silverman explores the valuable social connections that museums can facilitate, particularly focusing on museum visitors and community engagement. Silverman argues that museums are "at their very core … institutions of social service."[20] As social institutions, museums have an opportunity to create social connections for people who are isolated or feel disconnected from their peers and community. Silverman writes, "as a social creation, the at-risk experience implicates everyone, for we are all interconnected and interdependent," and thus, museums must "recognize the need to address two major systems for change: people at risk and the social conditions that create and contribute to such risk."[21] The lack of services and social opportunities for disabled adults is a social condition that contributes to health and safety risks, including feelings of isolation, depression and anxiety, and suicide.[22]

Ableism in museum workplaces is a social condition embedded in museum education, which contributes to the marginalization of disabled and neurodivergent people. If museums truly want to be inclusive of neurodivergent audiences, they will promote mutually beneficial opportunities for learning and development. This means not only creating accessible and inclusive programs that offer social opportunities, but also including neurodivergent educators in program design, facilitation, and development of theory.

In the program, building social connections between staff members encouraged trust and friendship between all Explainers, and also supported Sam in particular.

"In feedback, I was told I wasn't 'approachable'," Sam remembers:

> But you (Becca) were approachable, for me, so I could observe your interactions and trusted you with my questions about how you responded to people and picked up on the phrasing and tone you used with me. That helped me to improve both how I interacted with visitors and gave feedback to other Explainers.

The ability to build our social relationship then cemented trust and allowed us to attend to each other.

Museums can foster these social systems among staff by intentionally prioritizing unstructured time for staff. In the Explainers program, this manifested as regularly scheduled breaks together, and consistent rotation and pairing of staff throughout the day, which coincided with more social interaction. By dedicating paid work time to unstructured social space, leaders in museum education departments can attend to all their staff (full time, part time, and otherwise) in the same way

Allowing for authenticity

The social interactions described above helped build trust, which supported participants in going beyond inclusion and moving toward belonging and authenticity. Staff could feel welcome as their authentic selves before they even get to the museum floor due to these relationships.

Social science researcher Brené Brown writes that data collected about leadership showed that "care and connection are irreducible requirements for wholehearted, productive relationships between leaders and team members."[23] A commitment to caring for teammates, or museum staff, is the basis for developing a workplace culture that makes authenticity possible. Leaders have a responsibility, as Brown writes, to be "guardians of a space that allows [learners] to breathe and be curious and explore the world and be who they are without suffocation."[24] Whether leader or peer, the attentive museum educator facilitates interactions that allow peers to feel connected, or attended to, and thus safe to be their wholehearted selves in interactions with museum peers and, ultimately, with museum visitors.

Sam sees a direct connection between authenticity and the support of neurodivergent staff as learners.

> Why aren't we authentic when we show up as museum educators? For neurodivergent educators, it isn't always safe to express different communication styles or different ways of dressing and acting in social settings, especially in the workplace. We are implicitly judged on soft social skill sets at the cost of our livelihood or career prospects.

As educators, it's vulnerable to be attentive rather than prescriptive because we lose authority. The typical structure of education programs gives more authority to the educator because they know what's happening and where the program should go. Thus, it feels vulnerable to keep the outcome open-ended and move through an interaction in response to what arises. This is especially important not just in the interactions between staff and visitor, but also among staff, as this vulnerability in turn builds trust and belonging and allows for authenticity.

The authenticity involved in attentive facilitation is about being genuinely non-judgmental and accepting of all human parts by allowing what arises (verbally and non-verbally) to be expressed. That way, an "educator" and "learner" construct knowledge together, rather than the educator giving knowledge to the learner.[25] "By 'learner,'" Becca reflects, "we mean someone learning how to facilitate museum education programs as a staff."

In experiencing an environment where they could feel like their authentic self, Sam knew exactly how much that impacted their work as an educator.

> It was when I felt I could be myself while facilitating that I felt more capacity to be attentive and responsive to what happened during my interactions with museum visitors. My authentic self in those moments, for example, was that I communicated in my own style, sharing content in my own words and making analogies to explain concepts. I remember explaining the concept of lift with an analogy – how it feels when the wind moves your hand if you stick it out the window of a moving car – because that's what made the science "click" for me, and it came from my own experience rather than the program script. In general, being authentic and camouflaging less freed up some brain space so I could focus more on being responsive to visitors.

