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Inclusive education

An African perspective

Edited by

Nareadi Phasha • Janet Condy

"*Inclusive education: An African perspective* is more valuable at this time than ever before. It encapsulates the debate and eventual dialogue about the tensions between transformation and reform."
Prof Catherine Odora Hoppers, University of South Africa

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Inclusive education: An African perspective engages with prevailing philosophies presenting a holistic view of inclusive education from an international, as well as – importantly – from a South African, and a broader African perspective.

The book draws a strong link between inclusive education and *ubuntu* and indigenous knowledge systems and, in so doing, claims a space for African worldviews. It presents African worldviews, epistemologies and values as a means of creating space for effective and culturally sensitive ways of implementing the vision of inclusive education. In doing so, the book helps to equip professionals with the attitudes, knowledge and skills to be responsive to the diverse needs of learners, including learning, emotional, social, neurological, intellectual and physical needs. This contributes to the facilitation of greater educational access, participation and success for all members of South African society.

The authors address educational problems in South Africa from a perspective which validates the experiences of South African teachers and learners, discussing specific issues which are pertinent in South Africa and Africa. Readers are encouraged to evaluate current inclusive education polices from an African perspective, to identify potential limitations with practical implementation in the classroom, and to create flexible and holistic solutions to educational challenges.

The book is suitable for students taking postgraduate courses in inclusive education, in-service teachers, as well as academics, policymakers and many other professionals working in inclusive education.

Key features include:

- opening case studies which introduce concepts and provide an illustration of practices
- 'Stop and reflect' boxes which pose questions that allow the reader to apply knowledge and opinion, and call for critical engagement
- end-of-chapter questions which require dialogic and critical reflection and engage the reader in the practical application of the conceptual thinking and theoretical principles advanced in this book

EDITORS

Nareadi Phasha is a professor and the first chair of the Department of Inclusive Education at the University of South Africa.

Janet Condy is an associate professor in the Faculty of Education at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Authors

Esther Foluke Akinsola, University of Lagos
Regis Chireshe, Great Zimbabwe University
Obert Maguvhe, University of South Africa
Francina Dikeledi Mahlo, University of South Africa
Magen Mhaka-Mutepfa, University of Sydney
Serefete M. Molosiwa, University of Botswana
Pedzani Perci Monyatsi, University of Botswana
Jacomina M.C. Motitswe, University of South Africa
Muzwa Mukwambo, University of Namibia
Sibusiso Ntshangase, University of South Africa
Mary Runo, Kenyatta University
Matshidiso Taole, University of South Africa
Joseph Tchatchoueng, Towson University
Lloyd Daniel Nkoli (Dan) Tlale, University of South Africa

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Abridged contents

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Foreword

Inclusive education: An African perspective is more valuable at this time than ever before. It encapsulates the debate and eventual dialogue about the tensions between transformation and reform. Reform is all right –its only problem is that it is a change in structure without a change in ideology. From this point of view, it is transformation that demands that both the philosophy and structure are changed. Sometimes, a good philosophy such as *ubuntu* – or even reconciliation – sounds and feels right. But, like humanism, a good philosophy is only the beginning.

So, for inclusive education to work from an African perspective, there has to be a renegotiation of space and relationships *in practice*. Deep historical wounds will not be healed by simply putting children into the same space, or training teachers to recite in their numbers, or inviting people to come together to engage in dialogue to solve problems. Relationships must be renegotiated. Renegotiation requires trying to understanding one another at a level we call metaphysical. The metaphysics of a culture – at once its way of making sense of the world and its rationalisation of its basic cultural structures, that is, that which is normally taken for granted by the members of that culture – matters greatly.

Taking the South African and, indeed, the African situation, it is clear that Western metaphysics deriving from European history is accepted as the norm, while mumblings about how other cultures are marginalised continue without any urgency at all. This recognition of marginalisation is clearly not enough; it does not help us very much when we would like to apply our understanding of the metaphysics of African cultures in recommending actions on equality and equity of use of public spaces and institutions. We have to identify the substantive elements of a culture – in various disciplinary areas, knowledge, food, history, the arts, dance, rituals, and so forth.

I would add that in order to practise 'inclusive education' we have to take into account what I have called 'second generation indigenisation' in which the errors of the past are taken as starting points for new directions. For instance, it is recognised that there has been a period of a lot of social change in which, to establish the recognition and strength that is a prerequisite for an effective presence in dialogue and discourse, there is a polarisation or over-reaction against the incumbent (that is, defining oneself as 'different from' them). The force it takes against established and resistant hegemony to create this space reflects an exaggerated and confrontatory antithesis (such as radical feminism, the anti-development lobby of the green movement and the white settler colonies) – each spawning an equally distorted backlash (Fatnowna & Pickett, 2002; Odora Hoppers, 2002; Odora Hoppers & Richards, 2012).

With this new stream, there is a growing maturity of dialogue that is not the result of a paradigm shift, but is the shift itself. Thus, from the ignorance and depreciating ideology along with social theories that claimed '*terra nullius*' as a convenient rationalisation for colonisation and ill treatment, there is a need for honest recognition of the existence of other knowledge systems, like indigenous knowledge systems, which continue to play such a crucial role for non-Western peoples. In fact, there is a need for those knowledge systems themselves, not just the recognition that they exist (Knudtson & Suzuki, 1992). The knowledge paradigms of the future are beginning by reaching out to the excluded and epistemologically disenfranchised, to move together towards a new synthesis.

Inclusive education is transdisciplinary, and contains the basic essence of human rights. But, firstly, we must recognise that the field of human rights is a contested terrain of meanings and applications, including the role and space of human rights education (generally) and human rights in education (the sector). Secondly, we have to pay close attention to the poverty in conceptual understanding around human rights that is evident in the linear and evolutionary view that dominates present-day thinking internationally and in Africa. The inability to grasp the variety of human rights understandings that are determined by specific social, political and economic arrangements manifests the view that human

rights are absolute and uncontestable. Thirdly, we must take into account the political economy of human rights, which is ignored in advocacies of human rights. An analysis of the political economy of human rights would show that the framing and adoption of various UN instruments are intrinsically linked to the specific stages of human rights development since the Second World War. These instruments have bequeathed rights without challenging the world order, leading to the determination of the discourse on human rights to be constructed from the perspective of the 'North'. Thus, when the North – throughout history – insisted on human rights being construed as civil and political rights at the expense of social, cultural economic and development rights, it was taken as a fait accompli. This was noticed most recently during the debates about the reparations for slavery and colonialism at the World Conference Against Racism in Durban in 2001, and the subsequent provisions of the Durban Declaration.

Fourthly, the hegemonic nature of human rights language displaces other needs (thus 'human rights colonialism'). This totalitarian discourse pre-empts any critical engagement with, for example, how the notion of human rights contributes to the spread of possessive market individualism (Keet, 2002). Another danger is that of pitching the language of rights that mask privation by presenting values that are unattainable for the majority – for example, the reality of hunger (i.e. the right to eat) and the rights to shelter, health and education quickly nullify the illusions of freedom, equality and equity. Taking suffering seriously also means taking active steps to disclose the discrepancy between the existing normative framework of society and its reality. It also implies that protecting human rights takes into account the most pervasive and chronic forms of distress that are a consequence of economic, social, political and structural circumstances that impact on groups as well as individuals (Odora Hoppers, 2004).

The notion of collective human rights therefore challenges the philosophical foundation of the dominant human rights discourse, which sees people as individuals rather than as social beings – a product of a web of relations, social, economic and political, from which social relations arise. It is from this vantage point that the fate of millions of people trapped in a permanent condition of poverty at the margins of economies should be exposed. The vicissitudes of the global market make it impossible for governments – even those of social democratic persuasion – to end the indignity of poverty and joblessness (Vally, 2002; Felice, 1996).

