



## **How to work towards an accessible and equitable workplace – Millie Pollitt video transcript**

Hi everyone, my name's Millie. I work as an occupational therapist and I am passionate about sharing the power and impact of occupations as a vehicle to experience a sense of belonging, reduce inequalities for people furthest away from meaningful engagement, help and well-being. So this workshop focuses on belonging. I want to acknowledge my own lived experience and the meaning I take from belonging in occupational therapy. So my lived experience is that I'm neurodivergent I suppose what that means to me is that I have a different way of doing being and engaging with the world. I grew up quite poor working class or under class as some people might determine at their childhood experiences, have lived experience of gender violence, young caring responsibilities, long term health conditions and am currently pregnant. So to summarise, my lived experience has not only shaped my ability to experience a sense of belonging, but moreover it's shaped my sensitivity towards addressing and prioritising the factors that get in the way and facilitate the sense of belonging for myself with and for others.

So for people who experience exclusion in any and all of its forms belonging being actively engaged and connected, personally, interpersonally, culturally, and across content contexts, I believe that has true transformative potential. So the following slides are some of my reflections on belonging in practise and some of the top tips from the EACHOT community.

the employability and career hub for occupational therapist community. OK, so why does this matter?

As an occupational therapist for any grade, our role is really crucial in role modelling

inclusive, inclusive practises, equity, diversity, inclusion and belong practises in the workplace for ourselves and in support of others, we impact culture, access and belonging colleagues and clients, and I believe transformative leadership happens absolutely at every grade and it absolutely has to.

So here are my top tips #1 if you have a difference on neurodivergent and or a disabled person. If you can try and be visible and do the work. Throughout my training career as an at possibly the scariest but most effective way of bringing people with me has been to own my story and be willing to in the right spaces and places. Shine a light on the systemic issues that cause friction, so being prepared for the fact that the people we work with may not have a clearly defined set of reasons or adjustments for some even being able to articulate what they need could be considered a privilege. Therapeutic use of self, and intentional relationships, are not just important for relationships we have with patients, service users or clients but are essential for our teams and leadership to transformative leadership happens at all grades. Can you own that power in your working relationships?

Workplace culture and fit are highly dependent on the people and attitudes of the leaders within them. So think about what your leadership is in terms of belonging in the workplace.

Friction is real. Being openly different is a political act in itself. So yes, we absolutely need to have and have to recognise differences and builds place, places and spaces champion individuals. And we also need to recognise that with that difference that often comes friction.

Alien T Geronimus explained this sort of sort of friction very well in the book weathering, which highlights how people at the sharpest end of the social gradient are weathered and explores.

How long to help the well-being are influenced by the cost of difference, including early mortality and increased incidence of disability. And so the metaphor is this. If you've got a spiky profile, or you're a square peg in around the hole, these corners and edges are going to feel well sometimes. So perhaps when interacting with other people's expectations with systems and services that are not designed to accommodate your unique way of being. Friction will be felt in teams when different roles apply to different people on the other side. As a leader, as a manager, as a colleague. So things can

sometimes feel uncertain and uncomfortable. If we're going to build environments that embrace diversity difference, we need spaces and structures that allow teams to adjust, adapt, reflect, and engage in a kind of transformative leadership that challenges the status quo together. And this all takes time, which I argue we really need to account for.

So I love being in spaces and places where people get what's going on and I don't have to over explain myself. But sometimes the risk is that I can be lulled into a false sense of safety. I believe in the future where we can all belong but that's not the world that we currently live in. Getting to that future means identifying where the foundations are cracking, noticing friction, acknowledging frameworks that aren't working, and shining a light on what is working.

So I'm showing that there are other ways of doing being building more stable infrastructure, so more people can get there too. Getting stuck in polarised silos or positions in my experience doesn't help.

OK, so the personal is political. Break the issue from the person, including ourselves. Can you ask yourself, is this a personal failing or is this an actual access issue? So this is something that I asked myself on a regular basis or have needed to as I've lived with long term health conditions during a particularly difficult time, just after being diagnosed with a long term health condition and dyslexia I experienced significant burnout and sensory sensitivities resulting in daily disabling fatigue. I grew up with this sense, this internalised belief that I just had to put up and shut up and other people's needs were most more important than mine, and that if I encounter problems, it was my own fault and just had to get on with it, really. So falling short of my internal expectations, working full time caregiving, having a sparkling career felt like a personal failing. I thought I just needed to try harder to do better, to manage my diet and exercise even more.

So at the time I was a nutritional therapist, not an OT. Years later I realised that approach didn't work and I started working on the issues outside of myself, the social and the political ones.

Now when I'm experiencing episodes of illness, I take precautions. So everyday adjustments like noise counselling, headphones to manage sensory sensitivity, taking regular rest breaks, especially during time pressured, cognitively demanding tasks

which absolutely tank my dyslexia. And I make space for unstructured playing creativity. Even if that means just creatively choosing how I want to spend my time off.

So for me personally, I live an intentionally low demand lifestyle. I'm gentle with myself and I ask hang on a minute. Is this a personal failing or an access issue? And I try and embody that mindset with the people I work with too. Because far too often we internalise things that aren't actually our responsibility or ours to ours to to take full responsibility for.

Oh, OK. So systems don't work for everyone, so be prepared to be open about how systems and services don't automatically work for everyone. We need to be able to own and negotiate adjustments in the workplace and be open about how systems often all often fail people.

So as a colleague, a leader manage as a newly qualified OT. Do you know what the process is for requesting accommodations? Have you developed skills to negotiate for them? Do you know how long an access to work claim takes to process? Have you ever had to upskill a new support worker, a personal assistant, or train a new guide dog? If not, know that these things take a lot of time. It's perhaps a mistake to assume people who need adjustments already have the skills or the insight or the resources to manage all of this before entering the workplace, because often that's not the case. If we want work cases where everyone can belong, we need to build and amplify the bridges and scaffolding that already exists. We also need to ensure that knowledge and insight can be learned and shared. Again, this takes time.

More often than not, it's people, meaningful collaborative relationships that make change happen. When the new employment rights bills come through this year, employers, managers, workplaces will have enhanced responsibilities to ensure accessibility. So can you get ahead of the curve?

And these are some of the tips from the EACHOT community. So this first slide is community campaigns and connections, so engaging with support groups like able OTUK attend or ally with stuff that support groups. Consider starting one foster inclusion by welcoming people on the fringes. Share resources like race equality Matters, Five day challenge and RCOT materials.

Learn about the employee resource groups ERGs. Join affinity groups participate in campaigns even as the follower. There's some links to some videos here.

More tips from the EACHOT community build leadership and resilience. Understand allyship, intersectionality, and ups and directions, develop influence, learn about change processes, build networks of support and solidarity. Being neuro, affirming and informed about neuro divergent develop cell compassion. Rest protect yourself.

Challenge inequities. And finally, from the EACHOT community, use and support your Union. Access your Union health and safety reps consider becoming a Rep yourself and advocates, or advocate for rights and safer bearer workplaces.

You have got a summary of a future of belonging. It's built, it's not given. Can you get ahead of the policy changes and lead inclusive, really and can you take time to reflect and adjust support and advocate? Is there an action that you can take today from some of the tips in the community, or perhaps from the next in the slides? Where can you amplify someone else's voice? And what time and space can you make for reflection and adjustment in your team? These these books John Powell has been a great inspiration for me over the last year or two, learning about belonging, bridging. And then is work by Ludmilla Praslova definitely encourage a read of these. OK, thanks for listening. Bye.