

**Transformation at Rhodes University: investigating the extent of support for the participation of students with disabilities in the transformation processes of the Institution.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study is motivated by the vigorous discourse around transformation at Rhodes University and investigates the extent of support for and engagement with students with disabilities in the transformation processes of the institution. It analyses the extent to which integration is holistic at institutions of Higher Learning. Particular interest is given to the institutional culture of Rhodes University, namely whether it values and embraces diversity and is committed to inclusivity, centering the presence and voice of students with disabilities. It explores institutional responses to students with disabilities and their capacity to flourish beyond notions of access, therefore, delivering on the demand for institutional transformation.

The thesis draws on the Critical Disability Studies Approach (CDSA), the social justice reform agenda with reference to the feminist analysis of disability, and the concept of inclusive education. The study uses a qualitative research methodology. The sample size used in the study was sufficient to highlight the challenges students with disabilities at Rhodes University face and their coping mechanisms while investigating the extent of support and active participation in the transformation discourse. The study found that the majority of the participants' academic capabilities were influenced by their disability and impacted on their academic success. The study further revealed that there is a disjuncture between policy and practice in terms of awareness, and as such, effectiveness. While there is a supportive institutional framework, as indicated by more than 50% of the participants in the study, the recommendations ensuing from this research indicate that there are areas in which the university can improve its support mechanisms. Improving support structures is possible through establishing platforms which can be used for students to share their lived experiences and making disability a visible part of the institutional discourse on transformation.

The study concludes by arguing for the application of principles of Ubuntu which demonstrate the commitment of Rhodes University in inculcating an inclusive institutional culture and understanding that disability is intersectional with social registers such as race and gender. It emphasises the recognition of the institution as a transforming one if the body that matters is the body whose presence, voice and lived experience is acknowledged and recognised.

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I would never have made it without You!

“I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:16).

All Glory and Honour to You!

## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

|       |                                                                |
|-------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| ADA   | Americans with Disabilities Act                                |
| ADHD  | Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder                       |
| AET   | Adult Education and Training                                   |
| AT    | Assistive Technology                                           |
| ATL   | Assistive Technology for Learning                              |
| BSTF  | Broader Students Transformation Forum                          |
| CDSA  | Critical Disability Studies Approach                           |
| CHE   | Council on Higher Education                                    |
| CPU   | Campus Protection Unit                                         |
| CSIE  | Centre for Studies on Inclusive Education                      |
| DHET  | Department of Higher Education and Training                    |
| DMU   | Data Management Unit                                           |
| DoE   | Department of Education                                        |
| DoS   | Dean of Students                                               |
| DPSA  | Disability People of South Africa                              |
| DSA   | Division of Student Affairs                                    |
| DU    | Disability Unit                                                |
| E&IC  | Equity and Institutional Culture                               |
| FOTIM | Foundation of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis |
| GE    | General Education                                              |
| HCC   | Health Care Centre                                             |
| HE    | Higher Education                                               |
| HEDSA | Higher Education Disability Services Association               |
| HEIs  | Higher Education Institutions                                  |
| HR    | Human Resource                                                 |
| ICT   | Information Communication Technologies                         |
| IFO   | Infrastructure and Operations                                  |
| INDS  | Integrated National Disability Strategy                        |
| LoA   | Leave of Absence                                               |
| NCHE  | National Commission on Higher Education                        |
| NDP   | National Development Plan                                      |
| NGOs  | Non-Governmental Organisations                                 |
| NMMU  | Nelson Mandela Metropole University                            |

|        |                                                                      |
|--------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
| NPHE   | National Plan for Higher Education                                   |
| NSFAS  | National Student Financial Aid Scheme                                |
| OPCS   | Office of Population Censuses and Surveys                            |
| O-Week | Orientation Week                                                     |
| ResOps | Residential Operations                                               |
| RU     | Rhodes University                                                    |
| SA     | South Africa                                                         |
| SEN    | Special Needs Education                                              |
| SRC    | Student Representative Council                                       |
| SSA    | Special Schools Act                                                  |
| SU     | Stellenbosch University                                              |
| UCT    | University of Cape Town                                              |
| UD     | Universal Design                                                     |
| UDL    | Universal Design for Learning                                        |
| UFS    | University of the Free State                                         |
| UID    | Universal Instructional Design                                       |
| UK     | United Kingdom                                                       |
| UKZN   | University of Kwa-Zulu Natal                                         |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation     |
| UNCRDP | United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities |
| USA    | United States of America                                             |
| VC     | Vice Chancellor                                                      |
| WHO    | World Health Organisation                                            |
| WITS   | University of the Witwatersrand                                      |
| WPRPD  | White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities               |

## **LIST OF APPENDICES**

|              |                                                                                                                               |
|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Appendix 1   | 2005 Student Disability Policy                                                                                                |
| Appendix 2   | SRC 2015 petition poster                                                                                                      |
| Appendix 3   | Interview questions                                                                                                           |
| Appendix 3.1 | Interviews with students with disabilities                                                                                    |
| Appendix 3.2 | Interview with the Director of Student Affairs                                                                                |
| Appendix 3.3 | Interview with the Deputy-Director Residential Operations                                                                     |
| Appendix 3.4 | Interview with the Lecturer in the Accounting Department and the Chairperson of the Examinations Concessions Committee        |
| Appendix 3.5 | Interview with the Head of the Counselling Centre                                                                             |
| Appendix 3.6 | Interview with the Director of the Office of Equity and Institutional Culture and the Chairperson of the Disability Committee |