Human rights considerations in education straddle access, curriculum, management, budgeting, provisioning, and teaching and learning. They relate to issues of equity, redress, equalisation of opportunities, teaching and learning conditions, rights interpretations, quality, lifelong learning, socio-economic justice and, of course, inclusivity.

It is hoped that the publication of this book will add to the chorus of the humanitarian voices all over the world that are trying to make a difference!

Prof. Catherine A. Odora Hoppers
DST/NRF SARCHI Chair in Development Education
University of South Africa

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Preface

Worldwide, inclusive education is embraced as a means for achieving educational equality and success for all. However, the notions that permeate society and educational systems might render the translation of 'inclusion' into reality untenable, especially in the African contexts. The current notion of inclusive education tends to be biased, it defeats the very ends of restorative justice in epistemologies hence the aim of this book is to engage an alternative way of making inclusive education realise its main international objective, which is **quality education for ALL**. The current notions exclude the basis of the African perspective of a holistic view in education, which is *ubuntu*, one of the fundamentals of human rights value in education for democracy and social justice. This does not in any way suggest that non-African influenced definition/s of inclusive education should be replaced by the aspired African understandings. There is no suggestion that African conceptions should be elevated at the expense of Western perspectives or any other knowledge. We are of the view that perspectives other than the conventional ones should be validated, and in this regard, an African perspective. Africans have their own complex histories that should be acknowledged and respected in making education inclusive.

This book aims to achieve the following:

- Engage and reveal the critical need for a value system of *ubuntu*. We are of the opinion that Western dimensions would make inclusion difficult to realise especially in Africa because their understandings are not included.
- Policy makers will be sensitised to issues that relate to Africans and their impact on the implementation of inclusive education which so far seems to be dominated by a Western imprint.
- The public will also be sensitised to the fact that principles embedded in the philosophy of inclusion does not make room to espouse the African values in the subject, rather it elevates Western thought at the expense of African thought. Therefore, suggestions should be made for an addition of an African perspective in inclusive education.

This book is a collaborative contribution. Contributors represent various education fields at institutions of higher learning. They have a deep understanding of inclusive education, and/or are involved in teaching, researching or supervising research in inclusive education. This book is suitable for students pursuing postgraduate degrees in inclusive education, especially B.Ed Honours and Postgraduate Diplomas.

The book consists of two parts. The first part of the book, which focuses on the conceptualisation of inclusive education, has five chapters. The second part, which consists of eight chapters, pays attention to the practice of inclusive education. Chapter 1 encourages acceptance and ownership of the concept and educational practice in African contexts by demonstrating its grounding in the African philosophy of *ubuntu*. Chapter 2 demonstrates how different epistemologies have shaped the understanding of inclusive education and disability. It also reveals the dangers of ignoring an African perspective. The authors draw on the work of African scholars such as George Sefa Dei, Odora Hoppers and the father of Afrocentricity, Molefi kete Asante, Ama Mazama. Chapter 3 proposes a culturally sensitive curriculum as that would give each learner an opportunity for a holistic development. It calls for the incorporation of indigenous knowledge into the curriculum and therefore, uses very practical and classroom-based examples to facilitate the reader's understanding. Chapter 4 discusses how an African child should be understood if we are serious about providing quality education. It demonstrates that an African child has always been understood using non-African theories or those that do not give space to an African's way of thinking. It argues that an African child is socialised early in his life about the African tenet of humanism and therefore she or he must be understood as such if we are serious about making the curriculum inclusive. Chapter 5 focuses on an African perspective of disability in relation to the current trends in inclusive education. African and Western views about disability are presented and their

implications on the implementation of inclusive education in African contexts. It further suggests ways in which inclusion of people with disability can be positioned in African contexts. Chapter 6 challenges the reader to go beyond disability as a barrier to learning by identifying various sources which undermine learning. A Western approach to barriers to learning is interrogated to reveal its impact on the implementation of inclusive education. It also provides suggestions for policy development to accommodate African thinking to the inclusion of all learners. Chapter 7 uses the SIAS document to explain how educational support should be understood. It emphasises that the effectiveness of support in inclusive education schools will depend on the collegiality and collaboration of various stakeholders. Chapter 9 presents strategies that should be considered to manage inclusive classrooms. Chapter 10 argues that flexibility is at the centre of inclusive education, and therefore presents various factors that can facilitate such flexibility and highlights the importance of *ubuntu* in the curriculum. Chapter 10 demonstrates that inclusive education should not be confined to mainstream, but should be considered in settings such as prison and adult centers as well as homes. The penultimate chapter challenges the application of the current assessment strategies as exclusionary and therefore calls for the assessment tools that are sensitive to the needs of an African child. Finally, Chapter 12 gives the reader ideas on how to communicate in inclusive educational settings, especially with children who have disabilities and/or those who communicate in ways that are different from the norm.

About the authors

Editors

Nareadi Phasha is a professor of Inclusive Education, and the first chair of the Department of Inclusive Education at UNISA. She obtained a PhD from the University of Cambridge in the UK after obtaining an MEd in Special Education at Virginia State University, US. Prof. Phasha's articles appear in internationally and nationally accredited journals. She has authored and co-authored several chapters and books with early-career and senior scholars across the continent. She is a recipient of several research funding and awards. In 2013, she was honoured at the NST/WISA awards as a distinguished researcher of violence against women. She mentors a number of young African women at various institutions across the continent. Prof. Phasha is currently leading two major research projects: Gender-based violence towards learners with intellectual disability and DHET-funded collaborative research that aims at developing an inclusive policy and practice framework for teaching and learning at institutions of higher education.

Janet Condy is an associate professor and lectures undergraduate, honours, master's and doctoral students at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology. She specialises in the fields of literacy, inclusive education and digital storytelling. She founded the Reading Association of South Africa in 2004 and began the online journal, *Reading & Writing*, which was accredited in 2014. Prof. Condy volunteers for the International Literacy Association and has conducted literacy projects in Mauritius, Zambia, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. In 2014, she received the International Volunteer Award from ILA for her commitment to, and work in, these international projects. She has published over 25 papers in accredited journals, edited two books, published five chapters in books and presented at numerous international and national conferences. She has supervised nine master's and one doctoral student to completion.

Authors

Esther Foluke Akinsola is a consultant developmental and clinical psychologist and Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology, University of Lagos, Nigeria. She received her MPhil and PhD degrees in Developmental and Clinical Psychology from the University of Lagos. Her PhD thesis was on learning disability in Nigerian children. Her research interests cover life-span development and psychological challenges that may accompany different stages of development.

She has conducted research on language learning and communication in bilingual infants and children, children with special needs, parenting and parenting practices across ethnic groups and cultures, adolescents' upbringing, perception of world view, and psychological well-being, and is currently researching positive youth development and its contributions to the Sustainable Development Goals. She is a member of the executive committee of the International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development (ISSBD), and a fellow of the Nigerian Psychological Association (NPA).

Regis Chireshe is Professor of Educational Psychology and Special Needs Education at Great Zimbabwe University. He holds a DEd in Psychology of Education from UNISA and is a registered psychologist in Zimbabwe. He has been a visiting professor at Kyambogo University in Uganda, and head of department, deputy dean and dean of the Robert Mugabe School of Education at Great Zimbabwe University. He has worked as research champion in the Faculty of Education at Walter Sisulu University in South Africa and as professor of UNISA's College of Education, where he was responsible for life orientation. Currently, he is the Director of Quality Assurance and Academic Planning at Great Zimbabwe University.

He has published several articles in peer-reviewed journals. He has also co-authored two books and published eight book chapters. He serves on editorial boards of international journals and is the editor-in-chief of *Dzimbahwe: Journal of Multidisciplinary Research*. He has successfully supervised master's and doctoral students' theses and is an external examiner for a number of universities in Africa.

