

## NEA Educator’s Locally Led Book Clubs Focused on Disability Rights and Inclusion

The National Education Association (NEA) is expanding its Disability Rights and Inclusion (DRI) initiative through a local-level book club program to deepen member engagement and understanding of disability perspectives at the grassroots level. This innovative approach aims to raise awareness about the experiences of people with disabilities while exploring the environmental, social, and attitudinal barriers that impede true inclusivity and accessibility within local NEA affiliate communities.

### Who Can Participate in the NEA Locally Led Book Clubs?

The NEA Book Club is open to all members! This is a great opportunity for members to take what they learn and share key concepts about disability with their community.

### How Do the NEA Locally Led Book Clubs Work?

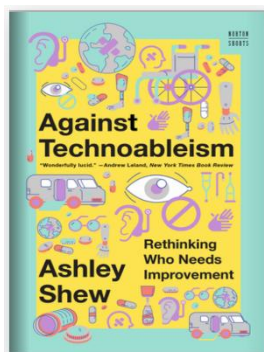
NEA members can register as book club leaders to organize local meetings, either in-person or virtually, focusing on disability rights and inclusion. The program provides up to 12 books and comprehensive online resources per local affiliate, empowering local leaders to facilitate meaningful discussions and create collaborative learning environments that advance understanding of disability rights within their communities.

### Where, When, and How Will the Book Clubs Meet?

Each local book club leader will share information about the book club and collaborate with interested members to identify meeting logistics, including the number of meetings and their duration, time, location, and format. The reading guide for *Against Technoableism: Rethinking Who Needs Improvement* is structured to complete the book study in three sessions. Local leaders can adjust the reading assignments, number of sessions, and other logistics to meet the needs of the local participants. The reading guides are available at [NEA.org/disabilities](https://www.nea.org/disabilities).

### ***Against Technoableism: Rethinking Who Needs Improvement***

By Ashley Shew



*Against Technoableism: Rethinking Who Needs Improvement* shows how we can create narratives and more accessible futures inclusive of the cross-disability community to forge a more equitable society. Shew—“a self-described ‘hard-of-hearing chemobrain amputee with Crohn’s disease and tinnitus”—argues against “technoableism,” which is the belief that technology is a “solution” for disability. She challenges us to look at “disabilities not as liabilities, but as skill sets enabling all of us to navigate a challenging world.” Shew looks closely at how we think about disability technologies, including mobility devices, medical infrastructure, neurodivergence, and the relationship between disability and race.

## ***Against Technoableism: Rethinking Who Needs Improvement*** **Reading Guide**

### **An Important Note Regarding Language Use for This Reading Guide**

This reading guide employs identity-first language, reflecting the book's assertion of disabled identity. It is crucial to recognize that the usage of person-first versus identity-first language is a complex and individualized matter. The selection of language can be influenced by factors such as age, personal experience, and cultural context. The debate surrounding language use is particularly nuanced within the realm of special education, where labels have historically been associated with deficit-based meanings. This complexity emphasizes the importance of respecting individual preferences and engaging in open dialogue about language use.

### **What Are the Main Objectives?**

As you are reading this book, approach the content with the following objectives in mind:

- Analyze how disability is socially constructed in education systems;
- Identify examples of technoableism in practice;
- Evaluate the role of technology in inclusion vs. normalization;
- Apply disability justice principles to professional contexts; and
- Develop actionable steps toward solidarity practice.

### **Session 1: Chapters 1 and 2, pp. 1–33** (to be read before the first book club meeting)

#### **Pre-Reading Reflection Questions**

1. Why do you think society has historically looked at a disability (no matter what kind) as something that needs to be fixed? Why is there resistance to accepting vs. “fixing”?
2. How do you define disability? Would you label someone with an amputation disabled? Would you consider someone who needs glasses to see disabled?

#### **Post-Reading Reflection Questions**

1. How does Shew challenge the idea that disability is something to be fixed? (pp. 2–4; 7–10)
2. What does it mean to view disabled people as experts? (pp. 10–13)
3. What is technoableism and how does it shape our decisions as a society? In what ways does technoableism show up in the classroom or learning environment? (pp. 7–8)

#### **Discussion Questions**

1. What physical or policy barriers are there within education that have prevented individuals with disabilities from being accepted or accommodated instead of “fixed”?
2. What stories have shaped the opening of the book? Choose one and identify the impact it made on you and how it challenged your understanding of disability. (pp. 1–2; 6; 14–15; 19–21)

#### **Next Steps**

Read chapters 3 and 4 before the next meeting.