## Table of Contents

|                                                                                                   |     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| ABSTRACT.....                                                                                     | ii  |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....                                                                            | iii |
| LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS .....                                                                       | iv  |
| LIST OF APPENDICES.....                                                                           | vi  |
| CHAPTER ONE .....                                                                                 | 1   |
| BACKGROUND AND CHANGING PERSPECTIVE ON DISABILITY.....                                            | 1   |
| 1.1 Introduction .....                                                                            | 1   |
| 1.2 Motivation for the study .....                                                                | 5   |
| 1.3 General background on disability .....                                                        | 5   |
| 1.4 Disability in higher education.....                                                           | 8   |
| 1.5 Centering the presence and the voice of persons with disabilities – a collective effort ..... | 9   |
| 1.6 Changing perspective on disability .....                                                      | 10  |
| 1.7 The Critical Disability Studies Approach (CDSA).....                                          | 11  |
| 1.8 Research question, research goals and research methodology .....                              | 12  |
| 1.9 Thesis outline.....                                                                           | 13  |
| 1.10 Conclusion.....                                                                              | 14  |
| CHAPTER TWO .....                                                                                 | 15  |
| THE CONCEPT OF ‘INCLUSIVE EDUCATION’ IN HIGHER EDUCATION.....                                     | 15  |
| 2.1 Introduction .....                                                                            | 15  |
| 2.2 The importance of inclusion in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs).....                      | 15  |
| 2.3 Inclusive education in HEIs in developed countries .....                                      | 18  |
| 2.4 Inclusive education in HEIs – South African context .....                                     | 23  |
| 2.5 Higher education transformation – South Africa.....                                           | 28  |
| 2.6 Consideration for the practice of ‘Ubuntu’ in South African HEIs .....                        | 31  |
| 2.7 Conclusion.....                                                                               | 32  |

|                                                                                                                  |    |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| CHAPTER THREE.....                                                                                               | 34 |
| INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION<br>INSTITUTIONS (HEIs) – SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT ..... | 34 |
| 3.1 Introduction .....                                                                                           | 34 |
| 3.2 Historical background- South Africa’s education system .....                                                 | 34 |
| 3.3 Profile and experiences of students with disabilities in HEIs.....                                           | 36 |
| 3.4 The inclusion of students with disabilities: ‘Access with success’ .....                                     | 40 |
| 3.5 The mismatch between policy and practice.....                                                                | 44 |
| 3.6 Institutional and attitudinal barriers in the HE environment .....                                           | 45 |
| 3.7 Other South African Universities’ response to disability .....                                               | 46 |
| 3.8 Conclusion.....                                                                                              | 49 |
| CHAPTER FOUR.....                                                                                                | 50 |
| THE TRANSFORMATION AGENDA FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AT RHODES<br>UNIVERSITY .....                           | 50 |
| 4.1 Introduction .....                                                                                           | 50 |
| 4.2 Institutional Culture .....                                                                                  | 52 |
| 4.3 Rhodes University student access and success .....                                                           | 53 |
| 4.4 Response to disability at Rhodes University .....                                                            | 55 |
| 4.5 Conclusion.....                                                                                              | 58 |
| CHAPTER FIVE.....                                                                                                | 59 |
| RESEARCH METHODOLOGY .....                                                                                       | 59 |
| 5.1 Introduction .....                                                                                           | 59 |
| 5.2 Methods, procedures and techniques .....                                                                     | 59 |
| 5.3 Sampling process .....                                                                                       | 60 |
| 5.4 Data Collection .....                                                                                        | 61 |
| 5.5 Ethical Considerations .....                                                                                 | 63 |
| 5.6 Students with disabilities at Rhodes University.....                                                         | 63 |
| 5.7 Challenges faced throughout the interview process.....                                                       | 65 |
| 5.8 Conclusion.....                                                                                              | 66 |

|                                                                                                                             |     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| CHAPTER SIX .....                                                                                                           | 67  |
| EXPLORING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES’ EXPERIENCES OF THE ACADEMIC PROGRAMME .....                                           | 67  |
| 6.1 Introduction .....                                                                                                      | 67  |
| 6.2 Physical Environment: barriers identified in the physical buildings and layouts .....                                   | 68  |
| 6.3. Students with disabilities’ experiences of the academic programme .....                                                | 77  |
| 6.4 Coping mechanisms in place to cope with the academic demands .....                                                      | 82  |
| 6.5 Concessions in the academic programme .....                                                                             | 85  |
| 6.6. Curriculum transformation .....                                                                                        | 86  |
| 6.7 Conclusion .....                                                                                                        | 89  |
| CHAPTER SEVEN .....                                                                                                         | 92  |
| EXPLORING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES’ EXPERIENCES OF THE SOCIAL, SPORTING AND CULTURAL OFFERINGS AT RHODES UNIVERSITY ..... | 92  |
| 7.1 Introduction .....                                                                                                      | 92  |
| 7.2 The role of the Division of Student Affairs (DSA) .....                                                                 | 92  |
| 7.3. Students with disabilities overall experience of the general support services .....                                    | 93  |
| 7.4 Platforms for students with disabilities to articulate their lived experiences .....                                    | 96  |
| 7.5 Other South African Universities’ response to disability vs Rhodes University’s response to disability .....            | 98  |
| 7.6 Conclusion .....                                                                                                        | 100 |
| CHAPTER EIGHT .....                                                                                                         | 102 |
| EVALUATING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES TO INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION .....                            | 102 |
| 8.1 Introduction .....                                                                                                      | 102 |
| 8.2 Conceptualising transformation .....                                                                                    | 102 |
| 8.3 Current profile of students with disabilities at Rhodes University .....                                                | 103 |
| 8.4 Envisioning a transforming institution .....                                                                            | 104 |
| 8.5 Student disability policy formulation and development .....                                                             | 107 |
| 8.6 Intersectional approach with a social justice framework of the student disability policy ....                           | 112 |
| 8.7 ‘Access with success’ – did Rhodes University achieve this for students with disabilities? .....                        | 113 |