Obert Maguvhe holds a PhD in inclusive education policy and its effects on the teaching of biology to visually impaired learners. He is a professor at the University of South Africa (UNISA), and was previously Programme Manager: Education and Training at the South African National Council for the Blind and Director of Special Needs at the Kha Ri Gude Mass Literacy Campaign of the Department of Education in Pretoria.

He was appointed Deputy Chairperson of the SABC Board in September 2013, and Chairperson in June 2015. He has served as the South African National Council for the Blind's National Executive Director, on the Braille Production Task Team in the Department of Education and on the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Literacy. He is a member of a team of 10 researchers for a national project titled 'Successful/innovative teacher education initiatives in priority areas that will serve a changing Africa'. He co-founded the South African National Association of the Blind and Partially Sighted. Among numerous other initiatives in his field, he has represented Special Education on the SADTU Education Desk, played an instrumental role in designing Grade 2 Venda Braille and contributed to writing the National Department of Education's Adaptive Curriculum. He has published a number of articles about teaching life sciences to blind and visually impaired learners.

Francina Dikeledi Mahlo (DEd: Inclusive Education) is an associate professor in the Department of Inclusive Education at UNISA. Prior to joining academia, she was a Foundation Phase teacher and an inclusive education specialist at the Mpumalanga and Gauteng Departments of Education respectively. She is passionate about young learners who experience challenges in learning and believes that, with support, all learners can achieve. She offers modules in inclusive education at undergraduate and postgraduate level, and supervises master's and doctoral students. Her research interests are inclusive practices in the Foundation Phase, diversity in schools, and teacher, learner and parental support in inclusive settings. She has presented papers at a number of local and international conferences on teaching, learning and support in inclusive settings. She has published articles in a number of accredited local and international journals.

Magen Mhaka-Mutepfa is a teaching assistant in the School of Public Health at the University of Sydney (NSW), and has been a recipient of the Australia International Postgraduate Research Scholarship. She is a registered psychologist with more than 10 years of cross-disciplinary, versatile perspectives on providing psychotherapy support services. She also has more than 10 years of teaching experience, and has worked as a research consultant for five years. She has authored 13 research articles in accredited international journals and 13 book chapters, and has presented more than 30 papers at local and international conferences. Her areas of interest are HIV and Aids, ageing, counselling and abuse.

Serefete M. Molosiwa is a Special Education lecturer in the Department of Educational Foundations at the University of Botswana, Gaborone. She holds a master's in Education from the University of Manchester in England and a Certificate of Advanced Studies from the University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign. She is currently pursuing PhD studies at the University of Botswana. Her area of specialisation is in training teachers to teach children with developmental disabilities, particularly those with learning disabilities and intellectual impairments. Her areas of research interest include reading and reading comprehension, teacher training, curriculum access, assessment, inclusive education, action research, ICT in teaching learners with special needs, and classroom instruction and accommodations.

Pedzani Perci Monyatsi is a professor at the University of Botswana in the Faculty of Education. He holds a DEd from UNISA in Educational Management. As a teaching practice co-ordinator, he is responsible for internships at all levels. He has served as a secondary school teacher, a secondary school head, and a head of department at the University of Botswana's Department of Primary Education.

He has taught courses in Educational Management at both undergraduate and graduate levels and courses in research at undergraduate level. He has supervised research students at both undergraduate and graduate levels. He has published widely. His research interests are in teacher education, educational management, administration and leadership. He has also presented papers at local, regional and international conferences. He has been engaged in consultancies such as the UNESCO consultancy on the Impact of the Financial Crisis on Primary Education in Botswana.

Jacomina M.C. Motitswe is a lecturer in UNISA's Department of Inclusive Education. She holds a master's degree in Inclusive Education and is currently studying for her doctoral degree in Inclusive Education at UNISA. She has published three articles in a peer-reviewed journal and four chapters in different academic books. She taught at primary schools for 17 years. During her teaching career, she also served as a Foundation Phase head of department.

Muzwa Mukwambo is a lecturer at the University of Namibia, Katima Mulilo Campus (UNAMKMC), where he teaches Mathematics and Science Education. He holds a Licentiate degree in Physics and Astronomy from Enrique José Varona in Havana, Cuba. He also holds a master's degree from Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa. He has more than 25 years of teaching experience at both secondary and tertiary level. He has published 22 research articles in international and Namibian journals, presented eight papers at educational conferences and written three academic chapters in research books. His research focus is in indigenous knowledge systems and how they can be woven into science teaching and learning.

Sibusiso Ntshangase is an educational psychologist and a lecturer in the Department of Psychology of Education at UNISA. He has vast experience in teaching a variety of courses in developmental psychology. His research interest includes the study of talent development, intervention for children with psychosocial challenges, as well as African cultural perspectives in child development.

Mary Runo is a senior lecturer in the Department of Special Needs Education at Kenyatta University, Kenya. Currently she is the director of Kenyatta University's Kitui Campus. She has a BA and MA in Special Education from New Jersey State College (USA) and a PhD in Special Needs Education from Kenyatta University. She joined UNISA in 2014 for a postdoctoral fellowship in the Department of Inclusive Education. She has over 35 years of teaching experience in colleges and universities in Kenya. She is a researcher and has published a number of scholarly papers. She supervises postgraduate students and is an external examiner for theses. Her areas of interest are inclusive education with a bias towards intellectual and learning disabilities.

Matshidiso Taole is an associate professor in UNISA's Department of Curriculum and Instructional Studies. She has presented papers at local and international conferences in the field of curriculum and rural education. Her interests are curriculum studies, multigrade teaching, rural education and online learning and teaching. She is presently involved in teaching practice, student supervision and community engagement projects.

Joseph Tchatchoueng is an exchange scholar at Towson University in the USA. He holds a master's degree in Educational Psychology and is completing a PhD in Curriculum Studies at the University of KwaZulu-Natal. His research interest covers areas of special education, inclusive education and curriculum design, instruction and evaluation. He has tutored and lectured at postgraduate and undergraduate level in the University of KwaZulu-Natal's School of Education since 2013.

Lloyd Daniel Nkoli (Dan) Tlale is a senior lecturer in the Department of Psychology of Education at UNISA. He is a recipient of the NRF tracking grant. He joined UNISA after having been a teacher and a teachers' college lecturer for several years. He was previously an education specialist for the Department of Basic Education, supporting and training teachers in inclusive education. His responsibilities include teacher training (tuition), postgraduate supervision, research and community engagement projects. His research interests include gifted child education, orphans and vulnerable children, children in conflict with the law, social justice and qualitative research. He has published book chapters as well as articles, and has presented papers at various local and international conferences.

Part 1

Conceptualising inclusive education

12 Communication in inclusive settings

Mary Runo

Chapter purpose

Bornman and Tönsing (2011) state that the term 'communication' comes from the Latin word *communicare*, which means 'to share or make common'. For the purposes of this chapter, we discuss effective communication with learners with disabilities and other vulnerable learners in the setting of inclusive schools, and theories and philosophies about communication relevant to the needs of learners with disabilities. A definition and modes of communication will be provided, followed by an examination of alternative technologies used for communicating with learners with disabilities and a brief discussion of the barriers to communication. Etiquette and acceptable terminology about talking to learners with disabilities is discussed. The chapter concludes with a short description of the importance of collaborating with parents.

OPENING CASE STUDY

In 2010, a young boy called Kabelo Sizwa, paralysed from the waist down and non-speaking, passed his primary education with flying colours. He was able to select any high school of his choice. When his parents dropped him at his new high school, the principal, Mr Jobo, would not admit him. He provided reasons why it was impossible to admit Kabelo to his school. He said that his school could not physically accommodate students in wheelchairs and that he was not ready to make physical adjustments to the school environment and buildings, because it was just too expensive. He went on to explain to Mr and Mrs Sizwa that all of Kabelo's prospective teachers were trained as subject specialists and not as special needs teachers. They would not know how to communicate with him. Kabelo would not fit into this school. Although Kabelo and Mr and Mrs Sizwa were disappointed, they had no choice but to leave.

