Disability Visibility Podcast

Episode 65: Disabled Teachers

Guests: Travis Chi Wing Lau and Dayniah Manderson

Host: Alice Wong

Transcript by Cheryl Green

For more information: DisabilityVisibilityProject.com/podcast

Introduction

[hip-hop beat with radio static]

LATEEF MCLEOD: This is the *Disability Visibility Podcast* with your host, Alice Wong.

ALICE WONG: Hello, all you lovely humans! Welcome to the *Disability Visibility Podcast*, conversations on disability politics, culture, and media. I'm your host, Alice Wong. Today's episode is about disabled teachers with Travis Chi Wing Lau and Dayniah Manderson. Travis is a postdoctoral fellow in English at The University of Texas at Austin, and Dayniah teaches 8th grade at Mott Hall Community School in the Bronx, in New York City. You'll hear both Travis and Dayniah talk about their approach to teaching, what they enjoy about being teachers, what's unique about being a disabled teacher, and the challenges facing the teaching profession in both universities and city public school systems. Are. You. Ready? [electronic beeping] Away we gooooo!

ELECTRONIC VOICE: 5, 4, 3, 2, 1.

Introduction to Travis's interview

ALICE: OK! So, Travis, welcome to my podcast today.

TRAVIS WING LAU: I'm so excited to be here!

ALICE: I'm really delighted to talk with you today about your work as a teacher and just teaching in general. And tell me a little bit about yourself.

TRAVIS: Yeah! So, I am currently a teaching postdoc here at UT Austin. I'm here for two years, and I specialize in 18th and 19th Century British literature, but also the history of medicine and Disability Studies. So, it's interesting to be at an institution—this is my first job right out of graduate school—in a specifically teaching-focused position where I'm teaching anywhere between one to two classes. I'll be teaching three in the fall. But it's very much a position centered around teaching, focused on undergraduate classrooms, so I've been thinking a lot about the question of teaching. So, I really appreciate this opportunity to sort of reflect out loud about it.

ALICE: And you're a teacher, but you're also a scholar and a poet. And how do all these different roles intersect and feed into one another? Because teaching is definitely one aspect of your work, but it's not the only aspect?

TRAVIS: Yeah. I mean in truth, I thought about poetry and my creative writing as something very separate from my academic work before. In graduate school, for instance, I felt a lot of

pressure, both internal and external. To disavow that part of my life, to say, OK, well, that's what I do on the side, but a "true scholar in training," quote-unquote should be committed to literary criticism, reading theory, all of the things we think of as academia. But it wasn't until the very end of graduate school when I started seeing sort of the limits of my training and the exhaustion I felt with academic writing that I started to go back to my poetry and ask myself, well, why was it that I derive so much pleasure for it, and what was poetry doing for me? And in so many ways now, as I've begun to think of myself more as a poet, I still [chuckles] struggle in some ways thinking about myself as a poet/scholar.

Poetry allowed me to think and imagine differently the same sort of questions I was asking in my literary criticism, for instance. Like I would be able to use theory or, for instance, explore different ways of thinking that don't follow the academic conventions that scholars are supposed to follow. And disability scholars have been, for the longest time, sort of disrupting these norms, but for me, poetry was a way of experimenting with form, thinking about different ways of talking about say, disabled or crip experience that isn't so argumentative, so clear, so much in the form of prose. I could be tentative. I could ask questions and imagine and be potentially inconclusive rather than sort of follow the patterns of academic argument that I was trained to do in many ways.

ALICE: Yeah, I think a lot of times, people have the presumption that a teacher or a professor knows, has to answer. And I think that sometimes, I think some of the best teachers are the ones who say, "Let's have a conversation. Let's go on this journey together."

[bright, upbeat electronica music break]

How does being creative help you as a teacher?

ALICE: So, how does the idea of being creative and imaginative and exploring kind of the boundaries and limits, how does that help you as a teacher when working with students?