|                                                                                               |     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 8.8. An inclusive, mainstream learning and living space envisioned for Rhodes University .... | 113 |
| 8.9 Conclusion.....                                                                           | 114 |
| CHAPTER NINE .....                                                                            | 117 |
| CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS .....                                                         | 117 |
| 9.1 Introduction .....                                                                        | 117 |
| 9.2 Key findings of the study and emergent themes .....                                       | 117 |
| 9.3 Significance of the study .....                                                           | 120 |
| 9.4 Limitations of the study.....                                                             | 120 |
| 9.5 Recommendations.....                                                                      | 121 |
| 9.6 Opportunities for future research .....                                                   | 123 |
| 9.7 Conclusion.....                                                                           | 124 |
| REFERENCES.....                                                                               | 127 |
| APPENDICES .....                                                                              | 143 |
| Appendix 1 – 2005 Student Disability Policy .....                                             | 143 |
| Appendix 2 –2015 SRC Petition Poster .....                                                    | 148 |
| Appendix 3: Interview Questions .....                                                         | 148 |

## CHAPTER ONE

### BACKGROUND AND CHANGING PERSPECTIVE ON DISABILITY

#### 1.1 Introduction

Globally, people with disabilities have historically been and continue to be marginalised in the mainstream public. The marginalising of disability from other social categories contributes to the perception that disability is an “individual pathology” (Oliver, 1990:46). This perception has provided justification for the unequal treatment and unfair discriminatory practices against persons with disabilities.

Historically, the physical attributes of the body have been considered a reflection of the social construction of society in ideologies such as eugenics, scientific racism and sexism, which find their basis in the Western thought of biology and use registers such as race and gender to explain physical differences and positions in society. This social construction has been shaped in early centuries where the ‘body’<sup>1</sup> that matter is the body that is socially acceptable, placing it on a trajectory of superiority and privilege at the expense of those who do not fit such categories – known as the ‘Other’. According to Braidotti (2003) cited by Goodley (2013), the assumption is that the privileged body is a European white male, which is the standard against which the ‘Other’ is judged. Oyewùmí (2005) further asserts that the Western view puts more emphasis on sight, which puts the body on auction to determine its value. The scholar, Oyewùmí (2005) further asserts that those in positions of power determine what body is ‘ideal’ by constructing social structures to privilege certain bodies over others.

This has been documented throughout history with the practice and legitimisation of Black slavery, colonialism and apartheid, where Black men and women were judged by the colour of their skin and gender, subjecting them to exploitation and marginalising them through the imposition of oppressive structures that violates both the body and the soul. I am in support of the viewpoint of the scholar, Oyewùmí (2005), that the theorising of the experiences of the ‘Other’ in society has been viewed through a westernised lens. Consequently, such an approach lacks the tools to explain local and specifically African realities in a manner that

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<sup>1</sup> Referring to the social construction of physical attributes, privileging the European White male as referred to by Braidotti (2003) and Oyewùmí (2005).

prioritises lived experiences over accepted Western thought. Thus, in viewing disability through an Africanised lens, it will provide explanations that encompass the experiences of those labelled as the 'Other'.

In the context of education, this auctioning and subsequent marginalised lived experience of the 'Other' has been no different for students with disabilities in higher education institutions - both globally and nationally. In the South African context with the dawn of a new democratic dispensation in 1994, the redress of the political, social and economic past was necessary for transforming South Africa into a truly democratic state. Universities were seen by the government as one of the social institutions to advance such political, social and economic transformation objectives. The de-racialisation of higher education has resulted in an increasing number of Black students<sup>2</sup> enrolled in its institutions. However, the increase in access and presence of such students has not necessarily resulted in high retention rates and overall student success (Akoojee & Nkomo, 2007).

Being true to the transformation agenda, higher education institutions have adopted ways of successfully integrating such students, including students with disabilities, and in doing so increase their participation that could result in their success at these institutions. This has been no different for Rhodes University (RU), which under its Student Services Section offers such support for students with disabilities in order to enhance their living and learning experiences at the institution. Evidence of a well-rounded, enriching student experience will be indicative of not only the student's success but the institution's successful attempts of cultivating an inclusive institutional culture.

This study therefore investigates the extent of support for the participation of students with disabilities in the transformation processes at RU. It applies a sociological lens to the analysis of the support, participation and engagement of said students. Although a number of pioneering contributions have been made in the field of disability in higher education both globally and nationally, qualitative research on the lived experience of students with disabilities, particularly at Rhodes University, has received very little attention. There is still the marginalising of disability in the South African higher education context, which gives rise to the urgent need for research and development in the sector. This becomes particularly

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<sup>2</sup> In South African, Black student includes Coloured and Indian.

more urgent because of the prevailing and persistent negative attitudes toward students with disabilities, coupled with a lack of awareness of their presence by the mainstream public (Fuller *et al.*, 2004; Goodley, 2013).