They eventually took Kabelo to a special school, where they experienced similar attitudes from the principal and staff.

Many teachers in special schools do not know how to communicate with their learners and they do not know where to get help about this.

Stop and reflect

Use Kabelo's case study to discuss what you would have done if you were the principal of this school.

1. How would you have reacted to Mr and Mrs Sizwa's asking you to register Kabelo at your school?
2. Would you have used different or similar arguments to include or exclude Kabelo? Explain your answer.
3. To whom could you have gone to get more information about including Kabelo in your school?
4. How could you help a learner who has communication disabilities in your class?

5. Kabelo is a bright boy – how could you have used his assets to further his education (asset-based theory is discussed in Chapter 7)?
6. From which school do you think Kabelo would benefit the most? Explain your answer.

As stated in Chapter 1, a fundamental component of inclusive education states that regardless of disability, learners are encouraged to be educated together (NDoE, 2001). All learners, with or without disability, are urged to attend the nearest district school in the neighbourhood within their community. Therefore, as in Kabelo's case, no school management has the right to reject a learner on the basis of disability.

Schools are expected to reconceptualise and adjust to accommodate all learners' learning styles, instead of learners being expected to fit into the school system. This movement is in line with the social model (as explained in Chapter 7) and the NDoE's White Paper 6 on inclusion of learners with special needs (NDoE, 2001). Both of these documents, as well as many more, advocate that society should become more inclusive and welcome learners with impairments into their schools. There are, however, considerations to be made for inclusion to be successful: teachers and the school management body need to be trained in making the school environment barrier-free and accommodating for all learners experiencing disabilities.

What is communication in inclusive education?

Kabelo's case highlights important information about communication and inclusive education. One of the principles of inclusive education is a need for open, respectful communication between learners, teachers, parents and community (Tchatchoueng, 2014). A learner's ability to communicate with his or her peers and with adults is critical to his or her development and success at school and in life (Dednam, 2011). Learners with disabilities may experience challenges with this because they communicate in ways that are different from the norm. However, communication is a prerequisite for future academic learning and life achievement.

In classrooms, all learners have the opportunity to learn to communicate with those who communicate in non-conventional or non-traditional ways (Dednam, 2011). For instance, whereas learners without disabilities enjoy the oral/aural, or writing and reading, in the typical way, those with disabilities require other means of communication (Tchatchoueng, 2014). Most learners who have significant difficulties with communication need to use alternative means of communication, which may include sign language, facilitated communication, Braille, picture exchange and communication boards.

In addition, teachers should provide differentiated instruction, linkages, transitions and pace of teaching and learning in their classes so that all learners can access the learning. Tchatchoueng (2014)

suggests that for inclusive schools to provide learning opportunities to all learners, school managers and teachers must be aware of the many alternative means of communication available. It is important to remember that learners with communication disabilities can learn with their peers in an inclusive class.

Communication disabilities may occur before, during or after birth. Learners with these disabilities become vulnerable both in school and in our communities, because people without disabilities do not consider communication disabilities as a barrier. Hence, it is often observed that individuals with communication disabilities are not given an opportunity to make their own decisions and do not speak for themselves (Werner, 2012; Department of Human Services, 2012).

People without communication disabilities often make decisions for those with communication disabilities, even though the person with communication disabilities is mature and intelligent enough to make his or her own decisions. In many instances, the person's caregivers are addressed, instead of the person with the communication disability himself or herself. For example, it is not unusual to hear someone ask a caregiver or a parent, 'What is wrong with that person?' or 'Can the child feed himself?'

This level of ignorance, attitude and perception often exists as a result of a lack of education about, and awareness of, people who experience communication problems. The problem is that those with disabilities live in our society, but are not considered part of our society. However, there are some positive stories of youth with disabilities experiencing communication difficulties who have managed to develop independent living skills and can do almost everything alone.

Read the case study that follows about Helen Keller, born in 1880 in Alabama in the USA. To this day, she remains a leading 20th-century personality for achieving remarkable gains in communication among the **deaf-blind** community. She was deaf and blind herself. With the help of one teacher, Anne Sullivan, Helen not only learnt how to communicate differently, but changed humankind.

deaf-blind: a combined vision and hearing disability. It limits the activities of a learner and restricts full participation in school and society to such a degree that it calls for society to provide specific services, environmental alterations and/or technology (Nordic, n.d.)

CASE STUDY

Helen Keller was born a normal baby, but at 19 months old she suffered an illness that left her deaf and blind. Due to her condition, Helen developed such aggressive behaviour that it made teaching her almost impossible. She had only three senses: smell, touch and taste. Even though Helen had this condition, her teacher, Anne Sullivan, attempted all strategies to teach Helen gestures, finger spelling, tactile sign language, speech and reading Braille. Helen was intelligent but because of her deaf-blindness, her intelligence was hidden. She tried to understand why other people around her were using other types of communication and would feel their lips as they talked. This frustrated her even more, which intensified her aggressive behaviour. In 1904, at the age of 24, Helen graduated, *cum laude*, from Radcliffe College as the first deaf-blind person to earn a Bachelor of Arts degree. She was the first woman to be awarded an honorary degree from Harvard University and many more after that. She has travelled widely around the world.

Source: Adapted from McGinnity, B.L., Seymour-Ford, J. & Andries, K.J. (2004). *Helen Keller*. Watertown, MA: Perkins History Museum, Perkins School for the Blind.

Helen Keller's true story is evidence that disability does not handicap individuals. Rather, it is the environment and society that handicaps and limits individuals with disabilities.

Stop and reflect

1. Share with a colleague a good story in which you helped someone in need. Try to describe the happy feeling it gave you.
2. Would you be able to teach a learner who experiences a communication disability? Can you verbalise your biases towards these learners?
3. Search for more positive stories about Helen Keller and apply the lessons you have read about in your own teaching and learning.

Theories and philosophies of communication

In the previous section, you were introduced to the definition of communication and various modes of communication. In this section, you will learn about theories, philosophies and principles that support communication for learners with disabilities. These include Vygotsky's social development theory, social change and Afrocentricity, and behaviourism. Finally, you will be reminded of the philosophy of *ubuntu* and how it applies to inclusive school settings.

Vygotsky's social development theory

Vygotsky (1978) understands disabilities from a social-cultural developmental phenomenon perspective, and not from the perspective of a biological impairment that results in psychological consequences. He believed that disability is only considered an abnormality when it is judged from a social context (Vygotsky, 1983).Vygotsky's social interactionist theory describes language development as playing a role in the social interaction between a child and adult and, in Kabelo's case, between a learner and a teacher. He believed that language is developed through the use of social contacts and the relationships developed between adults and the developing child (Lue, 2001). According to Shaffer et al. (2002), when children collaborate with adults or older people socially, they are assisted both cognitively and linguistically.

Vygotsky's theory emphasised the fundamental role of social interaction in the development of cognition and believed that community plays a central role in the process of making meaning (Vygotsky, 1978). His work (1983, cited in Gindis, 1999) suggests that the defects in the ear and eye for those who are considered deaf and blind may vary psychologically in different cultural and social environments. In other words, the development of psychological consequences differs from one context to another, including the social

class from which the individual with disability comes. According to Vygotsky, the primary problem of a disability is not the sensory aspect (blindness, deafness, physical disability and others), but the social implications – which, in essence, bring about challenges in communication (Gindis, 1999). Disabilities prevent learners from mastering the social skills that they would rightly have mastered had they developed normally as their peers did. Due to a lack of social skills, individuals with disability tend to be socially deprived, which creates secondary challenges.

