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TEACHING AND LEARNING GUIDE

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Teaching & learning guide for disability and climate justice

Molly M. King | **Maria A. Gregg** | **Ana V. Martinez** | **Emily Y. Pachoud**

Sociology Department, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, California, USA

Correspondence
Molly M. King, Sociology Department, Santa Clara University, 500 El Camino Real, Santa Clara, CA 95053, USA.
Email: mollymkingphd@gmail.com

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1 | AUTHOR'S INTRODUCTION

Disability is widespread: nearly one in four Americans has a disability (Taylor, 2018) and disability cuts across demographic categories. Among individuals aged 15 and over, 12.6% had some type of mobility disability; above age 65, it is nearly 40% (Brault, 2012). Mobility disabilities heighten vulnerability to climate change and climate-related disasters (UNHCHR, 2020). Reduced information resources and mobility, increased health risks, and a lack of visibility in climate change discourse put people with disabilities in a more vulnerable position in the climate crisis. However, this vulnerability can be mitigated through relevant and sufficient access to information, risk mitigation strategies, and policy-shaping power. However, when these resilience-building resources are not accessible to disabled people, it exacerbates their vulnerability to climate change and becomes an issue of climate (in)justice. This guide and the accompanying article explore ways to teach the intersection of disability and climate justice for a better understanding of each.

2 | AUTHOR RECOMMENDS

Abbott, D., and S. Porter. (2013). Environmental hazard and disabled people: from vulnerable to expert to interconnected. *Disability & Society* 28(6): 839–852.

> This article discusses how the knowledge that people with disabilities possess regarding overcoming barriers, responding to risk, resilience, and interconnectedness has a lot to offer to environmental organizations and environmental planning. By shifting from a view of disabled people as a "specialized"

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or "vulnerable" group to an interconnected population with expertise, all people can benefit from the environmental solutions that are created as a result.

Bell, S. L., T. Tabe, and S. Bell. (2020). Seeking a disability lens within climate change migration discourses, policies and practices. *Disability & Society* 35(4): 682–687. doi: 10.1080/09687599.2019.1655856.

Focusing on migration and using examples from the Asia-Pacific region, this article argues that vulnerability is located in exclusionary environments and institutions rather than individuals. The authors emphasize the need to bring a critical disability perspective to mainstream climate change adaptation to enable the sharing of valuable knowledge and a more productive way forward for all.

Gaskin, C. J., D. Taylor, S. Kinnear, J. Mannd, W. Hillmane, and M. Moran. (2017). Factors Associated with the Climate Change Vulnerability and the Adaptive Capacity of People with Disability: A Systematic Review. *Weather, Climate and Society* 9: 801–814. doi: 10.1175/WCAS-D-16-0126.

This systematic review analyzes 34 papers that studied the adaptive capacities of people with disabilities in events (fires, floods, etc.) related to climate change. Personal factors found to increase the vulnerability of people with disabilities include gender (identifying as a woman), living alone, nonwhite ethnicity, and low income. Practical support from disability organizations and social networks, formal education, and community engagement contributed to the adaptive capacity of disabled people during preparation for a climate emergency.

Priestley, M., and L. Hemingway. (2006). Disability and Disaster Recovery: a tale of two cities? *Journal of Social Work in Disability & Rehabilitation* 5(3–4): 23–42. doi:10.1300/j198v05n03_02.

This article reviews the literature on disaster recovery and argues for the incorporation of a social model of disability approach for understanding the disaster risk experienced by people with disabilities. It advocates for people with disabilities to be viewed as rights-holders within integrated groups to maximize recovery efforts.

UNHCHR (Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights). (2020). Analytical study on the promotion and protection of the rights of persons with disabilities in the context of climate change. Retrieved from https://undocs.org/en/A/HRC/44/30

This report from the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights provides a global overview of the current state of affairs of the impact of climate change on people with disabilities. Detailing the impacts on health, food and housing security, water and sanitation, resilient livelihoods, and migration, the report then goes on to outline best practices and an inclusive, human rights-based approach to action on climate change.