TRAVIS: I think that's such a good question because I've been thinking a lot about how vulnerable the act of poetry is. And it requires a degree of trust between yourself and an imagined reader, yourself and your students, to let go of this sense of authority. And I think that's what I, I mean as you really rightly pointed out, that's our perception of what good teaching is, right? The lecturer at the front of the room who has a dynamic personality and wows the room with their knowledge, and everyone just sort of absorbs this material coming from the source. But I think the strongest teaching, especially now, for me, has been when I've absolutely let go of the reins, and I have turned the center of attention away from myself but to my students and accepted, very publicly, the limits of my own training and the limits of my own ability to answer a set of questions. When it becomes a collective project, that's when I think real learning and change can happen. And even to work inconclusive ends. My favorite is when classes end where there isn't the easy wrap-up on the board where everyone goes, "Oh, these are the takeaways." When the takeaway is a question or a set of things that we are still grappling with, that's how I know the issues and stakes of whatever we're learning matters.

ALICE: I read a recent Twitter thread that you tweeted that I thought was just so, so lovely, and I'm just gonna read it because I just really love it. And I'd like to hear more about your thoughts on this. So, you tweeted, "One of the greatest joys of my profession is being able to engage students in dialogue. To teach honestly and confidently from a place of pain has made this work part of my #LifeWorthLiving as a disabled member of the academy. I remind my students and myself that if ableism had its absolute way, I would not be here. I would not even be able to have the difficult conversations I am having with them. I would not be able to occupy space at all

in this institution." What have you noticed in terms of the reactions from your students in terms of the way they interact with you, the way they perceive you as a disabled member of the academy?

TRAVIS: Thank you so much for one, reminding me about sort of not just that tweet but the set of feelings I had at the moment of when I wrote that tweet, which was after a class in which I very, very forthcomingly shared with my class that I was in immense amounts of pain. And I've started doing that throughout my classes ever since maybe my last year of graduate school, but very much so in this position now. I told my students, "We exist in an academic structure that wants us to disavow these aspects of our bodyminds, but that's what we come to class, in some ways, with. So, why is it that we need to disavow it? And I am no exception even though I am quote-unquote, the 'supposed figure of authority' in the room." I wanted to sort of cast off those assumptions that your instructors can't be struggling with pain or grappling with mental or bodily difference. And I found the reaction to be so much more compassionate and welcoming than I ever could've imagined.

Throughout graduate school, from mentors to even colleagues, I was warned explicitly never to make these aspects of my life public because it is a liability. It sort of marks me out as somebody who might be weak, incapable. And while some of my peers and colleagues might say, oh, well, we're never that ableist in our practices out loud, I think that is always the subtext. And a lot of graduate training, including even the way that we tell graduate students and young academics on the job market is to not disclose these things because committees will make all sorts of often unfair assumptions about your ability to do your job just because you identify as disabled. And I guess maybe this is my…unsafe and dangerous perspective, but I'm here for two years. I don't know what the future of my career is, but I've sort of taken the perspective that if I'm not honest now, when can I be honest? Should I wait until I have sort of protection and security for all that that might mean for me to be able to be myself in a classroom? Would my students, is that fair to my students that I'm selectively choosing to be myself in certain contexts because I have security? I think that's a sort of disservice to my peers and all the activists doing incredible work in our community. That seems wrong.

And I've taken a pretty strong stance of being very, very transparent about my disability for better or for worse. I think I will never know the true consequences of that, but I know, I know for damn sure my students have said to me in more ways than one that they are thankful and that they've never seen or felt the presence of a disabled instructor before. They just don't see them. They've always felt like they've had to hide aspects of who they are, especially if it is involving accommodations or particular needs as disabled students. And it's a feeling of safety that many of them express they've never experienced before.

[bright, upbeat electronica music break]

Crip time and disability culture dismantling ideas of what learning looks like

ALICE: And I feel like this is so, I think poking the ideas of what does learning look like, you know? There's such, I think, pressure now for students to finish this course, get that degree, and there's just this very linear idea of learning. And what do you think some of the ways in terms of the concepts of crip time and disability culture, how does that kind of challenge, and in many ways, dismantle these ideas, of these very kinda narrow and rigid ideas, of what learning looks like?