Vygotsky believed that if adults created tools of communication, learners with disabilities may be able to learn. Learners with disabilities will not be able to make any meaning in the classroom if the educator does not make an effort to enable effective communication. According to Vygotsky, 'learning is a necessary and universal aspect of the process of developing culturally organized, specifically human psychological function' (1978, cited in Gindis, 1999).

Social change and Afrocentricity

According to Asante (1991), education is fundamentally a social phenomenon, the ultimate purpose of which is to socialise all learners. Therefore, sending a child to school gives that child an opportunity to prepare to become part of a social group. Asante (1991) studied the place of the African American child in the education system. His findings concluded that the African American child felt like an alien or an outsider, because he or she was not included in the system that was expected to accommodate him or her. Failure of the school to embrace multicultural diversity excludes some learners from the entire school system, including the curriculum taught. According to Asante, (2009) the Afrocentricity approach seeks, in every situation, the appropriate centrality of the African. Asante further explains that teachers should provide opportunities for learners to learn about and value all their people, concepts and history.

Schools reflect the societies that develop them. In education, centricity refers to a perspective that involves locating learners within the contexts of their own cultural references so that they can relate socially and psychologically to other cultural perspectives. According to Sotuku and Duku (2014), centricity is a concept that can be applied to any culture. In this case, we can apply it to the culture of those with communication disabilities. The centricity paradigm is supported by research showing that the most productive method of teaching any learner is to place them in a group within the centre of the context of knowledge (Asante, 1991).

Learners with disabilities are not well socialised because of the standards that have been put in place by those without disabilities and which exclude them from the larger community. One such way of excluding learners with disabilities from culture is through poor, or lack of, communication. Dei (1995) suggested that in a 'Parents of black children' meeting, the parents questioned the impact of black

history on learners who are already failing Mathematics and Science. Parents felt that their children could learn much better if they were able to relate to the materials and information taught and if their teachers could teach learners about black achievement in Mathematics and Science. Learners would then apply such information to their everyday learning, giving them a platform from which to identify themselves with earlier black achievers.

The Afrocentric idea in education promotes the idea that for inclusivity to work and be felt in schools, it requires space – for alternative, and sometimes opposing, paradigms to impact on learners. Such an impact can only take place if the curriculum is broad-based and there is diversity in methods and strategies of teaching learners with diversity, including those with different abilities (Dei, 1995; Van Wyk, 2014). According to Banks (1993), learners come with diverse personal experiences from their homes, families and communities; if teachers drew from those experiences to inform the content they teach, it would encourage the inclusion of specific values and social ethics, and even improve learners' conduct.

Learners with disabilities have already developed their own communication styles and methods before they join the school system (Van Wyk, 2014). It would be appropriate if teachers could find out which communication needs these learners have and how best they would like to communicate with both the teacher and their fellow learners. The home knowledge that learners bring to school allows them use their culture to question the knowledge they learn in school critically (Ladson-Billings, 1990; Dei, 1995).

The implication of this theory for the communication needs of learners with disabilities is that if learners with communication disabilities were taught indigenous communication from African contexts, and taught how communication took place in families, they may be able to learn to communicate in the same way. By attempting to move away from predominately Western academic circles, the Afrocentric paradigm attempts to return to the original inclusive community to which all children belong (Sotuku & Duku, 2014; Van Wyk, 2014). Communication methods practised in the family and in community circles are then normalised.

Stop and reflect

In South African communities, most people with disabilities lived peacefully with their families – unlike today, when they are separated. What, then, should be done to return to the original African modes of communication?

Behaviourism

Behaviourism can be applied to communication, as it focuses on the function of language, the stimulus that evokes verbal responses and the consequences of the performance (Lue, 2001).

Responses to verbal communication are included in Skinner's work on verbal behaviour. Skinner's (1957) concept of behaviourism can be applied to communication in the environment in that the community can provoke and reinforce non-verbal and verbal communication. This theory centres on the idea that learners are conditioned by the environment and reinforced by their verbal and non-verbal communication. Skinner (1957) emphasises schedules of reinforcement as the primary motivator in speech, language and communication. He believed that people are the primary cause of communication disorders. Therefore, as educators who have been charged with the responsibility of learners, we should be able to communicate with all of them. Skinner argued that children learn language based on the behaviourist reinforcement principles by associating words with meaning (Ambridge & Lieven, 2011).

The philosophy of *ubuntu*

Although the philosophy of *ubuntu* has been discussed in previous chapters, this chapter focuses on the concept of communication with learners with disabilities in Africa. According to Donohue and Bornman (2014), inclusive education is not an entirely new concept in Africa, and has its roots in principles of *ubuntu*. Africans have always lived and co-existed as a large community. When linking the philosophy of *ubuntu* and learners who experience communication disabilities, teachers should reach out to learners experiencing differences because they are people first and foremost, and reaching out to them is 'human kindness'. For example, a learner completing schooling because you played a part in accommodating him or her in your class by removing communication barriers is, in itself, *ubuntu* (Swart & Phasha, 2011).

In this chapter, we focus on how to communicate with your learners who have disabilities. It is important that you see learners with disabilities as individuals first, and then see the disability or limitation. Teachers and the school community should consider themselves agents of social change and strive to provide for learners with disabilities to learn alongside their peers. Effective communication in school settings cannot be overemphasised as one of the most influential tools of social change.

We have learnt about various theories, principles and practices that support communication for learners with communication disabilities. In the section that follows, you will learn about various methods you can use when communicating with learners with disabilities. You will learn about aided and unaided communications.

Definition and modes of communication

'Communication' is defined as 'the imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing, or using some other medium' (Scherba de Valenzuela, 1992). It means sending or receiving information,

such as telephone calls or an e-mail. It takes place between two or more individuals. The information conveyed may include facts, ideas, concepts, opinions, beliefs, attitudes, instructions and even emotions. Communication may be intentional or unintentional and may involve conventional or unconventional signals; it may take linguistic or non-linguistic forms and may occur through spoken or other modes (Scherba de Valenzuela, 1992). In this chapter, we focus on you as a teacher. We shall attempt to show you how you may communicate with learners who experience disabilities in inclusive settings.

The importance of communication in an inclusive setting

Hardly a day goes by without our communicating with a friend or a stranger, giving information, asking for information or just having fun moments. This is because we are social beings and language enables us to manipulate the environment through communication. Communication is a basic human right and is essentially fundamental to our everyday life as social beings (James, 2001). We use communication to meet our needs, share happiness and sadness, question and answer each other, or face circumstances, share information, describe events, complain and argue, teach and give feedback, among others. As teachers, we spend our entire day communicating with learners and our colleagues at work and we extend this to parents, discussing their children's performance.

It is therefore necessary to know how to communicate with learners in schools – especially in inclusive settings, where there are learners with all types of abilities and disabilities. It is not unusual to witness schools' unwillingness to admit learners with communication disabilities just because the school's staff do not know how to assist and work with them, as in Kabelo's case.

There are several modes of communication that teachers may use in class. These include verbal communication, written communication, and body language. Let us explain each of them.

Verbal communication

Verbal communication involves sending a message through a spoken language that is understood by the sender and the receiver. Such messages come through listening to one another, receiving a call, face-to-face talk, or even listening to a teacher as her or she talks.

Written communication

Written communication involves sending messages through written symbols or print. The written print is understood by both sender and receiver.

Body language

Body language is communication that is non-verbal (Jooste & Jooste, 2011). For example, if a learner in your class rests his or her head on

the desk, you, as the teacher, would be quick to ask what the matter is. The child may be sick, or sleepy, or even bored with classwork. In other words, he or she is communicating or sending a message to the receiver. The sender can communicate these non-verbal messages using parts of the body; the most commonly used are facial expressions, postures and gestures. As we shall see later, learners with disabilities often use non-verbal communication when communicating with adults and other children (Jooste & Jooste, 2011). For example, a learner may pull an adult's clothes or hand because he or she wants to go to the toilet or wants some food.

