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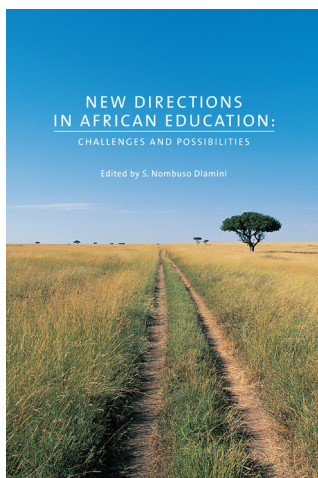
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NEW DIRECTIONS
IN AFRICAN EDUCATION:
CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

Edited by S. Nombuso Dlamini

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A COMPARISON OF INSTITUTIONAL DISCRIMINATORY PRACTICES AGAINST PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN NORTH AMERICA AND AFRICA: CASES IN ZIMBABWE AND CANADA

Zephania Matanga

ABSTRACT

This chapter makes a cross-disability discussion of institutional discriminatory practices against people with disabilities in Zimbabwe and Canada. The author explores the negative attitudes toward people with disabilities in economic, social, political, and intellectual structures in these societies. This analytical comparison between Canada and Zimbabwe demonstrates that discriminatory practices against people with disabilities are not confined to the developing world; rather, they are global. The chapter provides deeper insight into the challenges facing people with disabilities and offers a discussion of current policy developments and institutional initiatives that are working to address these challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Since time immemorial people with disabilities have been isolated, ostracized, and relegated to charity, medical, psychological, rehabilitation and, recently, to a few integrated institutions. These austere institutions are administered by able-bodied professionals who are, in most cases, insensitive to the needs of their clients. Also, until recently, public policies have not reflected the interests of handicapped people. Yet even the current policies that attempt to incorporate the interests of people with disabilities are designed and implemented by able-bodied professionals in ways that force the handicapped to try and fit themselves into the able-bodied world. This chapter is based on data collected from Canada and Zimbabwe about the challenges faced by the disabled in these two countries. This analytical comparison yields interesting results, which demonstrate that discriminatory practices against people with disabilities are not confined to developing countries, rather, they percolate throughout the economic, social, political, and intellectual structures of any society, regardless of its development status. The data further indicate that the challenges faced by people with disabilities in these two different contexts are similar and that they are not isolated; rather, they cross national and cultural boundaries. These findings also challenge the notion that discriminatory practices committed against people with disabilities are either self-inflicted by the disability itself or dismissed as isolated incidences and localized problems, which are especially prevalent in and mostly confined to developing countries. Such notions of disability often strip the disabled of their fundamental rights and basic humanity. The assertion here is that, just as slavery, the holocaust, and other forms of oppression are universally considered unacceptable, the ill-treatment of people with disabilities should also be viewed as a universal inequity.

BACKGROUND AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Although a number of policies have been enacted, both in Canada and Zimbabwe, to alleviate the challenges experienced by people with disabilities, there have been few progressive initiatives since people with disabilities continue to experience discriminatory practices. For instance, in 1982, the Government of Canada formalized disability rights in the enactment of the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, particularly in Section 15 of the Canadian Constitution. According to Section 15 of the *Charter*, every individual is equal before and under the law and has the right to equal protection and equal benefit of the law without discrimination and, in particular, without discrimination based on race, national or ethnic origin, colour, religion, sex, age, or mental or physical disability. Over the years, some steps have been taken to ensure that people with disabilities experience the basic human rights as stipulated by Section 15 (Government of Canada, 1982). Yet, to date, such rights have been slow in coming, as indicated by the 2004 Speech from the Throne, in which the Government of Canada stated:

Many Canadians with disability are ready to contribute but confront different obstacles in the workplace and in their communities. Too often families are left on their own to care for a severely disabled relative. Here too, the government of Canada has a role. We want a Canada in which citizens with disabilities have the opportunity to contribute to and benefit from Canada's prosperity – as learners, workers, volunteers, and family members. Canada can not afford to squander the talents of people with disabilities or turn its back on those who seek to provide care and a life of dignity for family members with severe disabilities. (Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2004, p. 1)

Therefore, despite stipulated policies such as stated in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, Canadians with disabilities continue to struggle against discrimination and live in poverty. The discrimination faced by Canadians with disabilities is further demonstrated by the employment gap between Canadians with disabilities and able-bodied aged twenty-five to fifty-four years, which has significantly increased despite the economic boom of the 1990s. More significantly, according

to a Labour-force Participation Survey (Service Canada, 2001), youths with disabilities face challenges in making the transition from school to the labour market, with only 45.7 per cent of youths with disabilities being employed compared to employment rates of 56.6 per cent for youths without disabilities. In general, youths with disabilities are more likely to be unemployed than youths without disabilities (11.2 per cent, compared to 8.5 per cent). The difficulties faced by youths with disabilities in the transition to employment are also apparent in the labour-force participation rates of young people no longer in school. Among youths with disabilities, 53.0 per cent who are out of school are employed and 13.7 per cent are unemployed; the remaining 33 per cent were unaccounted for in the survey. In contrast, among youths without disabilities who are no longer students, 72.3 per cent are employed and 9.1 per cent are unemployed; again, 18.6 per cent of respondents made no response on their employment status (Service Canada, 2001). It is also important to note that according to Statistics Canada (2001), during the working-age years fifteen to sixty-four, persons with disabilities experience great challenge. The employment rates range from 45.7 per cent for youths with disabilities to 51.2 per cent among core-working ages, to 27.3 per cent among older workers with disabilities. These rates are all substantially lower than those of persons without disabilities. As well, 51.3 per cent of working age Canadians with disabilities are not in the labour force at all versus only 20.6 per cent of those without disabilities (Statistics Canada, 2001).

