



# The Co-Active<sup>®</sup> Accessibility & Wholeness Project Report

We Create Our World. *Together. Everyday.*

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**Our efforts are not about making the “able bodied” world available to those with “disabilities” but something infinitely richer. We seek to expand our understanding of what it means to be and hold others as naturally creative, resourceful and whole.**

““ Since my accident, 7 years ago, this is the first time I have taken a class outside a rehab hospital, along side others with no physical limitations. I was scared and wondering...  
*‘Will I be able to do it? Will they understand? Will they give me the assistance I need to succeed?’*

My Program Advisor was in communication with the leaders before the weekend and all the staff was ready and willing to support my needs. And when something came up that we hadn’t talked about, we all adjusted in the moment so I felt comfortable and in control.

When that’s the atmosphere from the leaders and assisting staff – that energy affects the students and we all learn better! ””

*Orit Gedalya*

*CTI Coach Training Participant*

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## INTRODUCTION BY S. Barton Cutter

At CTI, our workplace is our workshop.

This is certainly proving true as we explore our responsibility to make our programs open and accessible to people with disabilities. As we work to provide accommodations, a larger exploration is opening up around how the presence of disability affects our experience of humanity.

As a consultant for Co-Active® Accessibility & Wholeness Project and as a CTI-trained Certified Professional Co-Active® Coach, it is within this workshop that I work, play, learn, and grow daily with my colleagues as we consider how disability itself is perceived, accommodated for, and integrated into the human experience.

Much of what we are finding reinforces my personal experience of living with a disability – **that disability itself is based on perception.**

Our conditioned thinking and unconscious biases distort our ability to recognize wholeness in others when the perception of disability is present. These ingrained perceptions – some biological, others cultural – reveal that on some level we equate these circumstances with a sense of brokenness or loss.

Yet when we are able to uncouple the perception of loss or brokenness from the situational experience of the person in front of us, what emerges is a new

relationship between perceived challenge and wholeness.

At CTI, we have begun to cultivate a new language and terminology to reflect this understanding, by pointing to the perceptions that underlie disability and challenge rather than seeing them as empirical realities.

We are using the terms “unique ability,” “unique challenge,” and “perceived disability” interchangeably to explore the different ways in which wholeness is ever present and recognizable regardless of how it is expressed through the individual.

We recognize this might cause discomfort, and we specifically appreciate that there is a living paradox in many who identify with having a disability. In my own life, embracing this paradox of honoring my unique expression of wholeness amid a range of perceptions, external and internal, has become a lifelong practice.

This means, I suspect, that some may find it challenging to have their disability referred to as a perceived challenge.

Nevertheless, we intend to provoke radical conversation, within the coach training and leadership development industries, toward the full inclusion of people with perceived disabilities. This report is a first step.

We look forward to engaging with you in further discussion and learning from your experiences.

**Barton**

# Initial Discoveries of the Co-Active® Accessibility & Wholeness Project

*This report communicates our initial findings as we embrace our responsibility as a company to make our work accessible to all. Already, we know the Co-Active® Accessibility & Wholeness Project has three key objectives:*

1.

To advance the effort of creating and implementing industry-wide standards in the field of personal and professional development for approaching accessibility and accommodation needs.

2.

To reveal unconscious bias about perceived challenges and shift that perception from one of deficit to a unique expression of wholeness.

3.

To illustrate ways the lens of wholeness enhances accessibility for all by providing tangible examples of how the Co-Active® Accessibility & Wholeness Project serves students.



## Deepening Our Capacity to See Wholeness

The foundation of the Co-Active® model for which CTI is known, and in which over 50,000 worldwide are trained, is that people are naturally creative, resourceful, and whole. This idea is absolute, and yet in practice it depends on each individual's ability to embrace it, for themselves and others. This is a journey in which we open ourselves to deeper levels of experiencing the idea that we are naturally creative, endowed with the resources we need to fulfill our goals and dreams, and accept that we are not broken but instead integrally whole in mind, body, heart and spirit.

It is with this in mind that we realized that any request to CTI to provide accessibility accommodations – i.e., removing barriers of entry to our classrooms both in person and virtual for someone with a perceived disability – should be seen as an opportunity to enhance a unique expression of wholeness rather than address a perceived limitation.

Rather than seeing accessibility accommodations as simply a matter of logistics such as providing wheelchair access or sight-adapted supporting materials, we chose instead to see it as an opportunity to deepen our capacity to see wholeness in, and appreciate the leadership in people of all abilities.

Of course, we are always willing and curious to find innovative ways – through course design and technology – to fulfill the practicalities of accessibility accommodation requests. However, we are learning that this becomes far more expansive when we hold the context of wholeness.

It is our experience that when we do so, our efforts are not simply about making the “able bodied” world available to those with “disabilities,” but something infinitely richer. It expands our understanding of what it means to be and hold others as naturally creative, resourceful and whole.



The use of Video Technology opened doors to our certification program for a student with cerebral palsy and unique speech patterns. This technology supported communication by providing visual cues that aided group members in understanding his speech. His presence subsequently sparked deeper learning experience for all participants, who learned to listen beyond the words.

““ As a CTI faculty member I was immediately struck by the challenge the student’s unique speech presented for me and for the rest of the group. Some students, for whom English was not a native language, initially expressed grave reservations about their ability to work with him. What ensued was the deepest and most honest conversation I’ve ever had with a class in almost 15 years on the faculty.