Ways in which people with disabilities communicate

Communicating with people with disabilities is no different from communicating with those without disabilities (Jooste & Jooste, 2011). It is important to know individuals' needs and to meet those needs without prejudice (Van Wyk, 2014). As mentioned earlier, respecting the rights of each learner is fundamental. However, the level of communication may depend on the individual's mental ability, the subject matter, and environmental factors.

People with disabilities may develop non-conventional and antisocial means of communication, which may include behaviours that are aggressive towards themselves and/or others. Others may display withdrawal behaviours, but an observant adult may still be able to see some elements of communication. Others, still, may communicate through written symbols or pictures. The following are examples of learners with communication barriers:

- A girl with autism was served food at school by a teacher whom the girl did not like. She jumped onto the female teacher and knocked her down, pouring the food onto the table.
- A small, withdrawn boy of eight years old would draw figures of women in flames every time he was given an assignment in class. After studying several drawings, the teacher decided to consult an art therapist. She came to the conclusion that the boy was trying to communicate violence or displeasure to someone. He was asked to talk about the woman in the fire. He wrote his mother's name, and that he was so angry with his mother that he wanted her burnt to death. After several sessions of counselling, the boy opened up and communicated that he was angry with his mother because she had left his father.

It is teachers' and caregivers' responsibility to observe undesirable behaviour in a child with a communication disability. They need to be mindful of recognising non-verbal acts or patterns that the learner displays so that they can find ways to promote socially acceptable communication behaviours.

Stop and reflect

1. Reflect on your past teaching experiences, and share any experiences you have had of a situation like the ones in the examples above in your class. How did you solve the problem?
2. At the beginning of a new academic year, you are assigned a class of 25 leaners, of which three learners experience disabilities: one has poor vision, one is hard of hearing and another stutters very badly. How would you organise your class, your learners and yourself to prioritise effective communication among all of your learners?

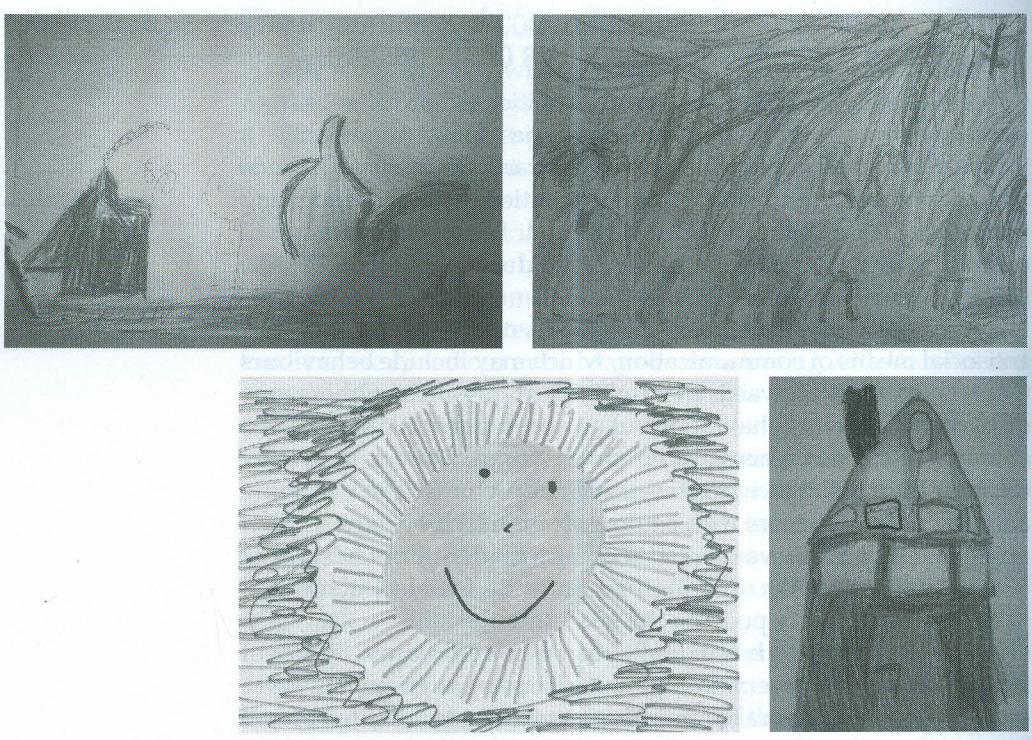


Figure 12.1: Drawings communicate feelings and unearth hidden emotions

Alternative technologies for communicating with learners with disabilities

In this section, we introduce several alternative technologies for communicating with learners. Learners with disabilities require support – not only in understanding the teaching, but also in participating in learning activities. Alternative technologies can assist your learners with this. They include: assistive technologies (AT), augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) and information and communications technology (ICT).

Assistive technology (AT)

assistive technology (AT): any tool or device for assisting learners with disabilities do activities more comfortably, quickly and independently. AT can be low or high cost, and low tech or high tech

Assistive technology is a general term covering assistive, adaptive and rehabilitation devices for individuals with disabilities.

ATs are used to maintain, increase and improve the functional capacity of learners with disabilities so that they can learn alongside their more abled peers. They enable the individual to gain independence by performing tasks that they could not have performed without them. When ATs are made available in inclusive classrooms, learners are given an opportunity to access learning and teaching activities in a variety of ways. Some examples of assistive technology that you may have come across in your teaching career are as follows:

- A learner with low vision may require large-print texts or magnifying lenses;
- A learner with physical disabilities may require a wheelchair, walker, canes, crutches, prosthetic devices, page turners, modified pens, or adapted page grips;
- A learner who is hard of hearing may require a hearing aid; and
- Computer-assisted instruction software is available to all learners.

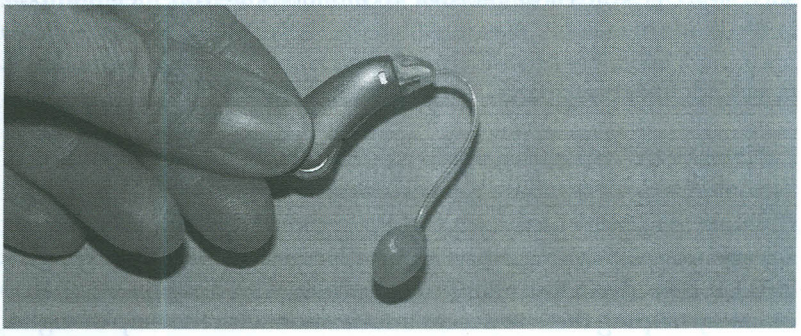


Figure 12.2: Assistive technologies in the classroom

Augmentative alternative communication (AAC)

AAC incorporates a variety of methods that individuals with communication disabilities or restrictions experience during the production or understanding of language (Bornman & Tönsing, 2011). These methods are useful to those with a wide range of disabilities, such as those with intellectual disability, speech and language disabilities, autism and cerebral palsy.

AAC has been in operation for many years. In the 1950s, AAC was used for some people who had lost their speech following surgical procedures. In the 1960s and 1970s, it was introduced into mainstream classes to learners with communication disabilities to help them acquire skills for independence. In the 1980s, AAC became a field in its own right. This saw a speedy growth in technology; many communication devices were invented.

There are two categories of AAC: those that are aided and those that are unaided (Bornman & Tönsing, 2011).