Literature on the plight of the physically disabled in Africa is lacking. What is known is from the United Nations Population Information Network, which indicated that of the almost 800 million people living in the continent, 50 million are disabled. Given the fact that the definition of disability in Africa is very conservative, it is surprising that these statistics are pointing that one in every sixteen Africans has a disability. Moreover, only 2 per cent have access to any form of rehabilitation, 90 per cent of children with mental disability die before age five, and 70 per cent of disabled adults are unemployed and live in poverty. Additionally, in Africa there are factors such as wars, land mines, malnutrition, diseases, poverty, and so on that make disability more widespread than in other parts of the world. As recently as 2005, the United Nations Secretary General Kofi Annan, marking the International Day for Persons with Disabilities, noted that:

Persons with disabilities make up the world's largest minority group. They are disproportionately poor, are more likely to be unemployed, and have higher rates of mortality than the general population. All too often, they do not enjoy the full spectrum of civil, political, social, cultural, and economic rights. For many years, the rights of persons with disabilities were overlooked. (United Nations Enable, 2005, p. 1)

This statement comes fifteen years after the United Nations declaration of a decade for persons with disabilities and sixty years after the Holocaust.

Lifton (1986) has documented how Nazi physicians killed those who were disabled or sick before the Nazis undertook the mass killing of Jews. Yet, compared to the Jewish Holocaust, and to other atrocities of a similar nature, the killing of the disabled did not receive much public outcry when the atrocities were discovered after the war. Commenting on the unequal treatment of the disabled, Woodil (1992) argues, "While much of the study of persons with a mental or physical disability has resulted in less drastic treatment than death, many persons with a disability have been confined, subjected to treatments without their consent, and abused with the tacit or explicit approval of professionals trained in scientific research" (p. 19). Similarly, McGee et al. (1991) state:

In reviewing the programs in more than 200 institutions in the United States and other countries, we have witnessed a pattern of punishment practices such as beatings, isolation, persistent administration of electric shock to parts of the body, the use of psychoactive drugs for chemical restraint, using helmets that emit irritating noise called white sound, masked helmets locked at the neck, persons tied like animals to metal bed frames, turn-of-century straitjacket, and noxious substances squirted in the face and eyes. (pp. 24-25)

In many developing countries, including Zimbabwe, the treatment of the disabled is also serious, especially regarding access to schools, workplaces, and other public institutions. Not providing access to these places is viewed by the able-bodied public as natural, unavoidable, and justifiable. Acquiescence is tantamount to publicly accepted neglect. For example, in Zimbabwe in 1986, the Ministry of Education suspended the recruitment of visually handicapped teachers, citing

the public's negative attitude as a concern. Actually, in one school in Zimbabwe, the head of the school rallied teachers, parents, and students to stage a demonstration against a female visually handicapped teacher. Parents were unwilling to allow this teacher, regardless of her qualifications and excellent teaching experience, to teach their children. Instead of defending the teacher, as it often does with other employees who, in some cases, are corrupt and incompetent, the Ministry of Education quietly removed her from the school and sent her to work at another school designated for blind students. In 1991, Canada witnessed a similar incident involving a visually impaired teacher. A colleague of mine, Patti Simmons, despite his honours degree from McMaster University, his degree in education from the University of Toronto's Faculty of Education, and his excellent record of practice teaching, encountered formidable resistance from Ontario school boards in his employment search. In the end, he was hired at Fort Frances High School as a replacement teacher for one year.

Incidents of discrimination against the disabled are likely to take place almost every day throughout the world and are always dismissed as isolated and insignificant. Since these incidents take place in both developed and developing countries, one can safely argue that discrimination against people with disabilities is not economically based; rather, it is based on negative attitudes and intolerance. This perspective is articulated by Smith (1985) when stating that the general public's typical assumptions about a person with a disability are that he or she is lazy, stupid, unmotivated, and doesn't care. Developing this point further, Beezer (1991) states that in discussing the problem of a visually handicapped job applicant one court made the following observations, which could apply equally to other handicapped persons: "The blind person in our society seems burdened with a double handicap: The first handicap – loss of physical sight – does not appear, however, to present as great an obstacle as the second – society's lack of vision as to the capacity of a blind individual to enjoy a full and a meaningful life despite the loss of physical sight" (*Hoffman v. Ohio Youth Commission*, 13 FEP, case 30, Ohio, 1975).

In 1988 the Zimbabwe Ministry of Education reluctantly changed its discriminatory policies against visually handicapped teachers. Its reluctance was best demonstrated by the non-committal statement in its policy that a "blind teacher may be hired." Under this policy visually handicapped teachers were expected to persuade heads of schools

to hire them, which meant that the heads of schools had the choice to either accept or reject a visually handicapped applicant. Even though the Ministry changed its discriminatory policies, working conditions for visually handicapped teachers continue to be intolerable as teachers are still required to pay their marking assistants from their meagre salaries. More importantly, promotional prospects for the visually handicapped are still very remote.

In Ontario, the prospects for visually handicapped teachers are also bleak, which is demonstrated by the absence of visually handicapped teachers in Toronto public schools. The only places to have hired visually handicapped teachers are Hollywood and Bradford schools in Scarborough, which are residential schools for visually handicapped students. Although the visually handicapped teachers' rights are protected under the Ontario Human Rights Code, discriminatory practices are still exercised in very subtle ways. For instance, on a job application, if an applicant indicates that he or she is blind, he or she is automatically disqualified and never receives a response. If one does not indicate on the application form that he or she is handicapped and this is noticed by the interviewers, chances of employment are narrowed. In the United States, visually handicapped teachers have had to request the intervention of the court to redress this situation.

Teachers' negative attitudes are dangerous to children with disabilities in mainstream schools, as demonstrated by a study conducted by Colman et al. (1987). This study investigated whether or not regular classroom teachers and resource-room teachers systematically differ in their perceptions of the behavioural adjustment of mainstream handicapped pupils in the primary grades in the Washington school district. They found that "regular classroom teachers rated the handicapped pupil sample as significantly more maladjusted than did resource room teachers on the WIPBIC total score on four of the five scale scores" (1987, p. 34). Colman et al. further argue that teacher expectations are powerful determinants of teacher-child classroom interactions. Their study uncovered that approximately one-third of teachers formulate differential expectations of students' classroom competencies and then act upon them in their instructional and management interactions. In other words, handicapped and disadvantaged pupils usually comprise the membership of the less competent group, for whom teachers hold

drastically lowered expectations. “As a result, teachers who fit this profile are very likely to behave in ways that maximize the achievement of the high expectation, more competent pupils and minimize it for the low expectation, less competent pupils. Mainstreamed handicapped pupils are especially at risk for this process” (1987, p. 38). Writing from personal experiences, Martinez (1990) confirms that disabled people face institutional risks in the very early stages of their lives: “Most of the people I have met who work in this field don’t believe that I could have a good quality of life or that I could even live on my own. When I was little, the doctor told my parents that I would never be able to take care of myself and that they should put me away” (p. 3).