We gave each other permission to be confused, to ask questions, and to lean in to each other as full partners in learning. Since people couldn’t always make out every individual word that was said, they learned to listen to the meaning conveyed by tone, by energy, and by the unspoken. On the other hand, because every word he spoke required greater effort, he was a master of getting to the heart of the matter, which invited his classmates to focus on the essence of their own communication.

Because he held himself to be whole; the rest of the group was called to do the same, including for themselves. The student showed us the power of one person’s full embrace of their own unique expression of wholeness to spark that for the rest of a class. I believe this group of students came out stronger and more in touch with their native resourcefulness and power than any of the 27 other sections I’ve taught over the years.””

*Ariane Cherbuliez*

*CTI Faculty & Certification Pod Leader*

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# Three Principles of Designing Inclusive Accommodations

In designing accessibility accommodations for people with unique challenges, we have identified three principles to help maintain the context of wholeness: address wholeness, honor challenge, and evoke mutual inclusion.

These are not linear steps in a process for designing accessibility accommodations, but rather a series of lenses that provide the basis for deepening our inquiry about the nature of wholeness as we engage with people with unique challenges.



## 1. Address Wholeness

At CTI we believe that wholeness exists beyond perception. Historically, though, ability and wholeness has been understood from a perspective of conditioned thinking and behavior.

This means we need to be courageous and willing to engage in direct conversation with the person requesting accessibility accommodations about what we mean by wholeness and how they understand it.

Consider this breaking the ice. Once this is done, we might discover that the water is warm and fun to swim in.



## 2.

# Honor Challenge

By recognizing and valuing how someone's challenge shapes their experience of self and the world, it is possible to help them develop trust, wholeness and natural leadership.

The metaphor of a mirror can be useful in understanding this principle because it is about reflecting both the reality of someone's challenge, however the person perceives it, and the reality of wholeness, whether or not that person is yet ready to see it.

If a person identifies only with their challenge, they may see themselves as broken in one way or another. However, if others around them hold and reflect back not only their challenge but also their wholeness – talents, abilities, natural resourcefulness – they will eventually own their wholeness as reality and reinterpret their challenge as part of their own unique expression of humanity.

One way we can support this process is, paradoxically, by recognizing that the mirror of a perceived disability and the greater challenge it appears to present, as an invitation to examine our own challenges and limitations more keenly.

This requires us to examine our own unconscious bias – in short the attitudes and beliefs that form our behavior around people with disabilities. For example, many people are nervous about their impact on people with unique challenges.

What we are learning is this nervousness can stem from an unconscious fear that they are looking into a mirror for those parts of themselves they have not fully accepted. In other words, beneath our conditioned thinking about what is whole lurk parts of our self that we still perceive as broken.



**The request by a deaf student to have a sign language interpreter present for her classes, led to new levels of embodiment and learning for all.**

““ Having a sign language interpreter not only supported the learning for our hearing impaired participant, it also helped deepen the learning for all participants by having the visual experience of watching the interpreter as they were learning through their customary channels of learning. I hadn't realized how much interpreters express with their whole being when they sign, not just their hands. The interpreters face is wildly expressive! On occasion we'd ask the interpreter to pause and tell us how she was communicating key concepts. With a word like Fulfillment, she told us what signs she combined to be able to express the concept behind the word. The result was deeper understanding for all. There were several points where a collective "Ohhh!" would fill the room as the learning sunk in. ””

*Helen House*

*CTI Faculty & Front of Room Leader*

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This fear commonly leads to responses that hinge on how robust our capacity for self-reflection is. Typically there are three responses:

1. We notice this fear, and it results in us avoiding interaction altogether.
2. We notice this fear and engage only superficially, believing we are engaging merely for the benefit of the person with the perceived disability. While well-meaning, this response can seem patronizing.
3. We notice this fear and engage with profound curiosity about how the other's experience and our interaction might enrich both our lives – the very nature of Co-Active® relationships.

If we experience one of the first two responses, it is an opportunity to get curious and acknowledge what is happening. The door then opens for us to examine the root of our unconscious bias or blind spots.

Indeed, simply naming them may be all it takes to dissolve the fear and its underlying bias.

### 3. Evoke Mutual Inclusion

The third principle, evoke mutual inclusion, is the alchemy that is possible when we align with the first two principles in relationship to people who have a perceived disability or other unique challenge. We look beyond the needs of a specific individual or accommodation and explore how honoring these needs can enhance and elevate the learning and experience of all.

To ensure that this alchemy is not momentary, this principle also suggests a practical step: the commitment to remain in discussion about our experience as the relationship grows.

In the Co-Active® model, the idea of a “designed alliance” provides the foundation for making explicit a set of agreements, which can be adapted over time, about how both parties will continue to address wholeness without diminishing the reality of the unique challenge the person with a disability faces.

# Mutual Inclusion Can Become the Natural Choice

As we work to expand inclusion for people of all abilities within the coach training and leadership development industries, we invite you to share your experiences and learning.

Together, we can bring our combined insight to bear in designing industry standards that expand the recognition of wholeness in ourselves and all we serve.

We view the promotion and exploration of the three principles of Co-Active® accessibility and wholeness as our contribution to provoking conversation that unmask and reshapes hidden biases around wholeness and perceived challenge.

Ultimately, when the three principles of Co-Active® accessibility and wholeness are in place, no marginalization can survive, and mutual inclusion becomes the natural choice for the design of any relationship.

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To learn more about CTI's programs, please visit [www.coactive.com](http://www.coactive.com). For more information on the Co-Active® Accessibility & Wholeness Project, please email [accessibility@coactive.com](mailto:accessibility@coactive.com).

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