Aided communications

Aided communications are methods of communication that use additional equipment or external devices, ranging from paper, pictures, or symbols to computers and voice-generating devices. We can categorise these further into two main categories: low tech and high tech (Bornman & Tönsing, 2011). Low-tech communication devices include papers, pictures, symbols and text. High-tech devices include devices that require batteries, such as pointers, toys, talking books, computers and other electronic devices that are both aural and visual.

Unaided communications

Unaided communications do not require additional equipment or external tools (Bornman & Tönsing, 2011). They include facial expressions, vocalisations, gestures and sign languages. Body language and facial expressions are some of the informal vocalisations and gestures that are considered natural communication (Bornman & Tönsing, 2011). We use these natural gestures and facial expressions in our everyday life to indicate displeasure or enjoyment. For individuals with severe disabilities, such signs, gestures and informal vocalisations are considered important – they are the only way in which the individual can communicate his or her needs. The advantage of these communication tools – hands, faces and other body parts – is that they are always available.

Information and communications technology (ICT)

ICT has, in recent times, played an expanding role in enhancing communication among individuals with disabilities (Tosun & Baris, 2011). It is used as a tool to improve learners with disabilities' quality of life by helping them to access information with the help of digital media through reading, writing, hearing and visual processes. ICT is important to the lives of learners with disabilities because it reduces discrimination and gives all learners equal opportunities to engage with everyone around them and in their society (Tosun & Baris, 2011).

The following are some of the ICTs available to assist learners with disabilities in your class: screen readers (for example Window-Eyes), convertors of local language to Braille, touch screens, eye-tracking devices, Braille printers, and specialised keyboards.

Barriers to communication

Communication is an important resource in our daily lives. The inability to communicate becomes a hindrance (Dednam, 2011; Donald et al., 2014). Individuals with communication barriers may feel excluded from society because they are considered 'unable', even when they have not been given a chance. There are various barriers that may hinder people with disabilities from engaging in effective communication (Dednam, 2011). These barriers may be caused by intrinsic or extrinsic factors.

Intrinsic barriers

Intrinsic barriers include language, psychological and physiological barriers.

Language barriers

Language barriers may arise if the sender of information and the receiver do not understand each other. One person may misinterpret the information. The sender may use unfamiliar jargon, or there may be difficulties with articulation, voice and fluency (Friend & Bursuck, 1996).

Psychological barriers

When learners with disabilities are stressed, their ability to communicate with their teachers and peers may be affected (Donald et al., 2014; Dednam, 2011). They may suffer humiliation from their peers in class, which may inhibit their ability to communicate effectively even further. Communicating in class may become a nightmare or even catastrophic, resulting in the learner withdrawing or becoming aggressive. It is not surprising to find a learner with emotional and/or behavioural disorder involved in undesirable behaviour because he or she is being ridiculed or punished for wrongdoing (Donald et al., 2014).

Physiological barriers

Physiological barriers may occur when the learner receiving the information experiences reduced hearing abilities, for example, and may not grasp the entire conversation, especially if there is background noise. He or she may not be able to pick up non-verbal cues (Donald et al., 2014).

Extrinsic barriers

Extrinsic factors include physical, systematic and attitudinal barriers.

Physical barriers

Physical barriers to communication are those concerned with geographical distances and the learner's location. Ideally, the learner should be seated close to the teacher so that he or she can observe facial and body gestures (Swart & Pettipher, 2011). There may be differences in understanding different accents.

Systematic barriers

Systematic barriers may exist in a school community if there are ineffective information systems and communication channels. Information-sharing systems in classrooms, in the school and with parents need to be communicated so that everyone has similar expectations (Swart & Pettipher, 2011).

Attitudinal barriers

Attitudinal barriers are the most difficult barriers to deal with in inclusive school settings. Different cultures have different communication norms, expectations and prejudices. These need to be discussed so that everyone has similar understandings of the needs of learners with disabilities (Donald et al., 2014; Swart & Pettipher, 2011). People may also hear what they want to hear and arrive at incorrect conclusions.

Many schools, including those that are inclusive, resist change; others lack the motivation to change to allow learners with disabilities to fit in (Tchatchoueng, 2014). Negative attitudes affect not only the teaching in the classroom, but also the provision of materials at school level. Often, managers will complain that the money allocated to the school cannot cover assistive devices for a learner requiring a hearing aid or a calliper. Inclusive schools need to ensure that all learners access not only the school, but also the teaching and learning offered by school, alongside their peers without disability, without injustice, and to the maximum benefit (Tchatchoueng, 2014; Donald et al., 2014).

Stop and reflect

All learners have the ability to communicate, although not everyone communicates in the same way. Environmental barriers may hinder effective communication. Take a critical look at your school and list all possible barriers that may hinder effective communication among learners with disabilities. Share your identified barriers with a friend.

Etiquette required when communicating with learners with disabilities

In this section, we discuss the etiquette required when communicating with learners with disabilities (Dednam, 2011; Tchatchoueng, 2014; Donald et al., 2014). For inclusive education schools to do justice to their learners, educators need to know how best to communicate with these learners. Learners with disabilities often perceive a rude, patronising or thoughtless manner to be more offensive than language itself. The most appropriate way to behave is to relax and draw on your common sense. Observe how the learners' peers or teachers communicate and, more importantly, talk to the learners and ask how they would like to work together. Communication levels will depend on the degree of disability (Hutchinson & Atkinson, 2010).

CASE STUDY

Mrs Nangu, who teaches an inclusive class, invited Dora (who has a moderate intellectual disability) to sit in front of the class so that she could pay more attention to her. Mrs Nangu kept shouting at Dora because she was not finishing her work timeously and whatever she did was wrong. To prevent Dora from getting frustrated, she required simpler tasks and less work.

Dora's parents decided to do Dora's homework so that she was not in trouble with her class teacher. Her school friends ridiculed Dora because she could not do anything right. Dora felt bad that no one understood her; even though she was much older than the other learners in her class, she always came last in assessments.

Mrs Nangu did not know that Dora had an even greater intellectual disability than she had originally thought. Both Dora and Mrs Nangu were frustrated, because they could not communicate effectively.

Stop and reflect

Refer to Dora's case study. Say how you would communicate with Dora if you were Mrs Nangu, and discuss the relationship you would like to develop with her. Discuss this with a colleague.

Table 12.1: Etiquette tips for communicating with learners with disabilities

Etiquette tips for communicating with learners with disabilities	
General etiquette	• Acknowledge that learners with disabilities are people first and foremost. • Respect them as you would respect other learners in the class. • Create an atmosphere of acceptance. • Address them by their name. • If necessary, touch them on their arm. • It is a courtesy to ask them how you can assist them before you start helping them. • Ask them how they would like to communicate. • Speak to the whole class and ask them not to use derogatory terms. • If you cannot understand what the learner is saying, ask his or her peers to assist you. • Never ridicule learners. • Be patient when communicating with these learners. • Place them in a quiet place in the classroom. • Praise them appropriately. • Avoid interrupting them when they are speaking. • Give them an opportunity to show their strengths.
Speaking skills	• Speak clearly. • Use a respectful volume and tone. • Maintain eye contact. • Use short, uncomplicated sentences. • Keep your explanations brief and regularly check their understanding. • Do not dominate the conversation – allow two-way discussions. • If necessary, calmly ask them to rephrase in their own words. • Be patient: take your time.
Caregivers	• Address the learner, not the caregiver – but keep the conversation simple enough for the learner to comprehend.