TRAVIS: Yeah! I mean I'm so indebted to a lot of Disability Studies scholars for helping me think more about this question. I used to struggle a lot with any form of timed testing because of the

way my anxiety and fog worked. And I've sort of taken a hard line on that in my classrooms, which is I avoid any sort of timed exam or assessment that involves producing a certain result within a high-pressure, limited time situation. So, I often do assignments that take a long-term approach, multiple weeks or are divided into very small micro-sections that then become a final product toward the end of the class. Whenever I do quote-unquote "exams," if I have to, my exams are take-home exams in which you can do them over a long period of time. So, I mean those strategies, I think, are really important too in terms of what is it that we're asking of our students when we put them through a particular ableist exercise? Well, one, calling out that exercise as ableist, such as a 30-minute exam in which we're expecting students to quote-unquote "regurgitate knowledge," right? Is that what are we actually getting them to do? It seems to be an exercise in ableism. And really calling that for what it is has been hugely transformative in the way that I think about my teaching.

Pressures that teachers face at universities

ALICE: And if it's all right, I wanna talk with you, I'd like to hear more about the pressures and struggles that teachers at universities face. It is not easy to be teaching in this climate right now where there's immense pressures on academics to teach and research and publish, and also just the lack of support for teaching. Speaking from your own experience and maybe what you've seen from your colleagues, what are some of the current pressures you're under to perform at your university?

TRAVIS: This is probably the toughest question because I think there's been a lot of really, really difficult conversations happening in academia about what to do with adjunctification and contingent labor. Part of the way I've been dealing with this has been, like I am with my teaching, extremely forthcoming about it. I tell people all the time, "I am a two-year postdoc here that has no certain future." And I've told that to my students, and my students were mortified to hear that and also, very eager to help and support, which has been so rewarding and so warm to feel in my classrooms. But at the same time, I think we have to grapple with the reality that so much of the teaching is done by people who do not have job security. And this, of course, implicates people in power, particularly the upper administration—everyone from the Provost to the Dean—but also our tenured colleagues who are on the other side, who have the protections of tenure, but in some ways, are now, whether or not they want to admit that, complicit with these structures of power.

To be more specific about my situation, my position as a contingent faculty member also means that I might have to relocate after this two-year term. There isn't a sense of stability while I'm also expected to be an early-career academic publishing, writing, teaching, mentoring. There's so many sort of shadow parts of this position in which students will see me as a full faculty member, but I'm not. And in order for me to have a future, I'm expected to be competitive and do the things that say, tenure-track faculty members already do. But there are sort of no guarantees that those things will be taken seriously, that they're truly of value to committees, and that there aren't necessarily resources, especially in terms of support, especially for disabled academics.

I mean the accommodations discussion is something that I've had a lot of this year, and oftentimes, I've really come to the realization that accommodations are almost always talked about for our undergraduate students, sometimes for our graduate students. But once we talked about accommodations for faculty, that discussion almost never happens. And that's telling to me about the ways in which academia functions. Once you have a PhD or you're in higher education, the idea's that well, clearly your disability isn't there, or you don't really have disabilities bad enough that are deserving of accommodation.

[bright, upbeat electronica music break]

The need for more disability faculty

ALICE: And as we wrap up, I'd like to just ask, is there anything else you'd like to share about your love of teaching or just being a teacher? Is there anything else you'd like to share with me?

TRAVIS: Sure! I mean as we've been having this discussion, it's, in many ways, underscored to me the necessity and value of not only having say, courses about disability issues, disability history, but actually having disabled faculty members be at the front of classrooms, fully being their crip selves. And it's only recently that that became apparent to me in terms of hearing students say that they feel included and welcome in a way that they've often not felt at all, even in spaces that purport to be safe, that purport to be about student wellbeing. And I believe that this is where the academy has every opportunity to sort of revolutionize itself, is the way in which we not only address disability in the classroom, but the disabilities of people who do this teaching work. Teaching through disability, teaching alongside it, with it: I think that's where pedagogy is going, and I'm really excited to see it evolve and to see it become a major part of the ways instructors engage with students in the classroom and even with one another. If the accommodations discussion can happen among faculty members and among departments as if it were anything, any other sort of faculty need in order to do our jobs, that would be incredible. And I hope in my lifetime, and I hope to be in the profession long enough to see that possible.