### ***1.1.1 The challenges and gaps in higher education transformation***

South Africa has witnessed from 2015 until the end of 2016, covered extensively in the media, the call for the accelerated transformation of South African post-apartheid education and training institutions. The reports by media outlets, including social media, covered the removal of the names and statues of colonial figures through the student-led movement of #RhodesMustFall at the University of Cape Town (UCT) that morphed into national student movement #FeesMustFall. This period in the history of South African universities placed greater emphasis on the urgency for these institutions to be a catalyst for promoting social justice, equity and social mobility (De la Rey, 2015). However, in the throes of the fees must fall movement, disability as both a social justice and political issue, were largely ignored and very little attention has been given to augmenting the lived experiences of students with disabilities, their need for support and their active participation and engagement in the transformation discourse.

### ***1.1.2 The challenges and gaps in higher education transformation – Rhodes University***

Rhodes University, as any other South African higher education institution, aspires to embrace values and institutional practices that reflect a post-apartheid society. Consequently, a number of vigorous transformation conversations have been conducted campus-wide at various structures of leadership since 2006. Some of the conversations held concerned symbols, signage, the name of the institution, the institution's culture, conversations on gender, sexuality and other increasingly pertinent social issues. Out of these conversations, what transpired was transformation fatigue, with reports that very little action has been taken to address some of the practices and thereby inadvertently reproduce an apartheid system (Office of Equity and Institutional Culture, 2013).

This seems to be no different for transformation conversations on disability issues. The University's Transformation Indicators document shows that the number of students with disabilities enrolled at the institution is much lower than the national percentage. Further to this, the document speaks of a recruitment strategy plan and implementation process for students with disabilities which aim at improving student participation in the university. However, there is little evidence that demonstrates this has taken place other than the

attendance (which is very low) of student activists at university meetings such as the Disability Committee (Office of Equity and Institutional Culture, 2013 and 2015). Although some issues have been addressed through action, the lack of a comprehensive institutional plan continues to impede transformation and development. This places the university in a precarious position of responding in a reactive manner. In 2014, an Institutional Transformation plan was drafted as a means of documenting the plan and strategy needed in monitoring and reporting on the institutional transformation imperatives which must be achieved. According to the study conducted in 2015, it revealed that the majority of the Rhodes University staff and students felt that transformation is taking place at a very slow pace. This has resulted inter alia, the Black Students Movement (BSM) profoundly expressing their dissatisfaction with the slow pace of transformation through student-led protests at the university campus during the year of 2015 (Office of Equity and Institutional Culture, 2015).

Given the above, it highlights the need for the University to apply urgency on crafting an institutional plan and strategy and for the Institutional Forum, which has been mandated by the 1997 Higher Education Act, to provide leadership in institutional transformation matters and ensure clear plans and strategies are put in place, implemented and reported on. Therefore, it is important that disciplines such as Sociology in higher education take this matter seriously. Disciplinary work through theoretical contributions raises issues of disability and persons with disabilities lived experiences while developing what Oliver terms a "social theory of disability" (Oliver, 1990: 10). It is important then that as issues of race and gender become common areas of critical analyses in academia, it necessitates the need to equate value to the study of disability in academia.

In light of the above, this chapter of the study will attempt to give a general background and the changing perspectives on disability. Furthermore, it briefly articulates the motivation of the study, the research question, the goals of the research, the research methods used to collect data, the theoretical framework which guides the study and concludes with an outline of the thesis chapters.

## **1.2 Motivation for the study**

This study is motivated by the vigorous discourse around transformation at Rhodes University and investigates the extent of support for and engagement with students with disabilities in the transformation processes of the institution. Analysing the extent to which integration is holistic at institutions of higher learning, particular interest is given to the institutional culture of Rhodes University, namely whether it values and embraces diversity and is committed to inclusivity, particularly in centering the presence and voice of students with disabilities. It explores institutional responses to students with disabilities and their capacity to flourish beyond notions of access, therefore, delivering on the demand for institutional transformation.

## **1.3 General background on disability**

A common perception of persons living with a disability is that they were struck by some tragic happening in their life. Consequently, they are assumed to be unable to fulfil their daily obligations as this tragedy increases their dependence on others. This assumption is in itself an act of marginalisation of persons with disabilities, labelling them as incapable of helping themselves and assuming that they seek no self-determination or actualization. In some social contexts, any deformity, blemish or the exhibitions of an illness, are seen as witchcraft or punishments by supreme beings (Evans-Pritchard 1937 cited by Oliver 1990). Such a belief highlights that little is known of persons with disabilities' lived experiences in all contexts. These practices speak to the cultural construction of disability, which in many instances informs the discharge of social services. Those experiencing disability become what Oliver describes as "...the collective victims of an uncaring or unknowing society rather than as individual victims of circumstances" (1990:2).

Disability can be categorised into visible and invisible impairments which also determine the level of discrimination and social stigma and consequently power relations experienced by people living with disabilities. Goffman (1963) cited by Oliver (1990), coined stigma, which in ancient times referred to the branding of people because of their deviation from the norm of a society. In modern times, the person is stigmatised because of a visible display of a defect/deformity, which discredited the person through their social interactions (Oliver, 1990). Finkelstein differs slightly from Goffman when social stigma is preceded by individual stigma (Oliver, 1990:66). According to Finkelstein, the access and equitable provision of social services (such as healthcare, employment opportunities and education), determines the stigma experienced by the person with a disability. However, it is mainly still

experienced on the individual level. People, who exhibit particularly physical disabilities, are most vulnerable to experiencing stigma because of the very nature of their disability. This experience cannot be generalised, because the paraplegic may experience the provision of social services differently than the person who is blind. This is highlighting the point that the voice of persons with disability has been medicalised and that a 'one fits all' approach is adopted, to a problematic extent.