Attentively allowing for authenticity also lowers the need for – and ultimate impact of – autistic masking/camouflaging. It also gives rise to the idea that meaningfully interacting with museum visitors is a skill that autistic museum educators can learn and practice, opposing the idea that the best museum educators are naturally charismatic and sociable.

Museum leaders can make more room for staff to be their authentic selves by training staff to be attentive not just to visitors but also to each other. This includes developing the aforementioned social relationships and leaving room for all staff to be curious, open, and vulnerable in their own ways.

Building capacity for interaction

The framework of attentive facilitation, in some ways, reflects the familiar axiom, "meet them where they are," often used by museum educators to apply to their interactions with general museum visitors and, recently, in their work to increase community engagement among marginalized groups. But it also goes beyond "meet them where they are," in that attentive facilitation intentionally stipulates attending to the cognitive load on a learner's brain during an interaction, particularly for neurodivergent education staff. This attention eases the inequity that neurodivergent learners are more likely to encounter than neurotypical museum staff. It shows an understanding of how different brains work and approach learning and is about responding directly to that to make a learning interaction equitable. It works for the general population, but especially for neurodivergent people who need different, more authentic, or more targeted communication strategies than neurotypical learners.

Museum educators are perceived as "people people" who are natural conversationalists. However, interaction is a capacity that educators or mentors can build in each other through engaging the upper end of the learner's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), as outlined by Vygotsky.[26] This capacity is built through the trust and authenticity created between staff. Building capacity for facilitation means embedding inquiry in training and modeling constant and consistent feedback.

Helping staff imagine the direction of learning builds these capacities. Jerome Bruner's *Acts of Meaning*[27] explores the role of culture and narrative in the direction of learning:

> When we enter human life, it is as if we walk on a stage into a play whose enactment is already in process – a play whose somewhat open plot determines what parts we may play and toward what denouements we may be heading. Others on stage already have a sense of what the play is about, enough of a sense to make negotiation with a newcomer possible.[28]

Our social knowledge is constructed through interaction with others, and both staff and visitors have some preconceived notions of how interactions are supposed to go.[29] This interpretation of learning resonates with Sam's experiences:

> As an autistic person, my way of interpreting peoples' meaning and intention in interactions is different from those of neurotypical people. It is a common experience in autistic culture to feel that everyone around you is reading from a script that you never received. And we're viewed negatively if we can't see the "open plots" unfolding on stage. It can make it difficult to feel a sense of belonging in society and this field.[30]

Building the capacity to interact, which is the process Sam then went through, is a skill that can also be learned and constructed together. Learning is not a scripted play. But, at a

museum, there is a "script" in the background because the objects, exhibits, and educational programs around you create context. Preparing education staff with context builds confidence and is a basis for authentic interactions.

"When we were Explainers, we had a 'script,' too," Sam recounts:

> For example, I would have a script absolutely memorized. I was walking onto the stage knowing enough about what the play is supposed to be about. With practice, I could use the "graced allowing," the attentiveness, for whomever approaches the cart by following and responding to what visitors were interested in. I'm not just reading the script of how I think the play is supposed to go. I learned to apply an "If This Then That" algorithm to respond to what the visiting learner is bringing to the interaction. Subsequently, I could learn from each interaction and adjust my approach.

When educators anticipate specific responses, they are typically prepared to respond to what they expect to hear; neither participant will learn as much. And it can be especially limiting for people with ADHD, who have an impulsivity to jump in when we already have our response planned out. This is true not just for conversations with visitors but also interactions between staff. As an educator, you can't script a conversation with another human being, expecting them to always respond the way you think they're going to respond. "That's a really neurotypical way of constructing museum experiences," reflects Becca.

Sam knows firsthand the impact of this process. "I learned how to have back-and-forth conversations in general, in my personal life, from training and practicing as an Explainer, and especially from observing other Explainers."

Building the capacity to interact is important for neurodivergent museum educators because neurodivergent peoples' communication differences affect our interpretation of conversations, as described by researchers Catherine Crompton et al. They found that "autistic people share information with other autistic people as well as non-autistic people do with other non-autistic people. However, when there are mixed groups of autistic and non-autistic people, much less information is shared."[31] Information is lost when non-autistic people communicate with autistic people. Information lost includes the communication of social connection and empathy, in addition to concrete facts and information, all of which come together to affect meaning-making in museums. When a neurotypical museum educator communicates with an autistic person (both museum staff and visitors), the autistic person is at an inequitable disadvantage to a neurotypical counterpart.[32] Sam reflected, "Knowing the results from this study – which really just support lived experiences autistic people have been describing for decades – I am uncomfortable with the lack of representation of known autistic and otherwise neurodivergent museum educators." The ultimate experience that neurodivergent and neurotypical visitors are receiving from the neurotypical educator is not equal in terms of the success of the communication between the educators, simply because their brains are different.