ALICE: I hope so too! I think there's a lot to be distressed about, but I think knowing that people like you are in the academy that are being visible, that are in a sense engaging in influencing students is really important out there. And I think this is just part of a larger movement of more diverse folks in the academy saying, "Hey, we're not going away, and we expect more."

TRAVIS: Me too. I also don't wanna give off the impression that I've figured it all out or that I'm somehow on the other side of these things. I'm still very much in the process of learning what ethical and compassionate teaching means. And as I mentioned earlier, the ways in which I've begun to answer that has been actually to let go of what I thought were actual answers, but listening to students, allowing myself to make mistakes, and even as much as peers and mentors have said not to, really disclose and speak forthcomingly about the fact that I am inhabiting a space that was not made for me. But at the same time, I want to enable that space to accommodate more bodyminds. And I think saying that in direct ways is something we know to do theoretically but don't always practice in our pedagogy. And I think literalizing that and materializing that has been so transformative for me even though I'm sure my disabled colleagues and colleagues in Disability Studies would've said, "Yes, this is so obvious, Travis." But I'm putting it to practice now, and it's been, it really has been transformative.

Wrap-up to Travis's interview

ALICE: Well, I'm thankful for you, Travis, and just I think the future is, I guess I still have to have hope because I know that your students will come away from your class changed. And then they, in turn, will also change other students and other people they encounter. And I really think that there's so much potential that's gonna happen. So, thank you for talking with me today!

TRAVIS: Yes, absolutely! And I mean these conversations can definitely go on, and I look forward to hearing from listeners what they think about this. But it really was a great experience to reflect and to think about why it is we do what we do as disabled teachers. So, thank you.

[bright, upbeat electronica music break]

Introduction to Dayniah's interview

ALICE: OK. So, Dayniah, thank you so much for being on my podcast today!

DAYNIAH MANDERSON: Thank you so much for having me, Alice.

ALICE: So, Dayniah, why don't you share a little bit about yourself for folks who don't know who you are.

DAYNIAH: [laughs] All right. So, my name is Dayniah Manderson, and I like to say I'm only a teacher from the Bronx. I'm only a mom. But the truth is, I am a 39 year-old woman who lives with spinal muscular atrophy type 2. I have a 13 year-old daughter, and I've been teaching for 16 years. And I just try to spend my life living as much as I possibly can. As I mentioned, I'm a teacher, so most of my professional goals revolve around that for the most part. But yeah, that's kind of a synopsis of my world, if you will.

ALICE: And you're also Miss Wheelchair one year.

DAYNIAH: [laughs]

ALICE: Is that correct?

DAYNIAH: Yeah. I did. I do hold the title of Miss Wheelchair of New York, 2017, a very, very rewarding personal experience for me. And it did allow me to really connect with other members of the disability community on a level that I wasn't really, I didn't really know existed. I was finally fully exposed to other people with disabilities who were doing amazingly remarkable thing, and I don't feel as if I would have just been aware of the breadth of individuals out there working towards a change hadn't I been a part of that sisterhood.

ALICE: That's awesome.

So, when did you realize you wanted to be a teacher?

DAYNIAH: Ha. One day I was, I knew fairly early on that I wanted to be a teacher. It's funny because my parents always tell the story of me kind of forcing my nephews and my nieces, you know, the little ones, to sit down, pretend to be students, and I would conduct these lessons on a chalkboard that my dad had custom-made for me. And if you leave it to them, they'll tell you that I have always wanted to be a teacher. I think I realized that teaching was something I loved in college. I had gone into accounting. I had considered accounting for a while. I considered computer programming. But I always felt a little unfulfilled. Once I started taking literature courses and education courses, I realized that it was something that I really had embedded in me. It was something I really enjoyed and I felt rewarded for doing. So, I'll say maybe around the age of 19, 20 I decided that this was the path I wanted to take.

