

EDUCATION FOR ALL: DISABILITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN



Week 1- Presenter Looks Matoto

SP1 Hello Looks, how are you doing today?

SP2 Good, Chioma, I'm doing great. And how are you doing?

SP1 I'm very well thank you. I don't know if people really understand what the practice of inclusion is.

That is why we invited you to share your knowledge with your audience, to talk about what it has meant for you as a person. But before we start, can I ask you to introduce yourself?

SP2 Hi, my name is Looks Matoto from the Eastern Cape. I am a disability activist and member of DPSA, Disabled People South Africa, and basically disability has made me an activist.

SP1 So I'd just like to ask you, like when people talk about social cohesion and the need to have an inclusive society, what does that mean to you?

SP2 Firstly I regard inclusion as a basic step of life. We are all born into inclusive societies, into inclusive homes and then it is through social construct that we are excluded. Otherwise we are all born as children, loved to bits, hated if hated, not because of anything, but because we're children. And I am saying this because I come from a home of non-disabled parents and siblings and when we speak inclusion we want a replica of what life gives to us from birth but taken away from us as disabled people later on in life due to disability by society. We are making a call for that, because there is an assumption that disabled people must be excluded because of their inabilities or capabilities of certain things and exclusion moves from that premise that we will not be able to learn in the same way as other people in the same institution. And all we are saying is that create an environment where all children or students can participate and learn in an environment similar to other or to some of their peers. When I say this is a reflection of life you cannot tell by pregnancy a pregnant mother

SP2 So every pregnant mother has the same symptoms and everything that any other mother goes through irrespective if that mother is carrying a disabled child. They go through the same way, you see the same way. It tells you how inclusive life has created us to be. It is only after then that all these things come to being.

SP1 I really can witness a truth in that statement, that's a powerful revelation because you're basically saying life put me into a home where if I'm disabled the next person is not and we exist in that space together. And our parents find a way to accommodate everybody. So why is it different with society?

SP2 Exactly, that is a learned thing. I learn about disability later on in life. Even when I play as a child, I play just... I am curious to play all the games that every child plays because I am in an inclusive environment. It is then there in life that I learn that I find difficulty in doing A, B, C, but otherwise I am as curious as any other child. And I don't even feel that it is an issue at that stage because the next child may also have a different... may have difficulty in a particular thing, so at that stage you don't interact as disability and everything.

Then when we are saying create an inclusive education, create inclusive societies, make sure that disabled people are not shipped into a particular space where they are seen to be a space good enough for them. And there is a tendency to think that when you speak about inclusive education it is about lowering of standards. We are not saying we should lower standards. We're just saying that create an enabling environment so that I may reach the same standard as you. Don't drop them. Keep the standards where they are, because I want to achieve as well at that level but make it easier for me to achieve that level by creating a reasonable accommodation, by creating an environment that is universally accessible so that I may as well play my part, play my role same as any other children.

Because the issues of society we need to stress that disabled people belong in the society. We learn even our

views are shaped by the things we learn in society everything aspect of life. All we are then saying is that be sensitive and be aware that there are people that are different in a particular way, because generally human beings are rattled by difference. That I am different should not rattle you because when you interact with me you would find out that we are even much more actually the same on many other things, on many different levels. What is a difference is just a physical impairment. Other than that we may find out that we love the very same things as you do.

Maybe for example I grew up loving chess. I played chess and I was excelling in chess the same way as any other person was doing in chess and I was beating non-disabled people, winning competitions in chess, because it has nothing to do with my impairment. So I'm saying that if we create an environment that everybody can participate you would find that we have the same interests. The only thing might be just a difference in terms of an impairment which does not define who I am.

SP1 Is there any benefit to society this inclusion, persons with disabilities do they just receive from society or is there something that they give back as well?

SP2 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 on how in the 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 to make, 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 it 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 the 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 the diversification of 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 at 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 different 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 were in a particular different environment? Now if you understand inclusion in terms of race, what does it make it so difficult to understand it 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.

SP1 I just want to ask maybe lastly around issues of policy, in your opinion, how has policy driven inclusive education and what do you think has kind of... what space has it created for achievements in this field for persons with disabilities?

SP2 In South Africa we have the White Paper 6 Policy on Inclusive Education. I regard policy as a reference point and also as a guideline. It helps us find direction and also because we may talk inclusive education, without policy you may find after 10 years you're repeating the same call that you made and you have agreed on 10 years back because there was no set of guidelines that were put down to follow. And then everybody who comes they start the topic afresh as if it's their own invention. Policy creates a space for you to know that there has been discussion on this particular topic and this discussion has led to this set of guidelines which have been implemented.

And remember policy design, created and designed is not the same as policy implemented. When you

implement then you start to pick up shortcomings and you are able to perfect as you go along. So you need policy in order for you also to hold governments and systems responsible and accountable. Policy I always say it is like when the world is running too fast policy is there to hold the world down and say, hang on, you are leaving Looks Matoto behind. Can you please stop and take it slow. Policy holds it down so that I can also reach where you are and then we can then walk together going forward. That's what policy does.

SP1 Okay, thank you very much Looks. I just want to know is there any other thing you want to say to your audience? You have people listening to you globally. Any last words, something you want to leave behind with them?

SP2 I would like to say to disabled people the issue of inclusive education has rattled many disabled people, including parents of disabled people, because they have all... we grew up 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 at 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 you are 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, you know.

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 up and see the possibilities that are there. Let us adjust our own attitude and also remember that society 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. Let us go there, because you find that many young children who are disabled are left out in terms of education because education does not take the fact into... cognisant of the fact that many disabled children they go through hospitals for years and by the time they go out of hospitals doctors trying to fix them, they come out of those hospitals having lost a lot of years. And by the time they are re-integrated into the schools they are told they are too old to continue with schooling. Others due to parents being ignorant they attend school at a later stage. When we talk inclusion we talk 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, let us grab this opportunity and say inclusive education is a way for us to make a contribution in the disability narrative.

SP1 Thank you very much Looks. Thank you.

SP2 Thank you very much Chioma. Thank you.



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