3 | ONLINE MATERIALS

Rooted in Rights has developed a short documentary "The Right to be Rescued" which discusses the lack of infrastructure in place to rescue people with disabilities during natural disasters. A 15-min trailer of the documentary, which comprehensively tells the story of the tragedies that can occur and the ethics involved, is available along with an article on disability and climate change (https://www.ehn.org/climate-change-and-disability-2569643231.html).

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This would be valuable to show in class or have students watch as assigned material. The Rooted in Rights website (https://rootedinrights.org/) also has other disability rights-related short documentaries on various topics.

A shorter 5-min video with a more global perspective entitled "Disability Inclusive Climate Justice" is available from the European Disability Forum (https://youtu.be/36jwHDRtmGg).

Like the "Right to be Rescued" documentary, the popular article "Disability and Disaster Response in the Age of Climate Change" (https://psmag.com/environment/fixing-americas-disability-disaster-response) discusses the current lack of emergency planning related to disability rescuing the case of natural disasters.

The Disability Visibility Project (https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/?s=climate) has several resources — including articles, podcasts, and blog posts — that provide a disabled perspective on current issues.

The World Institute of Disability developed the New Earth Disability initiative (https://wid.org/2018/09/25/ned/) to provide a repository of resources on climate change and disability.

4 | SAMPLE SYLLABUS

King, M. and M. A. Gregg. (2022). "Disability and Climate Change: a critical realist model of climate justice." *Sociology Compass* 16/1: e12954, [DOI: 10.1111/soc4.12954].

> This review article would be a useful addition to a variety of course syllabi. In particular, we see this article as valuable for Environmental Sociology, Climate Justice, Sociology of Health & Illness, Medical Sociology, and Disability Studies courses. Below, we have provided an example of a module on disability and climate justice that might be deployed in a number of different courses.

4.1 | Basics

International Labor Organization. (2019)."Persons with disabilities in a just transition to a low-carbon economy." Available at https://afri-can.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/wcms_727084.pdf.

> This policy brief emphasizes the opportunity that transitioning to a low-carbon economy presents for disabled people in the workforce given its expectation to be a net generator of jobs. Including people with disabilities in the discourse surrounding new low-carbon sectors will lead to increased accessibility and social inclusion.

Disability Visibility Podcast. "Episode 63: Climate Change." Available at https://disabilityvisibilityproject.com/2019/11/03/ep-63-climate-change/.

> This podcast discusses the ideas of consumption and zero waste, climate resilience, and how people with disabilities and people of color can provide a different perspective on the challenges of climate change.

4.2 | Activism

Dines, H. (2019). "The climate revolution must be accessible – this fight belongs to disabled people too." *The Guardian*. Available at https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/oct/15/climate-revolution-disabled-people-activism.

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This opinion piece, written by a person with a disability, stresses the importance of ensuring that climate protests and actions are accessible as well as the need for legitimate representation of people with disabilities in policymaking.

Deerinwater, J. (2021). "Indigenous People With Disabilities Are on the Front Lines of the Climate Crisis." *Truthout*. Available at https://truthout.org/articles/indigenous-people-with-disabilities-are-on-the-front-lines-of-the-climate-crisis/.

This op-ed discusses the impacts of indigenous colonization on disability and health throughout time. Including an image of a protest, the article also discusses how indigenous people with disabilities are at the forefront of the climate justice movement.

5 | FOCUS QUESTIONS

1) What can the disability community teach the broader community about how to adapt to the coming effects of climate change?
2) In what ways does an over-reliance on either the social or medical model of disability limit our understanding of climate injustice as it pertains to people with disabilities? How does the critical realist model (of both disability and climate justice) strive to correct this?
3) Think of a recent or local climate related event. What elements of this event are more threatening to those with disabilities and what information or resources would better equip disabled people to prepare in both the short and long term?
4) What gaps are not addressed in the review of people with mobility disabilities' experience of climate change (King and Gregg 2021)? What areas of related/further study would you argue merits greater inclusion?.
5) Models of risk perception discuss a variety of different factors. What drivers of risk perception most inform your own evaluation of climate change and climate emergencies? How are those drivers influenced by your identity?
6) Make a list of things you would do, prepare, or enact if you knew a [climate crisis/wildfire/hurricane] was impending. Now identify which of these resources lack a component of physical accessibility and brainstorm how that component could be implemented.
7) How might disabled people with intersectional identities (eg: a low-income, Latina disabled woman) be even more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change or face unique challenges?
8) In what ways are many mainstream environmental and climate movements ableist and how can this be rectified?