[bouncy electronica music break]

Education and training to become a teacher

ALICE: And can you tell me a little bit about your education and your training in becoming a teacher?

DAYNIAH: Well, I'll tell you a little bit about my training first. I acquired a Bachelor's of Science and a Master's of Science from NYU. I was blessed enough to get a *New York Times* scholarship at the end of high school, which allowed me to go to NYU for my Bachelor's. There

are two ways to talk about difficulties to becoming a teacher. Having to find a school that is wheelchair-accommodating, wheelchair-accessible in order for me to do my teaching through my teacher training. It's also about when you go on those first few interviews as a new teacher where, in general, new teachers have a hard time securing a position because you don't have that experience under your belt. But now what we have is I was a new teacher with a wheelchair. And when we talk about biases of hiring staff, when we talk about trying to make sure that the school that might want you is able to accommodate you, advocating for yourself in terms of saying, "I can do the job only if you provide these things," that's when it becomes a little bit more complicated.

But thankfully, I was able to meet a principal, Mr. Natal. He was an assistant principal, and he took a chance on me. He warned me that he had a very difficult group of students, but he believed that I could come in there and do a good job as a teacher. And after that, I kind of found my education footing, and philosophy developed thereafter.

Classroom accommodations

ALICE: Yeah. What kind of accommodations did you need? If you can describe in your classroom, what are some of the things that you use that helps you teach?

DAYNIAH: So, accommodations, I mean as well as I know that you know, and many others in the disability community, is that accommodations can go from something that's considered very simple to something that actually helps you to stay safe. So, of course I need a classroom that can accommodate 33 students and still allow me to move around with my wheelchair, you know. The classrooms aren't always as big as they need to be. I don't always have the type of desks that I need. But those are things that you ask for. Those are things that you search the building for. Most buildings I work in, they have to have an elevator. That's kind of standard. I can't get upstairs to my classroom if the elevator's not functional. Another accommodation that I'm very actively pursuing is to make sure that our fire safety room—which we call the safe room—is up to ADA compliance. That means there has to be a clear path to the window for the fire department to get to you. It has to have labels. It has to be kept in a particular way to not have the fire spread. So, the safe room was definitely one of the things that constantly has to be monitored.

We talk about a wheelchair-accessible bathroom. In my current school, we don't have a bathroom that is wheelchair-accommodating. It's something that they're working on, but it's been a very lengthy process. So, needless to say, while I'm at work, I'm not capable of using the bathroom. On a simpler note, I also use what's called the Promethean Board, which is like [chuckles] the most modern-day chalkboard I've ever seen. It's actually great in that I can connect it to my computer. I can project the things that I want my students to see. I can have them be engaged in the lesson by being able to get up and use the technology in a very interesting way. So, those things like a Promethean Board, it helps me to reduce the amount of papers I might need to bring or artifacts and stacks of books because I kind of have everything at my fingertips. I can scan an image, put it on the computer, project it to the class, and then everybody can take part in that instead of me kind of bringing this really interesting book that I think the kids would like to touch and feel. I kind of change that experience to a more visual one that engages them on another level. So, when we talk about accommodations, it's whoo, a very, very broad list, if you will, and those can change from day to day, you know. It depends on what I'm being asked to do. If I'm being asked to take my students on a field trip, that accommodation looks different. It might look like me not traveling with my students on the mode of transportation they're using, but my boss allowing me to meet them at the site.

