

# The can be more than just physical

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The third assumption upon which the CRI program is built is that disability is a constant, immutable state of being, something inherent to the person in question. But the concept of disability needs to be understood through the social construct model. This model explains that disability is really a consequence of the person's environmental conditions (Kirby 2017, 177). A concrete example of this is how a person with a mobility disability accesses buildings: a building without ramps "disables" that person from being able to enter the building, but if that building has ramps, that person can enter the building as easily as anyone else, and their "disability" is nullified. Disability is contextual; it exists only under certain environmental conditions. These conditions can be more than just physical barriers—they can also be any social stigmas, common practices, and political decisions that deny a person access to the opportunities they deserve. Many of these conditions result from ableist beliefs that accept only one way of "entering a building".

The students in the CRI program at High Point are disabled by the conditions of the American educational system, which does little to modify its practices and expectations to nullify cognitive disabilities. Large-scale, paradigm-shifting systematic changes are needed to address the inequitable education of students with cognitive disabilities. These include eliminating labels to reduce stigma, implementing effective teacher preparation programs, and reducing our reliance on separate special education programs (Kirby 2016, 177). However, as an early-career teacher, there are many small actions I can take in my classroom to create equitable opportunities for my students with disabilities.

The include recognizing and altering the environmental conditionsthat  
disable my CRI students, implementing strategies considered best  
practicesin both CRT and DI approaches, and using Universal Design for  
Learning (UDL)strategies.