In a study about the impact of inclusion in schools, Smith and Smith (2000) uncovered that many teachers were reluctant to work in inclusive ways that accommodate people with disabilities. Inclusion here is defined as the practice in which schools and other public institutions put in place resources in order to accommodate the needs of the disabled population. Smith and Smith reveal a troubling trend, in which teachers are supportive of inclusion in the abstract but argue that they find it unrealistic in their daily dealings with the disabled. Smith and Smith (2000) went further to point out “prior research has indicated that classroom teachers may be very sceptical of inclusion and that they strongly expect that the practice will present inherent problems” (p. 165). In Nova Scotia, Sadhu (2002) conducted a study in which she examined teachers’ perceptions of the conditions under which they provide appropriate education to students with special needs. In this study, teachers’ views on inclusion rendered results similar to those of Smith and Smith, indicating that many teachers found the inclusion of physically disabled students a challenge. Sadhu states that teachers identified inclusion as a challenge because of lack of adequate professional development, material, and human resources.

Another study by Brackenreed (2004) investigated teachers’ perceptions of testing accommodations to the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test for students with special needs. One of the major findings of this study was that:

Items that drew disagreement from the respondents tended to cluster into a distinct group of items that appears to be concerned with alternate test formats such as: extended time limits, reading

a test aloud, reducing the number of items on a page, rewording questions, and teaching test-taking skills. It would appear that most of the teachers perceive that these accommodations do change the nature of what is being assessed, or do contaminate the validity of the testing instrument, which negates the advisability of making comparisons between students with special needs who write the test with these accommodations and students without special needs who do not use these accommodations to the test. (p. 15)

In this regard, inclusion has still retained the fundamental principle of integration. Through integration a student with special needs has to accommodate the school or work activities instead of the activities being adjusted to meet his or her disabling conditions. All these studies indicate that, while in developed countries inclusion has become a politically correct notion, its practical application has not yet served well students with special needs.

In developing countries the trend has been more towards integration as opposed to inclusion, resulting in an increase in special schools that care for the disabled separately from able-bodied students. Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler (2004) argue that the continuing separation of the disabled is in tune with “traditional beliefs among many Zimbabweans, which consider a disabled child inherently different from other children. For this reason, *inter alia*, it made sense to develop separate education systems” (p. 48).

The above are examples of larger problems facing people with disabilities in all spheres of their lives. There is a general absence of acceptance from teachers, professors, students, and the society at large to accommodate people with disabilities. The premise of this chapter is that the perpetuation of discriminatory policies is largely driven by stereotypic attitudes rather than the technical and economic development status of communities and countries. Additionally, this chapter argues that the public’s silence on these issues of discrimination is tantamount to gross neglect and mistreatment.

Attitudinal problems were clearly demonstrated in the two studies set in Zimbabwe and Canada. The Zimbabwean study focused on the integration of visually handicapped teachers into mainstream schools. In this qualitative study, I interviewed twenty-one education officers about the problems visually handicapped teachers face in mainstream classrooms. Although this study dealt with a lot of issues,

in this chapter I have focused on five potential problems: marking, classroom management, involvement in extra-curricular activities, use of audio-visual aids, and community attitudes. The study in Ontario focused on the involvement of people with disabilities in a research organization. This case study examined issues of power and how the staff mediated decision-making processes, economic reward, and the relationship between the researchers and the disabled participants. The study also examined elements of social organization in research, specifically, the social and cultural factors that impede or promote full participation of persons with disabilities in research studies.

The results yielded from these two studies were generally similar in that both studies pointed to negative perceptions as key factors in the way researchers and education officers viewed people with disabilities. The issue is how competent people with disabilities are overshadowed by the negative attitudes of those who work with them.

CURRENT REALITIES OF THE DISABLED IN CONTEXT

To further explore the inequities facing people with disabilities described by Waxman (1990) and others, I decided to take a close look at how people with disabilities are treated in two countries – Canada and Zimbabwe. Canada is an attractive site because of its location in a highly developed part of the world and because it was declared by the United Nations as one of the best countries to live in (Edwards, 2000). Moreover, Canada is well known internationally for promoting and exercising human rights. Zimbabwe was the second choice because it is located in southern Africa and is considered one of the least developed countries in the world. Moreover, like many other African countries, until 1992, Zimbabwe did not have a law safeguarding the interests of disabled people. It therefore provided an opportunity to examine the struggles developing countries face in their efforts to address human-rights issues. Overall, however, the results from these two studies should not be taken as representative of how people with disabilities are treated throughout the world. Broader generalizations require broader sources of comparison; however, it is hoped that the

information provided by these two studies will lead to a wider examination of discrimination in the international community.

The Canadian study, which was based in Toronto, demonstrates how researchers perpetuate handicapped people's dependency by, for example, encouraging them to volunteer their time to projects funded by the government. In contrast, able-bodied researchers receive huge salaries. The idea that people with disabilities should volunteer their time and energy to publicly and privately funded projects and not receive compensation has become an acceptable institutional practice in Canada. People with disabilities are encouraged and convinced to volunteer because researchers argue that the research projects for which they volunteer are intended to benefit the disabled community. The relationship between the disabled volunteer and the able-bodied researcher is euphemistically described as a "partnership" between consumers and researchers; yet, in reality, it is a partnership of the unequal. Writing from a North American perspective, Ysseldyke et al. (1992) argue that research organizations' main motives are to receive funding by pretending that they are promoting the interests of the handicapped. However, 80 per cent of research budgets are spent on salaries for able-bodied people, management activities, and conducting endless meetings hosted in expensive hotels. Ysseldyke et al. further point out that "assessment and decision-making require as much as thirteen to fifteen hours of professional time. If we estimate an average charge of 15 dollars per hour by each professional then the costs of assessment are obviously high" (1992, p. 127). Actually, the main issue is not the exorbitant cost of assessing handicapped persons but the information gained from the assessment. They also observe that, "It costs as much as 1,800 dollars to assess and make decisions for one student and the practical knowledge gained from such activities is marginal at best" (p. 127). In the Canadian context, a report written by Burt Perrin Associates for Evaluation Services, Evaluation and Data Development for Human Resources Development Canada (1999) states:

While the full costs of disability to society are not known, the estimated cost to the federal government of income support programs and provision of goods and services is more than \$6 billion annually. This does not take into account the costs of provincial programs and private sector insurance plans, or the lost income

and foregone taxes from people who are capable of work but who face barriers which prevent them from employment. (p. 1)

In Zimbabwe, using disabled people as fundraising objects is common. The Ministry of Education, as well as schools and churches, capitalize on, for example, the plight of visually handicapped students as a way to secure funding from donor agencies. For instance, one school in Zimbabwe solicited and received funds for building a school dormitory that would house handicapped students, yet not one blind student is a resident of that dormitory. Subjecting human beings to this sophisticated exploitative practice is dehumanizing.

Africa needs to pay special attention to disability issues because, at the moment, it is fertile ground for an uprising of the disability population. Over the last three decades, Africa has experienced numerous civil wars, political unrest, armed struggles against colonialism and apartheid, natural disasters such as droughts, and diseases such as HIV/AIDS, which have produced a higher percentage of people with disabilities, especially among the working-age population. For example, following national independence, Zimbabwe was embroiled in a thirteen-year civil war that left over one million people disabled. The disabled population in Angola and Mozambique, which are countries that were engaged in armed struggles against colonialism and later civil wars for over fifty years, is estimated to be higher than that of Zimbabwe. Survivors of these wars not only suffer from permanent physical disability and other injuries, they also suffer from war trauma. The anti-humane land mines, which were planted during the wars and subsequently forgotten about, continue to maim and kill people in Angola and Mozambique. Such violent realities have resulted in a large percentage of young people who could potentially contribute to the economy of the country becoming disabled, uneducated, and dependent on welfare systems or international handouts. Above all, many African countries have very limited resources for welfare or other social-support programs. As a result, disability in Africa is not only a moral, social, and charitable issue but also an economic one. The major initiative currently taking place in Africa is the African Decade for Persons with Disabilities. This initiative is administered by the Secretariat for African Decade for Persons with Disabilities, which is a pan-African disability organization whose purpose is to facilitate development processes linked to the Continental Plan of Action for

the African Decade (1999–2008). The Secretariat is located in Cape Town, South Africa, and derives its legitimacy from the Consultative Conference Delegates (CCD), the Africa Rehabilitation Institute (ARI), and a representative of the South African Government. The Decade Management Committee is composed of two representatives from the following regional Disabled People's Organizations:

- African Union of the Blind (AFUB),
- Pan-Africa Federation of the Disabled (PAFOD),
- Inclusion Africa and Indian Ocean (IAIO),
- Pan-Africa Federation of Users of Psychiatric Services (PANUPS),
- Africa Branch of World Federation of the Deaf (WFD/Africa), and
- Africa Branch of World Federation of the Blind-Deaf (WFBD/Africa).

The secretariat is implementing the Continental Plan of Action in Ethiopia, Mozambique, Kenya, Rwanda, and Senegal to serve as a sample that can be replicated in other African countries in the future.

A LOOK AT CANADA'S SERVING ORGANIZATION

The Canadian research organization, which was the subject of this study, was established to examine and develop appropriate assistive devices that would improve the quality of life and promote integration of people with disabilities into society. It was a partnership between several universities and research institutes and was funded by the Ontario Ministry of Health.

The funding was granted on the understanding that people with disabilities would have direct, timely, and meaningful input into the many and varied activities of the research organization. Input included the selection of projects that were to be undertaken and the selection of methods through which the projects were to be evaluated. Such input and process-related ideas were inserted at the proposal stage, but the proposal itself did not stipulate how they would be implemented. Even though the Ministry of Health and the research organization insisted that they valued the input of people with

disabilities, they did not have a clear plan stipulating how and where these inputs fit into their agenda. Hence, the implementation was left in the hands of the researchers. Also, there were no checks and balances to ensure that the organization did actually include people with disabilities. Therefore, it was clear from the very beginning that the Ministry of Health and the researchers were simply paying lip service to the involvement of people with disabilities.

The plan to involve people with disabilities was conceptualized by the researchers without the input of the disabled people themselves; thus, it appeared that people with disabilities were to be used as subjects if they were needed in this process. This was evidenced by the administrative structure, which consisted of three committee levels: the advisory committee, the management committee, and the sub-groups committee. All three committees were controlled and managed by researchers. The advisory committee included only three people with disabilities out of twelve members. In theory, this committee reviewed and made decisions on the projects proposed by the management committee; however, in practice, the committee simply endorsed the proposed projects. The management committee had the most power in the administrative structure and its membership was made up of seventeen able-bodied researchers. People with disabilities were not represented at this level, which was ironic since this was the major decision-making committee. The third level was the subgroup committees, which operated under the leadership of a nominated individual who was also a researcher. These researchers were assigned to look into specific disabling conditions such as confinement to wheelchairs and visual impairment. Under these arrangements, researchers were paid to examine conditions of the disabled population, and disabled people were supposed to volunteer their knowledge, experiences, and ideas. The examination of how people with disabilities were involved in research organizations in Ontario used process indicators from previous research studies as shown in Table 8.1.

Table 8.1: Studies influencing process indicators.

STUDY	MAIN THEME	PROCESS INDICATORS
Bjaras et al. (1991)	Direct community participation	Leadership, organization, resource mobilization, management and needs assessment
Drake (1991)	Consumers' influence	Capacity to act, roles in authority, organizational network
Shalinsky (1989)	Technology development	Context, goals, status relations, motivation, communication, participation

Bjaras, G., Haglund, B.J.A., and Rifkin, S. (1991). A new approach to community participation assessment. *Health Promotion International* 6(3), 199–206.