The visible impairments (e.g. person in wheelchairs or a blind person) arguably experience greater negative treatment in society in comparison to those conditions which easily pass as a non-disabled condition (e.g. a person with epilepsy, dyslexia and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) (Eckes *et al.*, 2005). This could be advantageous, however, it could also be burdensome in that they may fear the felt stigma if they disclose their disability which could lead to distress, causing psycho-emotional disability (Rhodes *et al.*, 2008). However, due consideration should be given to the fact that any form of mental illness or condition could eventually deteriorate the physical abilities of the person hence resulting in the inevitable social stigma and discrimination. In addition, the non-disclosure of any form of mental condition could be a means of negotiating with and surviving a social order, which predominantly caters and responds to the able-bodied person (Rhodes *et.al*, 2008).

The above clearly demonstrates that this reaction to disability is socially constructed. People attach meanings to physical and mental impairments and thus orientate their behaviour accordingly. As is the case with the re-conceptualisation of being homosexual, Black and a woman, it has become important to counter the language used for persons with disabilities through activism. In the status quo, the language used can be derogatory, for example, calling someone with a disability a cripple, mongrel or handicapped (Oliver, 1990). Given this, it means disability goes beyond the categorization and treatment of impairments to being a product of "social, political, economic, and cultural practice" (Baglieri *et al.*, 2011:270). According to Cocker (1999) cited by Rhodes *et al.* (2008:386), disability is "polysemic in nature", suggesting that it is open to a myriad of interpretations based on the social context and the social actors involved - subjecting the language of disability to the meaning attached by whom and in which context.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) have been criticised for its policies and programmes predicated on the individualised

view of disability which privileges the medical model of disability. Such criticisms stems from the fact that the approach is limited and one-sided, placing the lived experience of persons with disabilities on the periphery. This limited position of the WHO was strongly criticised by the Disabled People International's chairperson Finkelstein who in his own words stated that the "...present form reinforces medical and administrative approaches towards us...it is not in our best interests to support it" (Oliver, 1990:6). This individual 'one fits all' approach to disability is void of any explanation or reference to the social organisation of structures and institutions. Subsequently, these discriminatory and unfair practices are perceived to be more fiercely launched against women and arguably, its derogatory effect more profoundly felt by the Black women.

### ***1.3.1 Women and disability***

Although generally women with a disability have experienced unfair treatment and discriminatory practices against them, these inherently discriminatory structures have been experienced more profoundly by Black women in society. According to Rhodes *et al.* (2008), the cultural diversity and disability and gender combination is characterised as a 'triple jeopardy'. This speaks to the argument of understanding disability in conjunction with other social categories, allowing for a better understanding of disability, and thereby unearthing the lived experiences of people within these various categories. Furthermore, disability discourse has given little attention to women, which could be because of the perception that their primary role is seen in the private space, which is the home. Lonsdale (1990) asserts that as a result, very little qualitative study and the challenging personal accounts of women with disabilities are recorded.

Lonsdale's (1990) study on physical disability has highlighted a few important points on the experience of the physically 'disabled', and more especially the experience of women. In society women are objectified and categorised based on registers such as beauty, race, social status, sexuality and physical appearances. These categories are situated against the backdrop of Western accepted norms and values in societies, which implies that non-conformity to the norm marginalises certain women and places them at the periphery. In many instances where the self-image of a woman is determined by physical appearance, many women indulge in extreme forms of treatments and behaviour in order to fit in. These include cosmetic surgery, following extreme forms of diets, weight loss programmes that more often than not result in undesirable outcomes such as anorexia and other deformed appearances. This still makes

them 'undesirable' in a society fixated on the norm. It becomes more oppressive when 'disabled' women are perceived as asexual and incompetent and incapable of fulfilling the role of motherhood or assuming any influential position in society (Lonsdale, 1990). These perceptions are transported into the organisation of work, politics, economy, cultures, family and education - resulting in silencing their experiences and voices in this discourse. These negative experiences ensure the entrenched exclusion of especially the Black 'disabled' women from participating in the various strata of society (Lonsdale, 1990).

#### **1.4 Disability in higher education**

In reference to above, it clearly shows that disability in many social settings is regarded as inferior and the unknown, which makes the study of its intricacies and complexities less appealing, especially in the field of academia. In reviewing literature, it became clear that disability has received very little attention in the academic circles, except in the field of medicine and psychology. However, this is problematic because as issues of race and gender have become common areas of critical analyses in academia, the need to equate value to the study of disability becomes all the more important. This supports the argument by Abberley (1987) cited by Oliver, (1990) that 'disabled' people suffer triple oppression because of their race, gender and ability. Again, very little academic work has been dedicated to the study of disability in the social sciences to explicate the experiences of disability in terms of race and gender (Lonsdale, 1990).

It can therefore be argued that medical care only extends as far as diagnosis and treatment options are concerned, which is insufficient to ensure the holistic wellness of the person in a social context which is predicated on an able-bodied framework. The alternative would be a social model of care. However, this approach is limiting in that it underpins a paternalistic approach to disability. There is very little evidence, which documents the lived experiences of those with disabilities. Anthropology which focuses on the study of cultures, interestingly offers scant critical analysis to the study as it privileges the medical model. The issue is not that the medical and psychological intervention is inappropriate, but rather that the marginalising of the issue in the social context is problematic. This supports the view of the scholars such as Fuller *et al.*, (2004) and Goodley (2013) that this could be the result of the silenced voice of persons with disabilities because of the ignorance of disability by the mainstream public. The detachment of the issue from the social context clearly aggravates lack of integration of able-bodied with the 'disabled' in mainstream society. This social

arrangement further denies the opportunity for able-bodied people to gain better insight into the lived experiences of persons with disabilities.