Now, what most people don't know these days about teaching is that there are no longer just aisles in a classroom. Teachers are being asked to put their students into clusters to promote that social thinking and that building off of the ideas of others. So, we're talking about you're constantly figuring out classroom arrangements. How are you gonna arrange your desks to maximize the space and be able to give each student the personalized attention that they might need, depending on the lesson that you're teaching? So, in essence what I'm saying is to be a teacher, it requires me to constantly be thinking ahead of my lessons to figure out what is it that I need to do to be ultimately prepared to deliver this lesson effectively? So, there's a lot of amount of forethought that goes into everything. I have to think about the copy room. Is the copier, am I able to reach the code, the keypad for the code? Even if I can reach the keypad, are the buttons too hard for me to push? And if they are, how am I gonna get someone to help me to get the copies I need in time for my class? There's no, oh, I could just run and do this really quickly, or oh, I can run and take care of this situation. I have to plan everything ahead of time because if I drop the ball, it's not just gonna be seen as oh, a teacher just, it happens in the world of teaching. It has always somehow been equated to the disability.

[bouncy electronica music break]

The influence on students who have a disabled teacher

ALICE: What do you think is the importance of young people seeing all kinds of people as educators? What do you think is the influence of them seeing a disabled woman as their teacher?

DAYNIAH: It is important for young people to see not just me as an educator, but all types of people. We do play multiple roles. As educators, we are the mirrors in which kids look in that way. Meaning, they're going to look at me and find proof in the power of determination. They're going to see me get up every day and see persistence. They're gonna see me go through the everyday car trips and realize that there is a strong tenacity that we need in order to reach our goals. I try to be very transparent with them, even with my own needs because there are a lot of times when I do have to rely on them to reach something, to distribute something, to even help me get set up for lunch. You know, those are little things that they do. And for them to see me get up every day and still do that, it doesn't matter if it's something embarrassing, it doesn't matter if it's something that other people find easy to do. The mere fact that they see me doing it, I think it's inspiring for them. And I know a lot of people shy away from wanting to be considered inspirational, but for me, it's something that I take pride in, again, just to make sure that children see that there is a spectrum of abilities. We're not all able to do the same things, but we are all able to do something.

I want them to always remember that Miss Manderson went through a whole lotta stuff to get here, but she still got here, you know. She still showed up. And it's not a teacher who's walking who's there for them. It's the teacher that has a hard time coming out in the snow. It's the teacher that might not have gotten picked up by her paratransit that morning and had to take a bus instead. It's the teacher who has to work from 7:00 in the morning until 7:30 at night for parent-teachers conference, but I'm still there because I need to see your parents to let them know how great you're doing. And when you have that level of commitment, it's something that they also, it gets buried into them. They respect it.

[bouncy electronica music break]

Challenges and pressures facing public education

ALICE: And you teach in the New York City public school system. Can you tell me a little bit about the challenges and pressures facing public education?

DAYNIAH: Some of the challenges in public school education? I just wanna put a disclaimer that I don't feel as if I'm the educational expert in terms of policies and bureaucracies and all of that. I won't say that I know I have all the answers. But one of the things that have always been problematic to me are the use of these buzzwords like "equity, diversity, access, differentiation." These words really get thrown around a lot, and a lot of administrators will say that these are the hallmarks of what they're doing; these are the things that they're trying to change about the educational system. And I will say that when those conversations, especially about equity and diversity, come up, they're primarily in regards to sex, race, and socioeconomic status. There is usually a marginalization around the issue of disability where no one is really talking about equity in that sense. And that could be for the child that has cognitive deficits, and it could be the child that has more physical limitations or a combination of both. I don't know that there is still a way for them to see that you have to address all of the different types of students within your school. You find more of a merging of all students with disabilities not taking into account what they're really capable of doing.

We see that with even many schools are not barrier-free, you know? A lot of schools in New York City, I couldn't work there. No matter how desperate they were for a teacher and no matter how willing I was to work there, I just physically can't access the building. So, that's definitely one of the things that are lacking in the public school system. What I also see is a lot of bias from the educators: bias towards the parents or the families that we serve because they might not come from the more affluent social status. And then some teachers just kind of don't think that people can learn or will benefit from a good education. And I would say that a lot of the challenges that we face comes from just that. We end up selling a lot of kids short because we don't believe in them.