Etiquette tips for communicating with learners with disabilities	
Teaching	• When teaching, avoid walking around the room, as it is distracting. • Make sure that they can see you. • Reduce background noise. • A multisensory approach to teaching and learning would benefit these learners– provide auditory, visual, kinaesthetic and tactile teaching and learning activities. • Set deliberate, short-term goals. • Provide regular feedback – this helps in mastering concepts. • Be cautious about safety at all times. • Observe them to determine whether they have understood you. Some may blink their eyes, turn their heads or nod, stretch their hands or make sounds to indicate this. • Simplify your communication by using facial and body language. • Keep all assistive devices nearby for learners' easy access. • Have available computerised devices and communication boards, and posters of sign language. • Use modelling to expand learners' language. • Give them responsibilities.
Visually impaired learners • If a learner is using a Braille machine, slate, stylus or large print, ask the learner to teach you so that you can assist the learner. • Work closely with Braille transcribers in the school. • When writing on the board, read what you have written aloud for visually impaired learners so that they can also follow your instructions.	
Hearing-impaired learners • Avoid disadvantaging the learner who is lip-reading and learning from your body language as you speak. • Have a sign-language interpreter accompany the hearing-impaired learner in the classroom and in social places, so they can participate in conversations and socialise with ease. • Make sure that they look at you as you speak so they can read your facial expressions. Some learners can read lips. • As a teacher, it would help if you knew basic sign language.	
Speech and language disorders • Avoid using inferences, metaphorical language, or idiomatic expressions. • Provide an audio recorder so that learners with disabilities can replay the teaching and listen at their leisure to the discussion. • Use visual information such as diagrams, signs, objects and pictures. • Provide meaningful contexts for practising speech skills.	
Autistic learners • Allow them more time to process new information. • Their receptive and expressive language may be limited. • Social concepts such as greetings, 'thank you', 'please', and 'after you' can be taught with demonstrations and pictures. • Pair learners so that they can learn to work and play together.	

Acceptable terminology to use when referring to learners with disabilities

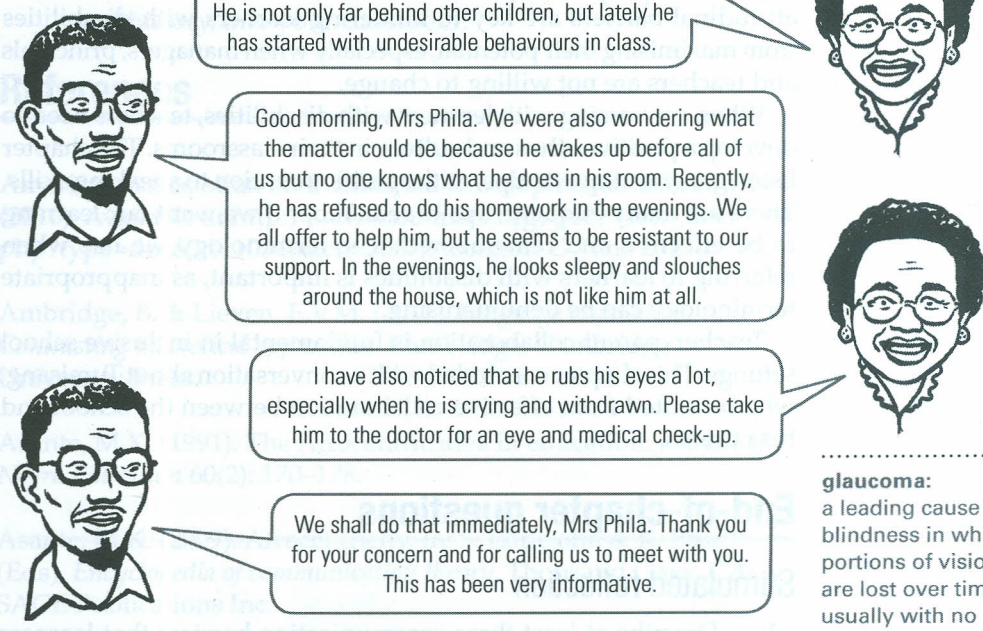
In this section, we introduce you to terminology that should be avoided when referring to learners with disabilities because they are obsolete, dehumanising, degrading and derogatory. Society should be mindful of using acceptable terminology when referring to individuals with disabilities (NDoE, 2003). Table 12.2 shows what is acceptable and what is not acceptable terminology.

Table 12.2: Words to avoid and acceptable terminology to use

Words to avoid	Appropriate words to use
Slow learners	Learners who experience barriers to learning
Cripple or crippled	A learner with a physical disability
Wheelchair bound; confined to a wheelchair	A wheelchair user
Insane, mad, lunatic, maniac, mental, neurotic	A learner with a mental illness
A mongoloid, a downy	A learner with Down syndrome
Suffering from a disability	A learner with a disability
Mentally retarded, mentally handicapped, defective, feeble-minded, moron, imbecile	A learner with an intellectual disability
The blind	A learner with a visual impairment or visual loss
Deaf and dumb	A learner with hearing loss or impairment. (Note that some literature uses the terms 'the Deaf' or 'the Deaf community'.)

Collaboration with parents

The importance of collaboration with parents cannot be overemphasised. Constant reporting and gathering of information is imperative if parents and teachers want to know the learner better and provide optimal learning experiences (Tchatchoueng, 2014). Therefore, an educator should develop a welcoming atmosphere to encourage open communication with parents (Donald et al., 2014).



Tumisang was taken to the closest hospital, where he was diagnosed with a visual problem known as **glaucoma**.

glaucoma: a leading cause of blindness in which portions of vision are lost over time, usually with no warning signs or symptoms prior to vision deterioration

Conclusion

In this chapter, we discussed the importance of effective communication skills in inclusive settings. We looked at different modes of verbal and non-verbal communication. Communicating with individuals with disabilities is no different from communicating with those without disabilities. We need to be mindful of, and sensitive to, the communication needs of learners with disabilities.

We learnt about Vygostky's social development theory and his contribution to communication with learners with disabilities. He believed that language developed through the use of social contact, and that learners can learn to communicate. Asante's philosophy of Afrocentricity and the need for social change was discussed. Asante advocates for schools to change and teach indigenous education in African contexts. We then explored Skinner's theory of behaviourism, which focused on the function of language. The philosophy of *ubuntu*, which calls for human kindness as the foundation of a good nation, was briefly mentioned.

We saw that some learners can learn alongside their peers without much support, but that others require assistive technology (AT) to maintain, increase and improve their capacity to function in their everyday lives. The need for AT, therefore, cannot be overemphasised: it is not only a tool, but part of learners' lives in enabling them to become more independent. We talked about aided and unaided communication.

We examined a variety of barriers to communication and saw that attitudinal barriers are key to hindering learners with disabilities from maximising their potential, especially when managers, principals and teachers are not willing to change.

When conversing with learners with disabilities, teachers need to develop a positive ethos and culture in their classrooms. The chapter listed general etiquette tips, with specific attention to speaking skills. There are many etiquette tips to remember if we want our learning to be effective and remembered. The terminology we use when referring to learners with disabilities is important, as inappropriate terminology can be dehumanising.

Teacher–parent collaboration is fundamental in inclusive school settings. This chapter concluded with a conversation about Tumisang, who benefited from effective collaboration between the school and his parents.

End-of-chapter questions

Stimulated reflection

1. Describe at least three communication barriers that learners with disabilities may experience.
2. Why do you think it is unacceptable to talk about learners 'suffering' from a disability?

Descriptive reflection

3. Describe a classroom adaptation that you could make for each of these communication barriers. Explain why you would do this.
4. If you noted that a colleague was not being respectful towards learner with a disability, what would you do? Refer to the discussion about etiquette tips.

Dialogic reflection

5. Write a plan for how you would ensure that your school embraces the social model of disability and the principle of *ubuntu* when communicating with your learners.
6. If you had a learner in your class who would benefit from using AAC, how would you go about researching the most suitable technology for this learner?

Critical reflection

7. Inclusive education advocates that schools and society should reconceptualise about how they embrace learners with disabilities. What does this mean to you?
8. How would you introduce Asante's Afrocentricity approach, which suggests that teachers should provide opportunities for learners to learn about and value all their people, concepts and history, into your classroom?

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