Chapter 69
The Inclusion and Support of Students With Disabilities in the South African Higher Education System:
Supporting Students With Disabilities

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ABSTRACT

The intention of this chapter is to contribute to the scholarship of diversity, equity, and inclusivity in contemporary higher education. Its purpose is to develop an understanding of pedagogical issues concerning the inclusion and support of students with disabilities in the South African higher education system through literature review. The chapter will contribute to debate on policy imperatives and how these have informed practice, the social model of disability and its role in shaping educational provision, access and support constraints as products of intersectionality of disability and disablement, and possible ways to re-culture higher education for support.

INTRODUCTION

The intention of this chapter is to contribute to the scholarship of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusivity in Contemporary Higher Education. Its purpose is to develop an understanding of the pedagogical issues concerning the inclusion and support of students with disabilities in the South African higher education system through literature review. It contributes to the debate on the inclusion and support of students with visible disabilities in the South African higher education system by investigating what literature

proposes is necessary to facilitate and strengthen the participation of these students at this level. The chapter uses re-culturing (Doyle, 2002; Sing, 2016) as a conceptual framework to understand how the country's higher education is engaging with transformation. It is divided into five sections, namely;

1. Interrogation of policy imperatives and how they have informed practice;
2. Exploration of the impact of the social model of disability in shaping educational provision;
3. Access and support constraints as products of intersectionality of disability and disablement;
4. Possible ways to re-culture higher education and increase the participation of students with disabilities; and,
5. Conclusion.

   In this chapter, the following concepts; Inclusion, Support, and transformation will mean the following: Inclusion means that everyone belongs, is accepted and supported (Swartz, Sandall, Odom, Horn, & Beckman, 2002). Support means creating an environment where everyone is cared for and loved, esteemed, and a member of a network of mutual obligations (Cobb, 1976). Transformation means the radical shift from one state of being to another, and includes a shift of culture, behaviour, mind-set, and the way the university and its people regard disabled students (Poutiatine, 2009).

BACKGROUND

During apartheid rule, persons with disabilities were among marginalized groups with limited access to services. Similarly, due to the politics and policies of the day, students with disabilities were amongst those with restricted access to education, including higher education (Howell, 2005). During that era, perceptions of, and all services rendered to, persons with disabilities were influenced by the medical model which regards disability as a medical and welfare matter (Republic of South Africa, 2015). As a result, students with disabilities experienced opportunity barriers which were imposed by people in the form of policies, attitudes and certain educational practices (Bornman & Rose, 2017:6). There is no statistics of how many students with disabilities had access to universities before 1994. Recently, the Department of Social Development has estimated that one in five people with disabilities are enrolled in higher education (Republic of South Africa, 2016)

   Now that South Africa is a democracy, the Constitution (RSA, 1996) extends the same rights to all citizens and forbids the practice of discrimination on any basis. As a signatory to international treaties, democratic South Africa is bound by proclamations of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (United Nations, 2006). Therefore, the inclusion and support of students with disabilities in higher education institutions is regarded as a basic human right protected by the Constitution and education policies. However, there is evidence that challenges to transform higher education are experienced both locally (Ntombela & Subrayen, 2013; Engelbrecht & de Beer, 2014) and internationally (Spassiani, Murchadha, Clince, Biddulph, Conradie, Costello, Cox… Tully, 2017) as students with disabilities continue to find themselves on the margins. This suggests that simply providing equal access to resources and services does not necessarily lead to a changed culture that is responsive to the issues of inclusion and support for students with disabilities. Reculturing is a lengthy process. In fact, Anastasiou and Kauffman (2014) remind us that:

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