Capacity-building rooted in attentive facilitation includes developing and modeling a consistent and continuous cycle of feedback and inquiry throughout the training process for museum education staff. This includes modeling openness, curiosity, and vulnerability in the feedback process, and recognizing that the very tactics educators rely on to interact with the public – constructivism, and in particular, scaffolding – must first be used when interacting with each other as staff. This entire process will support neurodivergent museum education staff the most and seep out to broader public interactions.

Modeling feedback cycles in capacity building

The Explainers Program was structured so that staff were constantly giving and receiving feedback – about their educational techniques, their content expertise, and even their social engagement. This structure allowed staff to continuously reflect on the process of being attentive. Modeling cycles of feedback in attentive facilitation is supported by constructivism.

The basis of constructivism is the interplay between a learner and the knowledge/ experiences they encounter while interacting with a "teacher"/expert and/or the learner's environment.[33] Attentive facilitation is about the "expert"/teacher being attentive to that interplay and intentionally shaping learning within that moment of interplay during the interaction, ultimately targeting the exact moment that learning happens. Vygotsky introduced the concepts of "scaffolding" and Zone of Proximal Development in his work *Thought and Language*.[34] Typically, however, educators think of scaffolding as a teacher-to-student relationship, without realizing that the educator is learning, too, by constantly attending to the learner's current development and adjusting their facilitation in response.[35] We take away from Peter Doolittle's reexamination of Vygotsky that the educator is really a learner; it reminds us that learning is a social experience.[36] Educators can scaffold for each other because "the essence of the zone of proximal development is the interdependent social system in which cultural meanings are actively constructed by both the student and the teacher."[37] Mentoring educators can and should use constructivist learning theories when training museum staff as they build the capacity to interact with museum visitors. As educators, we know how to create learning experiences – and to be truly attentive, educators should be treating their fellow peers with the same care that they do when designing experiences for visitors.

Feedback was constant and continuous among peers within the Explainers Program, acting out that scaffolding. Every shift, Explainers had a chance to train and be trained by peer experts and used the keep/change method to deliver feedback. In this method, a peer expert would observe a peer learner during an interaction with a visitor and then share what a peer learner should "keep" about their practice and "change" about their practice (i.e. what the Explainer did well, and what they could improve). This included recognizing that different peer experts had different skill sets, and setting the expectation that the peer expert could follow up with the peer learner after interacting with other staff. "And then," Sam remembers,

> We'd follow up next time we worked together. You'd see in action that they developed more knowledge of the concepts and increased capacity to communicate them. We would go through that process until they were ready to do the demonstration with museum visitors. And from there, their facilitation would always be improving if they were incorporating visitors' responses to make adjustments in their practice going forward.

The cycle of feedback we engaged in was modeled the type of learning we wanted to see on the museum floor. As trainers, we could reflect on how an individual developed their knowledge of the program and incorporate what we learned from that in future training sessions with other new Explainers, too.

An underpinning of these cycles of feedback is staff modeling the process of both teaching and learning for fellow education staff.[38] This was part of the training process for Explainers, but it also connects to neurodivergent psychology. What works well for

neurotypical people, in this case, works extremely well for neurodivergent people. Sam described this benefit: "We thrive on concrete examples, having a role model to follow, and often learning by doing (another element of constructivism), so this way of learning museum education facilitation was accessible to me."

During their time in the Explainers Program, Sam would often ask, "what would Becca do?"

> For a long time, it was very much a stopgap "camouflaging" or "masking" behavior.[39] When I observed you [Becca] facilitate, I could see that you were watching for which objects visitors looked at or touched and then you'd talk about those objects first because that's what they were interested in, instead of launching into the script from the beginning during every interaction. So, I saw that you were really observant about visitor behavior, and then you incorporated that, I realized it was something I could learn and get better at – I didn't have to be a "natural" at reading people to become a better educator.