6 | ACTIVITY IDEAS

6.1 | Activity I. Analyze an emergency plan – activity description

1. Students will research what their community, local organizations, or local governmental authorities recommend to do to plan for, react during, and recover from climate change emergencies.
2. Once they have a comprehensive understanding of their recommended plans, students will evaluate those plans for how accessible they are for people with mobility disabilities to follow. Students should also feel free to also evaluate it against any of their or their family's needs or for another type of disability that they feel the emergency plan needs to accommodate. Students will recognize any inclusive adaptations that the plan includes and critique the plan where it neglects the needs of people with disabilities.
3. After students understand the strengths and weaknesses of the emergency plan, they will use the resources linked below, any other relevant research they find, and their creativity to create accessible suggestions for people

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with disabilities. Students will describe their suggested changes as well as how they address a previous lack of accessibility for people with disabilities and students will make an argument for that information's inclusion, on the basis of people with disabilities' lack of access to information contributing to climate change injustice.

4. Finally, students will submit your edits as a letter or email to whatever organization, website, or local authority's office that originally published the emergency plan.

In class, you might discuss examples of emergency plans that students identified and ableism within them. Use this activity to have students suggest how the accessibility changes they argued for might benefit people without disabilities, as well.

Resources: Students can compare their local resources to disaster planning websites designed specifically for people with disabilities.

- Community Access Center Disaster Planning Site (https://ilcac.org/disaster-planning/).
- United Spinal Ready to Roll Program (https://unitedspinal.org/ready-to-roll/).

6.2 | Activity II. Analyze media sources – activity description

This second example activity can be modified to be longer or shorter and be used

1. Students will gather 3 media sources (social media, commercials, TV, etc.) discussing climate-related events or climate preparedness and identify examples of ableism within each media source.
2. Students will suggest how the media examples they identified could be re-written to portray accessibility/inclusion and better distribute information about climate preparedness or climate-related events.

In class, you might have a discussion around examples of ableism in media sources that students identified. Use this activity to help students recognize how ableist language disadvantages not only people with disabilities, but also people without disabilities, in seeking timely and accurate information.

6.3 | Learning objectives

- Students will evaluate how easy or difficult it is to find climate change resources and understand how or how not that information-seeking is complicated by the neglect of disabled needs.
- Students will recognize a common and dangerous area of ableism impacting people in their own communities and, once they have completed this course and better understand some of the ways in which climate change is especially threatening to people with disabilities and themselves, can connect that to the larger issues of climate justice.
- Students will take action to increase information accessibility and work towards climate justice.

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ORCID

Molly M. King https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9558-8622
Maria A. Gregg https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5475-6837
Ana V. Martinez https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7611-0263
Emily Y. Pachoud https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8894-4310

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AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Molly M. King is an assistant professor in the Department of Sociology at Santa Clara University. Previously, she earned her PhD from Stanford University, where she was a National Science Foundation Graduate Research Fellow. She studies knowledge inequalities and the implications of these inequalities for people's lives. She uses mixed methods, paired with a commitment to open science, to understand how the identities of disability, gender, and class influence information acquisition. Most recently, she is exploring these questions related to climate change. Find her CV and publications at www.mollymking.com.

Maria A. Gregg is a research assistant in the Department of Sociology at Santa Clara University. She earned her bachelor's degree from Santa Clara University where she majored in sociology and political science and her preferred areas of study explore the intersections of sociology, policy, and history. Most recently, her research has sought to understand how these different disciplines understand people's interactions with the natural environment.

Ana V. Martinez is a research assistant in the Department of Sociology at Santa Clara University. She will earn her bachelor's degree in June 2023 with a major in sociology and a double minor in economics and sustainability.

Emily Y. Pachoud is a student and research assistant in the Department of Sociology at Santa Clara University. She will earn her bachelor's degree in June 2023 with majors in environmental studies and sociology and minors in religious studies and sustainability.

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