

Disability Studies in Inclusive Education

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First Edition

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Preface

Disability Studies in Inclusive Education

Towards teacher empowerment and inclusive education for all

This textbook arises from the Teacher Empowerment for Disability Inclusion (TEDI) project, which started in the Division of Disability Studies at the University of Cape Town (UCT) in 2017. The aim of this project, which was funded by the Christelike Blinden Mission and the European Union, was to address the shortage of teachers trained in how to include children with disabilities in their classrooms through the development of short courses and massive open online courses (MOOCs). To address this need, the Disability Studies in Education (DSE) course was developed in 2018 as a MOOC, a short course and an accredited course in the postgraduate diploma in Disability Studies at UCT.

The DSE course was developed with active participation from academics, teachers, parents and persons with disabilities, as well as other community stakeholders, such as NGOs. Through a process of consultation, the course convenors were able to bring together a range of skills and expertise from scholars in the field of Disability Studies, specialist educators and experienced learning designers. Many of the course lecturers were persons with disabilities themselves. The course was further informed and developed by student feedback through each of its iterations. At the time of developing this textbook, the course had been offered four times as a postgraduate diploma course and four times as a short course. The MOOC had been running for four years, with more than 2 000 participants having completed the course.

As a result of this vibrant collaboration, many useful resources and a conceptual framework for understanding disability in education were developed and it became clear that it would be helpful to lecturers and students alike to bring these resources together. This textbook is the result of that effort. It is hoped that it will provide a resource not only to UCT students, but also to other students and lecturers at other universities and teaching education institutions.

The teaching and learning materials in this textbook were developed by the course convenors and the guest lecturers participating in the course in line with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles, which increases the choice of learning pathways for students by providing course materials, activities and assessments with multiple forms of representation, expression and engagement.

Guiding principles

We believe that to work in inclusive education, we must begin by examining our own feelings and our own fears and misconceptions around this emotive topic. In this book, we will challenge the way that disability is often seen as a medical matter, only to be dealt with by experts, such as doctors, therapists and special educators. We encourage our readers to look at disability as just another form of diversity, much the same as race or class. This book places the experiences of learners with disabilities and their families at the centre of the learning experience. We are aware that the voices of children and parents have not been sufficiently heard and we acknowledge the importance of engaging with disabled adults as both teachers and mentors who can guide our practice.

We aim to increase disability confidence of teachers in both mainstream and special schools so that they feel empowered to engage with disability in their classrooms. We also provide the basic understanding and tools for teachers to work with children with disabilities through understanding the nature of their impairment and strategies to meet their learning needs. It is our hope that once teachers feel confident and empowered, they will take charge of their own learning and continue to build their skills on their own and within communities of practice.

The premise for the promotion of inclusive education is social justice and human rights. People with disabilities have long been discriminated against and excluded and inclusive education is a major strategy to address this unfair treatment. We are moving away from the idea that disability determines how, when and where a child is educated, to ensuring that every child has a right to educational equity on par with non-disabled peers.

The way to achieve such ambitious goals, we believe, is through collaboration between families, communities and schools. We develop the idea that disability occurs in a social environment where there are many other factors at play which may have an impact upon a child's educational achievement. In an African setting, it is important that we look carefully at this environment and adopt a critical, what we term "decolonial", perspective.

A central premise of this book is that learners are diverse in the learning pathways that work best for them, even though they might be working toward the same learning goals. This also applies to you as the reader of this book and the unique path that made you interested in this work. This reality forms the basis of UDL, an approach that we adopted in developing the text of this book as well as in teaching about inclusive practices. We have therefore embedded the principles of UDL in the way we present these materials. Multiple forms of content representation have been used to accommodate the variety of ways readers process information; be it video links, written text, reading links, glossary boxes, diagrams, icons to distinguish chapters, or alt text. The typeface, colour palette, and layout decisions have been made with visual accessibility in mind. This is an example of the multiple means of engagement found in the textbook. We incorporated different means of action and expression by including activity boxes and reflection boxes throughout the textbook.

Finally, we adopt an understanding of disability as being created by the interaction between a person with an impairment and their environment. This means that we need to pay careful attention to the kinds of environments that are conducive to learning for children who may not be able to learn through vision or hearing, have limited cognitive capacity for learning or find it difficult to access certain physical environments. We therefore devote sections to addressing different types of impairment in an inclusive environment.

Structure of this book

The book is divided into eight sections with three chapters in each. The first four sections cover the foundations of our approach, establishing Disability Studies in Education as our framework, with close attention paid to the recognition of disability experience and to social justice for people with disabilities, including the right to education. We locate inclusive education in our communities and examine it from a decolonial perspective. We provide a foundation of UDL for meeting a diverse range of learning needs. The following four sections drill down into the learning needs of children who are D/deaf or hard of hearing, with low vision or who are blind, and those who have intellectual or physical impairment. In each of these sections, the three chapters deal with the experience of disability; the nature of the impairment and its possible impact upon learning; and then the adaptations that address these learning needs.

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