## Session 2: Chapters 3 and 4, pp. 34–76

### Pre-Reading Reflection Questions

1. What messages have you received about disability from school, media, or society?
2. Has your body ever unexpectedly changed? How were you told to react to that change? How did you actually react to that change?
3. Compare and contrast the impacts of fixing cracks in sidewalks vs. building exoskeletons to help people move up and down stairs for disabled people.

### Post-Reading Reflection Questions

1. How do technoableism and race intersect? How does the story of Lynn Manning frame the intersection of technoableism and race? (pp. 35–36)
2. At the end of Chapter 3, Shew encourages us to “try being biased not against but toward disabled people in how we frame issues and problems.” What does that look like in practice? (p. 45)
3. How do the media and statistical narratives about amputation shape public perception and the kind of technology developed for amputees? (pp. 49; 51; 57–59)

### Discussion Questions

1. What media have you seen recently that has played into or rejected these common disability tropes? Were disabled people involved in the making of that media or were they left out?
2. What is the physical impact of “inspoporn” on disabled people? Has your local school or news media run stories that might be considered “inspoporn,” such as highlighting a disabled person being asked to prom?
3. Shew raises the idea of “Deaf gain” to highlight how, contrary to narratives about needing to “fix” disabilities, disability can confer advantages. What other ways might disability confer advantages? How do we highlight those gains without falling into “inspirational overcomers” or “supercrip” tropes? (p. 73, Deaf gain; pp. 41–44, Inspirational overcomers)

### Next Steps

Read chapters 5 and 6 before the next meeting.

## Session 3: Chapters 5 and 6, pp. 77–132

### Pre-Reading Reflection Question

1. What would you consider good “autism technology” or therapeutic practice? What tools do you use in your education practices?
2. What steps have you taken to prepare for ageing and some of the health and physical changes that accompany it?

### Post-Reading Reflection Questions

1. How does the social model of disability support accommodations and inclusion without promoting the promise of a “cure” for disability? (pp. 87–88)
2. How do autism technologies, like Dungeons and Dragons, challenge technoableist assumptions? Can you connect these narrative-driven autism technologies to Shew’s opening argument about the importance of disability stories?
3. What are the implications of “pooping in space” for challenging structures of ableism? How does it reshape your understanding of disability to consider learning how to poop in extreme environments as a kind of disability gain? (pp. 127–129)

### Discussion Questions

1. In this section, there is a lengthy critique of the practice of applied behavioral analysis (ABA) for autistic people. Did reading this change your understanding of ABA? As educators, we often work in or around ABA concepts. How did this section change your relationship with those tools? (pp. 95–104)
2. Highlighting disability scholar Rosemarie Garland-Thompson’s famous maxim that we will all become disabled if we’re lucky to live long enough, Shew asks, what does it mean for disability to be considered part of the human experience? (pp. 114–115; 123)
3. One of the important throughlines in this book is the specter of eugenics haunting our approach to developing disability technologies. Discuss the ways in which eugenics impact your school environment. (pp. 17–21; 89–92, eugenics history)
4. Disability justice is framed as an important tool in fighting against technoableism. Reflecting on the 10 principles of disability justice by Sins Invalid that Shew references, how can we meaningfully apply disability justice to support disabled people in our profession? (pp. 25; 125)

### Next Steps: Take Action

Identify one or two ways you can create a more inclusive and supportive environment for disabled individuals in your school. Consider actions such as challenging assumptions, listening to disabled voices, implementing accommodations, educating others, encouraging self-advocacy, fostering community, reevaluating approaches, and advocating for policy changes. Your advocacy matters by helping to build a world where disabled individuals are genuinely accepted, valued, and empowered to thrive on their own terms.

### Further Reading

To read more on this topic, check out:

- [DisCoTec: The Disability Community Technology Center](#)
- [Sins Invalid: An Unashamed Claim to Beauty in the Face of Invisibility](#)
- [Disability Visibility Project](#)
- [Autism Self Advocacy Network](#)