This in essence encapsulates the viewpoint of Rowland (2004), who asserts that persons with disabilities should not be seen as "curiosities"<sup>3</sup> but as an integral part of mainstream society. The scholar further asserts that any 'welfare' approach to disability could be crippling unless it is cast as "...self-reliance, empowerment, human development and human security..." (Rowland, 2004: xi). This means that persons with disabilities themselves should take charge of their own development. Part of the expression of this position in South Africa has been through the Disability People of South Africa (DPSA) movement. This organisation spearheaded the disability rights movement with a membership exceeding 12 000. This movement is committed to asserting the rights of persons with disabilities as provided within the Constitution of South Africa. This movement boldly and earnestly pursues a stance of individual empowerment in the discourse on disability (Rowland, 2004). Its viewpoint further entrenches the need to extend this to persons with disabilities in the context of education.

### **1.5 Centering the presence and the voice of persons with disabilities – a collective effort**

Consequently, to give voice to students with disabilities it requires collective wisdom and action, which promotes advocacy and awareness on disability and its socio-political and economic construction and implications. However, statistical reports announced by various global organisations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and the World Bank further echoes the concern that disability is held at an inferior level, perpetuating the stigma and exacerbating the unfair and discriminatory practices launched against persons with disabilities.

The World Report on Disability which aims to explore ways of promoting the social participation and engagement of persons living with disabilities, documents that disability is a global concern. The 2010 global population estimates that more than a billion people live with some form of disability, which affects people from as young as 15 years old. The World Health Survey estimates that about 19% of the world population live with severe disability (such as quadriplegia, blindness and severe depression), which are influenced by environmental factors and health conditions of countries (World Health Organization, 2011). Consequently, disability is a development and a human rights issue because of the experience

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<sup>3</sup> Referring to people who are strange or peculiar

of inequalities in health care services, employment opportunities and political participation. The World Bank estimates that approximately 20% of the world's poorest population live with some form of disability, which directly affects their education and employment opportunities. This suggests that disability exacerbates poverty as it is intrinsically linked with lack of schooling, lack of job opportunities - resulting in economic strain on the household. According to UNESCO, approximately 90% of children with disabilities do not attend school, especially in communities of developing countries. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) study reported that the world's literacy rates in adults were approximately 3% and 1% for women with disabilities. Of paramount importance is the denial of their human rights in all of the above-mentioned instances and the UNCRPD acknowledges that any person with impairment is at risk of experiencing attitudinal and environmental barriers, which hinders their full participation and realising their full potential in society (Giffard-Lindsay, 2007).

### **1.6 Changing perspective on disability**

With reference to above reports, there is a call to rethink disability beyond the social and the medical model to the political perspective on disability. A new vision for disability is emerging, which focuses more on the lived experiences of persons with disabilities while simultaneously challenging the social construction of disability in today's society. This new paradigm came about with the active mobilisation of people with disability in tackling the everyday disabling practices and experiences of persons with disabilities. It has given rise to the enactment of various legislations which prohibits the unfair discrimination of persons with disabilities (Rowland, 2004). However, there is a mismatch of policy and practice. There are persistent systemic inequities, which exclude those with disabilities from normal social and economic activities. As noted above, this has found its roots in schooling and is manifested in hostile employment spaces, perpetuated by the predominantly negative attitudes held towards disability in general.

#### ***1.6.1 Re-thinking disability***

Although the social model perspective gave insight into the social construction of disability, it does not evolve in explaining the persistent inequities that marginalise persons with disabilities. The 'rethinking disability' political project emphasizes centering and augmenting the lived experiences of persons with disabilities with the aim of critically questioning and continuously disabling the existing and culturally set social processes and structures in order to configure "socially relevant practices" (Schillmeier, 2010:10). This perspective is ground-

breaking as it reverses the trickle-down approach of imposing practices and policies embedded in an able-bodied framework. This political project on disability focuses on challenging the fixed hegemonic perception to the heterogeneity of revealing the specificities of disabling practices and in doing so, giving the multiple voices prominence in the disability discourse (Schillmeier, 2010). This hegemonic perception has also permeated the higher education institutions where the social arrangements within these institutions negatively affect the lived experiences of students with disabilities and thus makes the call for inclusive education all the more important.

It is then the purpose of the study to elevate the profile of disability in higher education, particularly at Rhodes University and give recognition to its importance in the field of academia. It further aims to argue that the experiences of students with disabilities are not significantly different from other social groups which are marginalised in higher education settings. The study further argues that interventions be from an inclusive angle in order to effectively respond to the presence and voice of students with disabilities. It supports the view that disability and those experiencing it, should be actively engaged in transforming all social construction (Chard & Couch, 1998). Therefore, the theoretical framework that will guide the study is the Critical Disability Studies Approach. It will draw on the inclusive education work of scholars such as Ainscow *et al.* (2006) and the social justice reform framework of Johnson (2004) which places the rights and experiences of persons with disabilities at the core of the debate.

### **1.7 The Critical Disability Studies Approach (CDSA)**

The CDSA views disability not only in the theoretical and practical sense but also through the lens of politics (Goodley, 2013). This viewpoint argues that disability is not detached from the socio-economic and political spaces in society, but is an essential (yet unknown) part of it. This approach is therefore useful for examining current debates and trends on the issue of disability.

The field of disability studies evolved from a concern with challenging the structural and socio-cultural exclusion of persons with disabilities which aims to advocate for a change in attitude in relation to persons with disabilities. It further aims to promote the integration of persons with disabilities into the societal mainstream. CDSA offers a nuanced transdisciplinary approach to the study of disability and Goodley (2013), claims this field is deconstructing and decolonizing traditional views on disability.