Drake, R.F., and Owens, D.J. (1991). Consumer involvement and the voluntary sector in Wales: Break-through or bandwagon? *Critical Social Policy* 11(33), 76–86.

Shalinsky, W. (1989). Interdisciplinary and interorganizational concerns in the development of technology for physically disabled persons. *Disability and Society* 4(1), 65–79.

Design of the Canadian case

In this investigation, two separate questionnaires were used: one was for the research group funded by the health ministry (referred to as “providers”), and the other was for the disabled participants with whom the research group worked (referred to as “consumers”). Twenty-nine consumers working with providers were surveyed over a two-week period in June 1993. A variety of formats were used to administer the questionnaire, including telephone, TDD, on-line interviews, e-mail, diskettes, and paper and pencil forms. Responses were received from twenty providers (70 per cent response rate). This is a reasonable rate considering the brief survey period and the variety of survey formats used.

In their questionnaire, consumers were asked to rate the importance of a series of potential interview questions if research about disability was to be conducted. High-ranking questions addressed barriers and supports for consumer involvement, methods of involvement, and satisfaction. Example questions included: Are there barriers to your participation? How satisfied are you with your involvement? Consumers were also asked to define “effective involvement.”

Providers were asked about how they felt regarding the involvement of consumers in all research stages. If providers responded by

stating that consumers should not be involved or that they should be minimally involved, they were then asked to state reasons for their non-involvement stance and/or to identify those minimal areas of involvement. Providers were also asked about previous experiences working with people with disabilities in general and were specifically questioned about their involvement working with consumers in their subgroups. The questions teased out the nature and level of participation of the disabled in subgroups as well as the recruitment initiatives undertaken. Those consumers' responses gathered through the telephone were tape recorded and then transcribed, while those that were written on the questionnaire were preserved in their original state. All responses were studied and analyzed in order to identify common themes.

Consumers' perspectives

The responses, which can also be seen as the concerns from people with disabilities, can be summarized as follows. First, there were expressions of outrage regarding lack of accessibility facilities such as Braille and sign interpreters. Second, consumers expressed that they were often required to attend meetings for which they needed special travel arrangements and that they were expected to cover their own costs. Consumers expressed the need for easier wheelchair access to buildings and that they needed additional resources such as education and training so that they could work as equal partners with the researchers. Third, consumers expressed the need for providers to value and respect handicapped people's contributions in the same economic terms as the researchers' input. That is, people with disabilities should receive remuneration for the time they spend assisting providers in figuring out technological needs, approving the investigations of new devices, conducting the evaluation of newly designed devices, and assisting them in marketing these devices. Fourth, consumers felt that, for their contributions to be meaningful, they should be present at all major meetings, especially where important decisions are made, which would allow them to contribute suggestions and make policy-related recommendations. One consumer was so appalled by the current relationship between disabled participants and able-bodied researchers that she described it as analogous to the relationship between a dog and its food.

Providers' perspectives

Providers portrayed a more favourable relationship with handicapped people, even though these portrayals were not confirmed by the handicapped themselves. Providers stated that they involved handicapped people in all necessary research activities mandated by the research organization and that they have always provided and will continue to provide consumers with access services, including transportation and travel funding, accessible communication services such as Braille, attendant care, and reimbursement of other expenses. Nonetheless, the fact that all providers expressed the importance of involving handicapped people in research, especially in research that deals with rehabilitation technology, did not stop them from voicing reservations about the effectiveness of this kind of collaboration. Providers stated that they found it very difficult to find consumers and participants who could work together in a collaborative fashion. Additionally, they expressed reservations about the capabilities of some consumers who, even with additional resources such as education and training, could not make a meaningful contribution. Providers argued that making use of their own observations was more effective than using direct feedback from handicapped people.

Providers further stated they were not expected to spend a lot of time and funds addressing transportation and other physically related needs, which divert their attention from concentrating on “real” issues such as technology design. They further pointed out that there is danger in spending a lot of money on such social programs, and yet achieve very little in designing devices. While providers had no clear idea about the mandate surrounding the involvement of consumers in research, they foresaw problems around the sharing of expertise by consumers and providers.

ZIMBABWEAN REALITIES

The Zimbabwe study was conceptualized because of my experiences with the consequences that emanated from the Ministry of Education's resistance to employ visually handicapped teachers. The Ministry

justified this resistance by arguing that visually handicapped teachers would have difficulties in marking, using visual aids, managing classes, and involving themselves in extra-curricular activities and would face resistance from students and parents. The study had three goals: first, examine the viability of the assumption that if visually handicapped teachers are hired to teach sighted students they are likely to encounter resistance from education officers, principals, teachers, students, and parents; second, uncover the nature and source of this resistance; and third, devise strategies that could be used to overcome this resistance. These strategies would facilitate the integration of visually impaired teachers into the mainstream and the government, schools, and community to achieve successful implementation of this integration.

In Zimbabwe, questions were developed and distributed to twenty-one education officers from the head office of the Ministry of Education in Mashonaland's east region. The questions were designed to uncover first, how these officers ranked the effectiveness of the visually impaired teacher in their pedagogical skill; second, to determine whether disabled teachers were viewed to possess classroom managerial abilities including methods of discipline; third, to examine if able-bodied officials viewed visually impaired teachers as an economic liability; and fourth, to tease out overall perceptions that officers held of these teachers (whether they viewed blind teachers as angry, bitter, or emotionally unstable because of the disability).

Education officers' perceptions

In examining the results from the study conducted in Zimbabwe, it is worth noting that this study had some methodological shortcomings, which were, among other things, manifestations of the political order of the time. First, the study was conducted during a period when serious debates in the Ministry were going on about the recruitment of handicapped teachers. As a result, education officers were aware of the sensitivity of the issue under investigation, which may have influenced them to offer ideas that they considered politically in tune with the public discourse at the time. Second, educational officers may have been influenced by the fact that the study was being conducted by a visually handicapped person, thus offering sympathetic views. Despite these apparent shortfalls, the study did capture a wide

spectrum of attitudinal challenges confronted by handicapped teachers in their efforts to be integrated into mainstream schools.