"To Pay Attention": a conclusion

The Explainers Program never explicitly stated the goal of staff "attending to each other" in the way we've described, but connecting our lived experiences to museum pedagogy shows that this type of framework can support all educators, especially neurodivergent educators. We hope this article serves as a grounding, an understanding of the roots of attentive facilitation, and as a framework inherently for and by disabled museum education staff and supported by anti-ableist allies.

Attentive facilitation is the process of "graceful allowance," where what can arise is allowed to arise – and not just for visitors, but between staff themselves. By leveraging the social nature of museum environments, creating space for authenticity to arise, and building capacity through meaningful feedback and modeling, museums can support staff in the anti-ableist work of attending to each other – "our endless and proper work."[40]

Notes

1. Oliver, *Devotions: The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver*, 264.
2. Greenberg and Raskin, "Supporting Transitions: Cultural Connections," 333.
3. Brown, "Autism FAQ."
4. Typically, museum educators prioritize minimizing sensory input for autistic visitors, such as through "sensory-friendly" time slots for autistic visitors and their families to visit the museum. However, as autism is a spectrum disorder, some autistic people are more "sensory-seeking" – that is, they look for sensory input that they find enjoyable or helpful in regulating their minds and bodies.
5. See Cho and Jolley, "Museum Education for Children with Disabilities"; Deng, "Equity of Access for Cultural Heritage"; Fletcher, Blake, and Shelffo, "Can Sensory Gallery Guides for Children"; Langa et al., "Improving the Museum Experiences of Children" and Mulligan et al., "Examination of a Museum Program."
6. From the U.S. Department of Labor: The ADA requires reasonable accommodations as they relate to three aspects of employment: (1) ensuring equal opportunity in the application process; (2) enabling a qualified individual with a disability to perform the essential functions of a job; and (3) making it possible for an employee with a disability to enjoy equal benefits and privileges of employment.
7. Holt et al., "'Unheard Minds, Again and Again': Autistic," 1.

8. Lai et al., "Quantifying and Exploring Camouflaging," 691.
9. Haupt, *The Urban Bestiary*, 2–3.
10. Naturalistic observation is an evaluation method that involves observing a museum program or exhibit and recording events and behaviors that occur within that context. The evaluator unobtrusively takes field notes, then processes their observation data for qualitative analysis.
11. Theriault and Redmond Jones, "Constructing Knowledge Together."
12. Language note, ASD identity language preferences. (The Spectrum folks preferred person-first.)
13. Theriault and Redmond Jones, "Constructing Knowledge Together," 369–70.
14. Falk and Dierking, *Learning from Museums*, 46.
15. Vygotsky, "Interaction Between Learning and Development."
16. Simon, *The Art of Relevance*, 109.
17. Larsen, "Be Relevant or Become a Relic," 19.
18. Erdman, *The Care and Keeping of Museum Professionals*.
19. Gurian, "Intentional Civility," 474.
20. Silverman, *The Social Work of Museums*, 3.
21. Ibid., 34–5.
22. Weinstock, "The Hidden Danger of Suicide in Autism."
23. Brown, *Dare to Lead*, 12.
24. Ibid., 13.
25. Theriault and Redmond Jones. "Constructing Knowledge Together."
26. Doolittle, "Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development," 85.
27. We want to acknowledge that Bruner's work, as well as that of many other theorists whose work is foundational to our field, was ableist as well. Preceding the quote cited here (which we feel is invaluable to our conversation), Bruner used the word "autistic" in a derogatory way that exemplifies the way educators fail to understand that autistic people do, indeed, have capacity for empathy. This instance is but one example of ableism autistic people encounter in our field; that is, we were never meant to be seen as social learners or peers facilitating museum education programs, much less developing and sharing our own work.
28. Bruner, *Acts of Meaning*, 34.
29. Stapp, "Defining Museum Literacy," 3.
30. Holt, "Unheard Minds, Again and Again," 3.
31. Crompton, "Autistic Peer-to-Peer Information," 1704.
32. Theriault, "Programming for Autistic Audiences."
33. Hein and Alexander, *Museums, Places of Learning*, 35–7.
34. Vygotsky, Hanfmann, and Vakar, *Thought and Language*.
35. Theriault and Redmond Jones, "Constructing Knowledge Together," 370.
36. Doolittle, "Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development," 89–90.
37. Ibid., 87–8.
38. Brown, *Dare to Lead*, 201.
39. Garcia and Keane, "How 'Unmasking' Leads to Freedom."
40. Oliver, *Devotions: The Selected Poems of Mary Oliver*, 264.

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