These contemporary studies which move beyond the social model, also chronicle the evolution of the ethics of care and the prevailing political and economic climate, which all directly affects the discourse on disability. Other studies on disability critically analyse it as a cultural trope, which claims that beyond the material is the body, which is socially constructed, speaking to the lived experiences of persons with disabilities. Accordingly, Ghai (2006) cited by Goodley (2013) cautions that ‘disabled’ bodies experience dis-embodiment because of this construction, silencing the voice and ignoring the presence of persons with disabilities. This means the able-bodied person is inaugurated as the norm and their reference to the ‘disabled’ is degrading and discriminatory, shifting persons with disabilities to the periphery and classifying them as the ‘Other’. McGuire (2010) cited by Goodley (2013) argues that although ‘disabled’ people are classified as the ‘Other’, there are degrees of oppression based on sex, race, ethnicity, ability and class.

### **1.8 Research question, research goals and research methodology**

It is the aim of this study to focus on a holistic approach to disability. Using Rhodes University, the study will provide answers to the following question: To what extent does the institution offer support for the participation and engagement of students with disabilities in the transformation processes of the Institution? Its sub-goals will be to investigate:

- i) Their extent of engagement in policy making and development;
- ii) The experiences and challenges students with disabilities face and their coping strategies while living and learning at Rhodes University;
- iii) The platforms available for the articulation of their daily lived experiences;
- iv) The mechanisms of support offered to students with disabilities;
- v) The concept of an inclusive, mainstream living and learning space for students with disabilities at Rhodes University.

The research undertaken uses qualitative research design (see Chapter Five for a more detailed explanation of the research technique used in the study). A sample of registered students with disabilities at Rhodes University was purposively selected to give a holistic view of the extent of support and participation of students with disabilities in the transformation processes of the institution. Data collection took place from November 2016 to January 2017. In-depth interviews with the participants elicited information on their experiences of the academic programme, support services and their viewpoints on institutional transformation at Rhodes University.

## **1.9 Thesis outline**

**Chapter One** is a discussion on the background and the changing perspectives on disability. It looks at how disability has been predicated on the medical model, which frames it as an individual pathology. It further illustrates the development and the emergence of a re-thinking of disability as a political project that centres and augments the lived experiences of persons with disabilities. While continuously disabling existing and culturally set social processes and structures, it argues for the re-configuration of institutional practices which are socially relevant and responsive. The chapter provides a rationale for conducting this study. In addition, it introduces the theoretical framework of the study, the main research question, the goals of the research and the methodology and concluding with the outline of the thesis chapters.

**Chapter Two** introduces the concept of ‘Inclusive Education’ with a specific focus on students with disabilities in higher education institutions both in developed countries and in developing countries, such as South Africa. It will also look at understanding intersectionality and the principles and the practice of ‘Ubuntu’ and its relevance to the study of disability in higher education.

**Chapter Three** will look at the extent of inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education institutions in South Africa with a brief introduction to the history of education in South Africa, more particularly the provisioning of education for learners and students with disabilities in the educational settings. It will further detail the educational transformation agenda in higher education for students with disabilities and the responses of South African universities in their commitment to the participation of students with disabilities in its transformation agenda.

**Chapter Four** analyses the transformation agenda for students with disabilities at Rhodes University considering the institutional historical background and the concept of ‘Access with success’, elucidating the idea of students’ capacity to flourish within the university.

**Chapter Five** describes the methodological approach of this study. Using qualitative research methods, it provides a profile of the students with disabilities at Rhodes University, with a detailed outline of the student research participants’ profiles.

**Chapter Six** begins to introduce some of the pertinent problems outlined by participants in navigating the physical environment in pursuit of their academic ideals.

**Chapter Seven** will articulate how key informants describe the extent of support they offer to students with disabilities in their respective support divisions with a synthesis of the study

findings by introducing some of the pertinent problems outlined by participants of the support services.

**Chapter Eight** describes what institutional transformation means to students with disabilities, with an analysis of the extent of their involvement in policy making and development. This chapter also evaluates Rhodes University's response to disability by showcasing the contributions of students with disabilities to institutional transformation.

**Chapter Nine** concludes the thesis with a discussion of key considerations for Rhodes University in terms of support and institutionalising the participation of students with disabilities in its transformation processes.

### **1.10 Conclusion**

The chapter gives a general background on disability and chronicles the changing perspectives on disability from its predominantly medical and social model to disability as a political project where the latter centres and augments the lived experiences of students with disabilities. Furthermore, the chapter highlighted the gap in higher education institutions in South Africa in centering disability both as a social justice and political issue. It is in this light that this chapter has given a rationale for conducting this study at Rhodes University, which applies a sociological lens to the analysis of the support, participation and engagement of students with disabilities in the transformation processes at Rhodes University. It is for this reason that in Chapter Two the focus will be on discussing the concept of 'inclusive education' in higher education, drawing on the scholarly work of Ainscow *et al.*, (2006) and highlighting the importance of the ethics of care underpinned by the principles and the practice of 'Ubuntu' in higher education.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE CONCEPT OF 'INCLUSIVE EDUCATION' IN HIGHER EDUCATION

#### 2.1 Introduction

Chapter One points out the gap in South African higher education transformation processes when centering the presence and voice of students with disabilities and the urgent call for inclusive education which promotes social justice and equity towards said students. It is for this reason that in this chapter, the study will highlight the importance of inclusive education in higher education institutions, specifically looking at universal access of space and products, coupled with the concept of the ethics of care. The chapter would then look at how developed countries such as the United Kingdom (UK), New Zealand, the United States of America (USA), and other countries integrate inclusive education by looking at the results of case studies conducted in some of its schools and universities. It will conclude the chapter by discussing inclusive education in the South African context, with a discussion on higher education transformation and the practice of 'Ubuntu' in the discourse of disability in higher education.