Study participants from Zimbabwe exhibited both negative and positive attitudes towards visually handicapped teachers. Even though fewer educational officers were skeptical about the ability of visually handicapped teachers to mark, manage classrooms, and so on, the results indicate that their attitudes were overwhelmingly negative if the visually handicapped teachers' employment required extra financial support from the schools or the Ministry. They would prefer that visually handicapped teachers fend for themselves, which would include paying readers and acquiring technical devices from their own salaries.

Of the twenty-one officers interviewed, six expressed reservations about the ability of visually handicapped teachers to incorporate visual aids into their instructional methods. Registering his reservation, one officer stated,

It looks impossible for anyone to go round this limitation. My experience with blind teachers is that they always resort to lecture methods and ask some pupils to write on the chalkboard for them. This compromises pupils' learning. There are some visual aids such as diagrams which cannot be substituted, and how can a blind teacher draw them on the board?

This quote exemplifies the many negative perceptions about people with disabilities, which were dominant in the minds of many able-bodied teachers, students, and parents. The unfortunate part of this is that, as demonstrated by the two incidents referred to at the beginning of this chapter, such attitudes influence policy decisions that are implemented without input from handicapped individuals. As an aside, it is worth noting that the concerns expressed above by the educational officer were also expressed by teachers in one school district in the United States to a blind student teacher who was being integrated into their school (Miller, 1982). In this case, the sighted teachers were concerned about how she would use phrases such as "show me" and "look at." However, unlike the Zimbabwe cases, these sighted teachers handled the situation more positively by giving the blind student teacher an opportunity to explain and demonstrate how she would execute her duties.

As a visually handicapped citizen of Zimbabwe, I too experienced similar attitudinal problems and resistance when I was hired to teach both sighted and visually handicapped students in Zimbabwe. In my situation, the resistance was from some of my colleagues, students, and parents to the point where colleagues often used derogatory and demeaning comments in my presence in an attempt to dislodge me from the teaching field. Tactics used by my colleagues included making unkind remarks about me to my students, sneaking into my classroom, and openly calling me a preacher not a teacher, since they assumed that I could not use visual aids for instructional purposes and I would be limited to the lecture method.

Contrary to the negative views expressed by the six education officers, fifteen officers offered positive views and provided alternative ways of approaching instructional challenges. These officers acknowledged the importance of visual aids in teaching, but also suggested that other methods exist that can be effectively used to achieve the same intended goals. Their ideas were best represented by the following respondent's statement:

Visual aids are intended to assist students; however, their importance varies with the academic level of the student. At higher levels of learning, students deal more with abstract concepts. The blind teacher can still use his body as part of his visual aids. He/she can also use verbal explanations more. Some of the diagrams can be put into Braille for the teacher to explain to students.

Practical applications, such as the use of Braille, implemented by one of the blind teachers substitute visually oriented phrases while retaining the same intended and communicated meaning. For instance, instead of saying "show me," the blind student teacher cited in Miller (1982) would say "explain to me clearly what you have done." Similarly, in my teaching, I made efforts to adapt teaching techniques used by my sighted colleagues to my situation. For example, I distributed handouts and used overheads instead of writing on the board. There are now many alternative instructional strategies like the use of videos and dictating text to speech computers that can be connected to big screen projectors, making it possible for a visually handicapped teacher to type while students see what is being typed.

One of the fundamental principles of teaching is to provide students with meaningful feedback on their written assignments. Since

visually handicapped teachers cannot read print, it is impossible to assess students' written assignments. This drawback is often used to bar them from the teaching field. When asked about this issue, eight education officers expressed scepticism about the ability of visually handicapped teachers to use a reader as an intervener between them and their students' written work. The following responses illustrate the general themes that recurred: the use of readers (1) slows down the blind teacher's marking speed, which often results in pupils' exercise books being returned very late; (2) forces the blind teacher to depend on the cooperation of "readers," which may also result in a late return of students' work; (3) makes it difficult for the blind teachers to really see their pupils' problems, forcing the blind teacher to trust the reader and rely on the reader's judgment. Remedial instruction also depends on the reader and his or her ability to take pedagogical issues seriously.

The above assertions depict visually handicapped teachers as helpless objects that can be easily abused and manipulated by readers. Instead of addressing issues relating to the quality of marking, respondents focused on the honesty of the readers. The unfortunate aspect of these negative perceptions is that, no matter how unreasonable they are, they are used by those in power to justify discrimination against disabled teachers.

Acts of discrimination are experienced by most, if not all, blind teachers in Zimbabwe. In my case, discrimination occurred when my school and the Ministry of Education refused to hire a reader for me and expected that I hire and pay the reader from my salary. I was also denied access to proper accommodation; moreover, the Ministry took about three months to process my initial salary. It appeared to me that these unfair working conditions were intended to ensure that I failed in the execution of my duties as a teacher, which would have provided reasons for termination of my employment.

Contrary to the negative views expressed by the eight education officers, thirteen respondents offered different perspectives on the use of readers by visually handicapped teachers. The following statements capture the positive views held by this group of respondents. One respondent stated, "Readers are only intended to facilitate communication between the teacher and the student so that the teacher will then be able to assess the written work." While another said, "A reader who is educated enough should be able to mark correctly

under close direction of the blind teacher. The quality of marking gets maintained.”

The difference between positive and negative responses is that the negative responses dehumanize both the visually handicapped teacher and the sighted reader. As demonstrated by the blind student teacher’s practices and my own, blind teachers can successfully use readers and produce good results. In my situation, even though working conditions were not conducive, the superior quality of my marking skills was confirmed in that the feedback I gave when marking students’ papers was similar to that produced by my able-bodied colleagues. Moreover, despite the fact that national and international examiners used different instruments to test my students at the end of their two years of study, my students’ results were similar to those of students taught by able-bodied colleagues. Despite my teaching success, however, because of my handicap, the Ministry of Education was reluctant to designate me as an external examiner,¹ and my headmaster was unwilling to promote me to the head of my department; instead, less qualified persons were promoted. The main argument against my promotion to departmental headship was that I would need a reader when assessing other teachers’ performances. Ironically, the head teacher himself had a secretary who reviewed teachers’ files and wrote confidential letters to the Ministry of Education about these teachers’ performances.