Other pressures, I think, are pretty standard. Class sizes is an issue. Thirty-three students in a class, it's like triage. [chuckles] It's like a triage room because again, children are just in a class. And sometimes they try to group kids according to their academic standing, but again, when you have 33 children who are supposed to move to the next level, that could be a little bit difficult. Class sizes, I think, is just a general issue that we're seeing around the country. And I just, I don't know that resources are the problem. I can't say that resources is a problem because we spend so much per capita, per student. I think it's the smart use of these resources that's the problem, and I think it's compensating teachers for the time that they do spend working, learning these new syllabi. We get new curricula every year, and you're supposed to just start it in September. But there's never really enough time to digest it, to really get it acclimated into your brain so that you can execute it properly. So, there's a lot of, [chuckles] a lot of pressures that face teachers. And I think after a while, you just see where it comes with the territory. Unfortunately, America's not a country that has a lot of respect for teachers, so you're just expected to do a lot with not enough, and those things have their own pressure points.

ALICE: And Dayniah, can you tell me which grade of students you teacher?

DAYNIAH: Oh, I teach 8th grade.

Hopes for students' takeaways

ALICE: What is your hope that your students come away with of having you as their teacher for the entire year?

DAYNIAH: One of my goals, one of my personal goals for my students is for them to just become more knowledgeable of varying abilities. I definitely practice a model in my classroom when I'm doing groupwork is, you contribute what you're good at contributing. You have some students who, they won't talk a lot during discussions, but they'll be the one to write down their ideas on the chart paper, you know. And you have the child who doesn't really like to write on the chart paper, but they'll do the graphics for it. You have the child who will lead the discussions. So, I try and show them we're all good at something else, but that thing is really important as well. And if someone doesn't do it, something falls apart.

I want them to learn about accountability, like you are responsible, as much as you are, for your own success. And if something doesn't go right, if you didn't do an assignment, you missed a deadline, just take responsibility for that and figure out how to get yourself back on track. I don't just say like, "Oh well, I understand this and that." I do understand, but you're also accountable for doing what you have to do. And I want my students also to have a development of empathy. They need to be able to understand that being in someone else's shoes will definitely change how you approach and interact with that person. And I think that at the end of the year, my students do leave more compassionate. They do leave more self-confident because I always tell them, "You are the best thing out there. You just have to find that thing that you're good that, the thing that you wanna do." And they just leave feeling loved. They know that someone loves them. They know that someone has their back. And that's something that you can't just teach it; you have to feel it.

ALICE: Yeah, absolutely. And it gives students their confidence to move forward. I think that's one of the biggest gifts every teacher can give them.

Wrap-up to Dayniah's interview

So, as we wrap up, is there anything else you'd like to share about your work as a teacher and just your overall commitment to education?

DAYNIAH: What I can say is that America is definitely poised. New York City Department of Education, we're poised to do really good things. We do need more people with disabilities in the public sector. I don't work with anyone else who is disabled or not visibly disabled. And when we have staff meetings and we talk about equity, and I bring up the disability issue, it's almost like people don't know what to say because they don't…. It rattles them. It rattles them a little bit. So, the fact where that response happens, it means that there's still work to be done of getting people to just be comfortable with disability as commonplace.

ALICE: Great. Thank you so much for being on my podcast today. I learned a lot, and I really appreciate all that you do. I've had great teachers—I'm very lucky—throughout my life, so it's really tough work. So, much respect to you and all your colleagues.

DAYNIAH: Oh, I'm so grateful. Thank you for having me.

Wrap-up

[hip hop music]

♪ hoe strut, pole dance, romance, hats off
knees up, toes down, let's dance
get as low as you would if you were in sweatpants
How far will they go?
Oh, yeah yeah…. ♪

ALICE: This podcast is a production of the *Disability Visibility Project*, an online community dedicated to creating, sharing, and amplifying disability media and culture. All episodes, including text transcripts, are available at DisabilityVisibilityProject.com/Podcast.

You can also find out more about Travis and Dayniah on my website.

The audio producer for this episode is produced by Geraldine Ah-Sue. Introduction by Lateef McLeod. Theme music by Wheelchair Sports Camp.

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Thanks for listening, and see you on the Internets! Byeee!!

♪ Rock it to the blast off
Stop, drop, dance off ♪