

chapter 1

Disability Studies in Inclusive Education

Overview: Disability as a social justice issue and recognition of disability experiences

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Section learning outcomes

After completing this section, you will be able to:

- ✓ Identify meanings that you have grown up with associated with disability.
- ✓ Reflect on your beliefs about disability in education.
- ✓ Discuss the ways in which learners with disabilities may be excluded from education and what the implications are.
- ✓ Analyse the responsibilities of schools and education systems in promoting the right to education of learners with disabilities.
- ✓ Discuss aspects of disability as a social justice issue.
- ✓ Understand the emergence of the discipline of Disability Studies and its basic propositions.
- ✓ Discuss key human rights conventions that are important in the disability field.
- ✓ Understand and critique the logic and mechanisms of a human rights approach to addressing disability inequality.
- ✓ Discuss the ways in which learners with disabilities may be excluded from education and what the implications are.
- ✓ Understand responses to educational needs of children with disabilities from a historical perspective.
- ✓ Analyse the guiding policies for schools and education systems in promoting the right to education for learners with disabilities.

Introduction

In this section, as we begin to frame our approach to inclusive education which informs the approach taken on this textbook, there are two important steps that we need to take.

The first is to honestly examine our own feelings towards disability and how our own fears and misconceptions might get in the way of developing inclusive teaching and learning. There is a great deal of research that shows that, as a society, we have deep-seated fears and



uncomfortable feelings about disability. If we do not acknowledge this as individuals, it can stop us from being able to engage constructively with people with disabilities and this can get in the way of inclusive teaching and learning. An important part of this understanding process is to challenge the traditional way of seeing disability as an **individual tragedy** that requires medical treatment, to seeing disability as the way in which **a person with a bodily impairment interacts with their environment**. This shift in thinking is at the core of the discipline that we call Disability Studies. We will look at these issues in **Chapter 2** and in the next section of the textbook we will apply the principles of Disability Studies in a way that contrasts with the special education approach. This will bring us to the conceptual framework of Disability Studies in Education (DSE) which is the foundation of our approach in this book.

Secondly, we will consider how inclusive education relates to the right to education of children with disabilities. How do schools meet the needs of all children, while at the same time catering for additional learning support that may be needed for children who are D/deaf or hard of hearing or who have an intellectual disability, for example? In **Chapter 3**, we will look at how people with disabilities have experienced education and the differences between special and inclusive education. It will be important at this stage to clarify that inclusive education is not only about disability, but is a far broader concept that aims to address educational exclusion in all its forms. It is our purpose in this textbook to locate disability inclusion within this wider framework. Here we will use the DSE lens to understand the impact of segregated systems of education.

As the title of this chapter suggests, this textbook places disability experiences at the heart of our discussion. What does it mean to have a disability? What does it mean to have a child or family members with a disability? What does it mean to teach a child with a disability? Disability experience is not only about people with disabilities, but also about how disability is seen in society. Is it something to be pitied or to be fixed; or is it about having an impairment that requires an adaptation in the environment in some way? We will come back to this theme later on in this section. In the meantime, let us begin by reading about the experiences of Looks Matoto.

Insider view: Perspectives on education

In this summary transcript of an interview from the “**Education for all: Disability, diversity and inclusion**” Massive Open Online Course (MOOC), Looks Matoto describes his experience as a person with a disability and provides us with valuable insights from a learner’s perspective. He works for an NGO (the Disabled People’s Organisation of South Africa) and in the interview he explains how he became involved in lobbying for the rights of children with disabilities. You will notice how he is at pains to show that disability is not just a personal but also a social



and political issue and to assert the rights of people with disabilities to equal participation in education and other spheres of social life. The transcript below is an extract from a longer interview.

By not including disabled people society is losing out on how that person would've interpreted a particular situation. Because we each have unique ideas on how to tackle things and we each have our own contribution and our own footprint on every aspect of life. So when you include, society will learn a lot. They will also learn because they would learn on how disabled people should actually be participating in this, because remember this will be a process of trial and error.

Learning is a two-way process. As much as I learn, you also learn from me. You also learn how in life when a student like me comes into your class, how do you then become better prepared. We also have a role in the participation, because there is a thinking that seems to place disabled people in a particular corner. The fact that my limb might not be functioning well says nothing about what capacity I have on the various subjects that are offered at school. I may excel in maths, I may excel in science. I may come with interventions that will better ... actually because I am a disabled person I have a better lived experience on disability, I can better inform even society itself on how best to reasonably accommodate me so that the next time they meet another person they would've learnt from the first group that they've come across ... this is how they need to be able to look into the issues of disability. So, it is a big, big plus.

And remember when we talk about diversity in the labour force, it does mean disabled people as well because we do bring diversity into the labour force. We do bring diversity into the educational system. We do bring diversity into society. So give us that space so that we can also play that role and be able to influence the direction of society because education is fundamental. It is fundamental to claiming your rights, your human rights. It is through education that you can be able to even be aware of such rights and be able to claim them. Now it is through education that you can also make an entry to a better life in terms of economic upliftment of disabled people. So, when you exclude disabled people in education and come with an exclusionist kind of curriculum, you are beginning to say that you need to learn differently from us. How is that different from racism? How is it different from black people being designed to school in a separate school, white students being in a particular different environment? Now if you understand inclusion in terms of race, what makes it so difficult to understand on the disability level as well, because these are just reflections of life? Let us allow life to happen in order for society to grow.

I would like to say to disabled people ... the issue of inclusive education has rattled many disabled people, including parents of disabled people ... we grew up with some of us being used to special schools and that experience has not been a wonderful experience. Because you are disabled you were just taken away, put on a transport or bus, bussed away to a destination



about 300km away from your home, whilst your siblings are attending about 1km away or even less than a kilometre. You have to go 300km away. You only come back home during holidays, then you go away again. Then you would become a stranger in your own home. You become a stranger to your own parents, to your own siblings. Whilst everybody is here just because of your disability, it makes education traumatic. It makes you not feel that education is fashionable and should be something that is attained by a disabled person. It becomes punitive. You feel like you are being punished for being involved in education. As a result, you don't want that experience. And some, because of growing up in that environment you get used to it, because you know no other life than special schools. Then you feel sort of uncomfortable with the situation of being mainstreamed because you feel that you will be teased by other students. And the truth of the matter is you get teased even in special schools because you've got disabled students in the special schools who for some reason feel their disability is better than your disability and they tease you. You know, you cry just like everybody else or you learn to grow up and tease them back. So disabled people are not angels, they are human beings. They are capable of teasing you and hurting you in a school just like any child can do in any other school. They are capable of being mean and being friendly at the same time, just like any other child.

Let us not have solid ideas because there is very little you can do with solid ideas. It is better to have liquid ideas just like liquid water. You can be creative around liquid water, but with solid water it is difficult to manoeuvre it. So are solid ideas. If we as disabled people have these ideas that this is going to be difficult for us, let us be willing to try that and see the possibilities that are there. Let us adjust our own attitude and remember that we belong in that society and don't believe that society is out there to get us. No society is out there to get us. Let us teach society the different ways of thinking so that they in their societies thinking our own ideas can be seen. So let us not be fearful or scared to go into these issues.

When we talk inclusion, we talk about all the facets of disability inclusion, understanding the pros and cons of disability, making sure that all is on board, nobody is left out. No child will be left without education just because they are disabled. All we're then saying, disabled people, is let us grab this opportunity and say inclusive education is a way for us to make a contribution in the disability narrative.



REFLECTION

Think about your earliest experience of disability. When did you first become aware that there were people in your community who were disabled? How did you respond and what were you taught about this at the time?

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