Another fundamental teaching principle is the ability to manage a classroom, which includes executing discipline. There is an assumption that visually handicapped teachers have difficulty maintaining discipline in their classrooms. This assumption is also used to discriminate against blind teachers because they are seen as contributing to a lack of discipline, as exemplified by the following statements made by participants of the project:

Discipline in the classroom depends to a large extent on the tone/discipline in the school as a whole. Maintenance of discipline, therefore, will affect both the sighted and the blind teacher, although a visual handicapped *aggravates the problem*. Use of class monitors and prefects might help to *some extent* (emphasis added).

In Zimbabwe students are becoming increasingly rebellious, making school discipline a matter of disturbing concern. Some students terrorise other students in the class. Such incidents are difficult to detect since students who are bullies always threaten other students not to report them to authorities. So, discipline is an extremely difficult problem for the blind teachers.

These statements are very stereotypical and imply that classroom management is heavily dependent on the ability to see. Additionally, they suggest that students are so irrational that teachers need to adopt a military approach in dealing with them. Concerns about a blind teacher's ability to discipline students were also visible when I was interviewed by ministerial officials for a teaching position in Zimbabwe. One of the questions asked of me was, since I was visually handicapped, who would accompany me to the washroom and ensure that students did not play tricks on me and abuse me? A second question was, since I could not see, how would I know if students decided to have sex in the classroom? I found both questions condescending and reflective of how ignorant people are about blindness, to the extent that they are willing to use irrelevant and inconceivable reasons to arrive at a hiring decision.

There were, however, some educational officers who did not view classroom management as a problem for the blind teacher. One of them stated, "Class control depends on several aspects. These include the quality of teaching, rapport with students, and the teacher's personal discipline and principles. Being blind should not necessarily lead to poor discipline in class." Accordingly, another officer stated that what is required is to "keep students busy and interested ... they will not misbehave, give them worthwhile tasks, group discussions, and achievable targets." Other strategies proposed in the literature include the prefect and aide system. In fact, a study conducted by McGinnis et al. (1995) suggests:

Schools must recognize that student learning and behaviour problems cannot be solved through continued use of reactive strategies. The occasional use of behaviour management techniques in reaction to the occurrence of behaviour problems must be replaced by consistent use of coordinated preventive classroom management system. Proactive classroom rules facilitate the operation of schools by providing structure and allowing more of a focus on academic achievement. (p. 223)

With regard to the issue of involvement in extra-curricular activities, some of the interviewees argued that, since the activities of visually handicapped teachers are limited to classrooms, this is sufficient reason to keep them out of the teaching profession. One participant stated, “The teachers’ participation in extra-curricular activities is much more demanding than teaching in the classroom. Even when coaching singing and drama, the teacher has to see the students’ facial expressions and body movement and correct them as they are making some mistakes. So, without sight it will be extremely difficult to coach students in any extra-curricular activity.” Another respondent was even blunter, “My experience with blind teachers is that academically they argue that they can do anything. But when it comes to really doing it at the school level, they feel they are being exploited and that the sighted are unfeeling.”

These quotations are insulting to visually handicapped people. This traditional attitude has deprived blind people of the opportunity to become involved in extra-curricular activities. These quotations depict visually handicapped teachers as immobile and confined to indoor activities, yet many visually handicapped teachers engage in many outdoor activities and some are prominent singers, dancers, and so on.

Other education officers supported the idea that visually handicapped teachers can participate in the extra-curricular programs. One of these officers stated, “Extra-curricular activities depend on the teacher’s areas of interest. Blind people also have many areas of interest such as music, writing, playing instruments and so on. In addition, new games can now be played by both sighted and physically handicapped.” Overall, there was an overwhelming support from education officers for the potential and abilities of visually handicapped teachers to execute their duties. But the support was very minimal when the implementation of programs supporting visually handicapped required that schools and the Ministry of Education provide financial support. This included the payment of readers, procurement of technical devices, and additional expenses on insurance and pension premiums. Therefore, the underlying approaches exhibited by the findings of this study are that even those who considered offering blind teachers jobs did not support them with the necessary tools, thus adopting a “we will give you the job but not the tools” stance. This is tantamount to denying visually handicapped people access to employment.

CONCLUSION: A GLIMMER OF HOPE

As both case studies have demonstrated, the discrimination and exploitation of handicapped people is institutional. The bureaucracies of the Ministry of Education and the research organization are so entrenched in their administrative structures that they are inflexible and unwilling to accommodate handicapped people. The research organization and the Ministry only agreed to work with handicapped people because government policies required them to do so. In an attempt to meet this requirement, the researchers simply went to the disability community, hand-picked a few people, and presented them to the government as participants. After using them to secure funding and to gather data, they discarded them. These handicapped people were not acknowledged in publications nor were they financially compensated for their time and ideas. They were mentioned in the research organization's annual report presented to the government. They were also displayed from time to time at workshops and gatherings conducted for the government's benefit. This strategy seems to have ensured that the research organization's funding would continue (see also Ysseldyke, J.E. et al. 1992).

The Ministry of Education in Zimbabwe has some difficulty defining an ideal or optimal "teachable standard." This standard is defined through the eyes of an able-bodied teacher. The visually handicapped teacher is expected to fit himself or herself into this standard to the point where any use of alternative methods of teaching is interpreted as incompetence and an inability to do the job. Even though these results depicted a very pessimistic view about how able-bodied professionals perceive their handicapped counterparts, there is a glimmer of hope. The fact that these able-bodied professionals agreed to discuss issues pertaining to people with disabilities provides an opportunity for honesty and candid dialogue. Such dialogue might help to erase prejudices, which are based on the lack of awareness of the needs and abilities of handicapped people. This notion was supported by a study conducted by the Canadian Association of Children with Learning Disabilities (CACLD) in Smith (1985). It surveyed the top one hundred Canadian corporations to determine their level of awareness about job applicants with learning disabilities as well as their hiring policies towards potential employees with learning

disabilities. The results indicated that awareness and accommodation was very low, with nearly 50 per cent of those responding requesting information, workshops, or indicating any intention to attend one of the national symposiums on employment strategies being offered that year (Smith, 1985). Therefore, just as this study has attempted to engage researchers and education officers in this discussion, it can also raise people's consciousness about the unfair treatment of people with disabilities.

Finally, my two studies indicate that negative perceptions are not so much embedded in the words and written policies of the research organization and Zimbabwe Ministry of Education, but that they are visible in actions and in the way policies are implemented and administered. The integration into and involvement of handicapped people in a research organization should be implemented in a way that is based on mutual respect. It should acknowledge differences that exist between able-bodied people and people with disabilities and view these differences as strength in diversity and not as an excuse for repression and subjugation. People with disabilities should be provided with educational and financial support to accomplish their assigned tasks, and policies should be designed to discourage their failure and promote their success.

Since gaining political freedom from Britain in 1980, Zimbabwe has undergone formidable economic and political challenges, some of which, over the past decade, have resulted from conflicts in leadership, natural disasters such as drought, as well as chronic diseases including the outbreak of HIV/AIDS. Political freedom came through an armed struggle; a majority-rule political system was established following a civil war, all of which resulted in the creation of a large population of disabled citizens. Furthermore, as a land-locked southern African country, Zimbabwe faces economic challenges, mainly because it is agrarian-based, which causes alarming challenges for people with disability to participate in the best of times. Agrarian reforms that were accelerated in the late 1990s were met with economic sanctions from other countries. The result of the combination of economic sanctions, agrarian reform, corruption, and persistent drought has been a sharp and continuing economic decline. For example, the GDP declined by 30 per cent between 1998 and 2003, and fell another 5.2 per cent in 2004. The 2006 Human Development Report shows that the GDP is still on the decline (United Nations

Development Program, 2006). In addition it forecasted that GDP will decline by 2.3 per cent in 2007. Unemployment is estimated at 70 per cent and the adult HIV infection rate is estimated to be 20 per cent – all realities that have contributed to a sharp drop in life expectancy and increase in the disabled population.

As indicated in the preceding argument, in 1992, Zimbabwe legislated and passed the Disabled Persons Act. One of the most important objectives of this legislation is “to achieve equal opportunities for disabled persons by ensuring, so far as possible, that they obtain education and employment, participate fully in sporting, recreation and cultural activities and are afforded full access to community and social services” (*Disabled Persons Act, 1992*). By African standards, this is a very progressive legislation. This legislation makes provision for the welfare and rehabilitation of disabled persons. Under this legislation the National Disability Board was established, which is administered through the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare. It is a consultative forum through which the government of Zimbabwe reviews its disability policies and is constituted of representatives from different disability organizations. The Zimbabwe Disability Act of 1992 further provides a framework through which the government provides funding to disability organizations and income support to individuals with disabilities. Currently disabled persons receive Z\$250 (about US\$1) per month for children and Z\$500 (about US\$2) per month for adults.

In terms of employment, since establishing the Disability Act of 1992, the government, in principle, has been encouraging all employers to consider hiring persons with disabilities and has established an affirmative action initiative. In addition, the government has tried to place disabled people in self-help projects such as piggeries, poultry farms, and market gardening. Collective community projects are also being encouraged.

Finally, it is important to end this chapter by highlighting the basis of the continuing marginalization of the disabled population in Zimbabwe, which is the integrationist approach to disability that dominates the initiatives aimed at redressing the plight of disabled people. Unlike inclusion, in integration in schools for example, the child must make adjustments to the requirements of the school while in inclusion, it is the school that must make adjustments to accommodate or include the child. This approach applies to the employment

sector as well. Despite the noble intention of the law, Zimbabwean workplaces are inaccessible both physically and psychologically. The potential disabled employee has to adjust himself or herself to accommodate the needs of the workplace instead of the workplace adjusting itself to meet his or her needs.

In this light I would propose that if persons with disabilities are going to attain full citizenship a process of deinstitutionalization should take place both psychologically and physically. This approach articulates that people with disabilities should have the same civil rights, options, and control over choices in their own lives as do people without. This can be accomplished by strengthening their organizations and individual empowerment through a process of deinstitutionalization. This is an attempt to move the disability organizations and individuals with disabilities from the permanent state of dependency to the development of self sustaining programs. This is a shift away from the authoritarian medical model to a paradigm of individual empowerment and responsibility for defining and meeting one's own needs. This approach locates problems or "deficiencies" in the society, not the individual. People with disabilities are no longer perceived as broken or sick, certainly not in need of repair. Issues such as social and attitudinal barriers are the real problems both in developed and developing countries.

In contrast to Africa, the rights and needs of handicapped people in North America have been part of the public discourse since the 1960s. According to Smith (1985), "Although young people and adults with learning disabilities have been with us at least throughout this century, they were not formally identified as such or viewed as an important population until 1963 when parents and professionals banded together to form the Association for Children (and adults) with Learning Disabilities (ACLD) in Canada and America" (p. 35). However, even though there is now a high level of awareness about disability issues in North America, concepts of eugenics and euthanasia still threaten the very existence of disabled people. This was made evident when Mr. Latimer, a farmer in Saskatchewan, killed his disabled daughter with the full support of his wife, family members and neighbours. Moreover, his actions received a lot of public sympathy. This form of a publicly accepted killing builds on the principle of eugenics, which was developed in North America in the beginning of this century. According to Woodhill (1992),

The beginning of the twentieth century marked the rise of eugenics, a scientific approach to human reproduction which sought to have the “less fit” removed from the “human stock.” Many studies of mentally handicapped persons and their families were carried out to “prove” the eugenics arguments, all supposedly based on “scientific methods.” The results are well known – incarceration of hundreds of thousands and involuntary sterilizations in many countries including the United States and Canada. (p. 8)

All such practices altogether indicate that there is still a lot to be done in order to enhance the quality of life of disabled citizens all over the world.

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Notes

- 1 In Zimbabwe, in order to graduate, high school students have to write examinations in all subjects, which are evaluated by external examiners. External examiners are teachers who are not familiar with students whose answer scripts they will be evaluating and grading. Under this process teachers from one province will evaluate and grade students from another province.