#### 2.2 The importance of inclusion in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)

Although globally HEIs accepted and recognised the needs and rights of students with disabilities, the annual awareness-raising campaigns and *ad hoc* interventions are not sufficient to give prominence to the voice and presence of students with disabilities. These events are in some ways counter-productive as they seem to reinforce pity, perpetuating negative attitudes and increase the discomfort of people without disabilities (Eid, 2015). Inclusion is very important in a changing world, where traditional thinking on what is 'normal' is re-examined (CSIE, 2015). Inclusion demands that all students are reached and accommodated irrespective of their abilities. Scholars such as Ainscow *et al.* (2006), the founding fathers of inclusive education, defines inclusion as a process and not a state, placing emphasis on curriculum restructuring to accommodate and reach all students. According to Ainscow *et al.* (2006), we need to view inclusion as reducing, amongst others, discrimination based on gender, class, ethnicity and disability. This means overcoming exclusionary practices and barriers to participation in education. It is for this reason that inclusive education is pivotal in acknowledging and recognising students with disabilities in HEIs as enshrined in Article 24 of 2006 United Nations Convention on the Rights for Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD).

Furthermore, Ainscow *et al.* (2006), argue that inclusive education should also be concerned with the ethics of care, embracing diversity, promoting increased collaborative participation and engagement in the decision-making process of policies and practices. Such education should also be predicated on entitlement – which speaks to upholding the basic human right to education and appropriate support. The practice of inclusion is committed to reducing exclusion and barriers to learning, participation and the restructuring of policies and practices to respond effectively to diversity. The question raised is what meaning do we attach to the above values and what are the implications on social policies and practices?. The interest is how such a question permeates into the transformation agenda in education. State parties are to ensure that no persons with disabilities are excluded from a regular education system and that reasonable accommodation is provided in these inclusive education systems. Persons with disabilities can accelerate this through advocacy and awareness raising campaigns (Eleweke *et al.*, 2002).

However, beyond this position, it also demands reformed educational policies that remove barriers to learning and participation. The challenge therefore is for governments to re-examine their philosophies on education and shift to an inclusive approach to education as outlined in the prescripts of the 1994 Salamanca<sup>4</sup> statement. Inclusive schooling which became an international trend, became a central focus of the 1994 Salamanca Statement where state parties made a commitment to *Education for All*, including persons with disabilities 'within a regular education system'. The aim was to increase access and participation globally. Even though this statement drew attention to the possibility of an inclusive education system, persons with disabilities were still concerned that this did not translate fully into practice.

This requires that all think critically on the issue of inclusion also in relation to disability because the replacement of the separate schooling system for an integrative system was not effective in responding to the special needs of students. It does not alter a system - which implies integration of the special school system is assimilating, whereas inclusive education requires restructuring. Sebba *et al.* (1996), asserts that the special educational needs (SEN) thinking is in crisis and new thinking has been developed on how we should view SEN. Traditionally SEN as a separate education system championed by various charitable

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<sup>4</sup> 1994 World Conference on Special Needs Education held in Salamanca, Spain.

organisations was an extension of national educational provisions. This separatist approach to education became problematic as a human rights issue, as well as an ineffective and expensive system. These structures are rigid and exclusionary by nature, marginalising students with learning difficulties and other defects, who require special settings for learning. It seems to be a dominant worldview, making inclusion even more challenging in the context of education (Sebba, 1996).

However, Farrell (2000) argues that inclusion from a human rights perspective is over-emphasised. He finds it problematic that all students are placed in any schooling without reservation. This sometimes means individual needs are overlooked and not met. Examples of these would be students with profound learning difficulties who are placed in special schools, which cater for these special needs in a specialised educational needs system, with adequate resources and staff. This means there is scope for instituting inclusive education for all students irrespective of their differences and capabilities and in so doing breakdown negative attitudes towards students with disabilities. One such way of ensuring inclusion in higher education is universal design for universal access.

### ***2.2.1 Universal Design (UD)***

Robert Mace coined UD in the early 1970s as an integral part of architectural designs, making it more appealing to all individuals using the space (Silver *et al.*, 1998). This means that any design of buildings are mindful to the diverse array of people in society and therefore intentionally create environments that are more inclusive. This also means all products and environments are universal and accessible to all people from all walks of life rather than as an add-on (Scott *et al.*, 2003). Therefore in academia, universal instructional design is considered a progressive step to accessibility issues and instructional planning.

### ***2.2.2 Universal Instructional Design (UID)***

The scholars Silver *et al.* (1998), coined the term UID which is symbolic of the innovative means of curriculum necessary for higher education. The UID complements the existing innovations and holds the promise that cooperative learning, computer-assisted instruction and universal accommodation related to specific study strategies, ensures that teaching and learning are inclusive as well as innovative (Silver *et al.*, 1998:48). The UID is an innovative approach where issues of accessibility are an integrated part of instructional methodology and planning for students with disabilities (Scott *et al.*, 2003). The academic staff is therefore required to transform the content and pedagogical practices, which are student-focussed -

responding to the diversity in learning to function, learning profiles and diverse student interests. In addition to this, it promotes student self-advocacy and the institution's commitment to create inclusive learning environments. This brings to the fore that institutional policies should promote advocacy and awareness about disability within the classrooms and permeating to the broader institution and community (Kraglund-Gauthier *et al.*, 2014).

### ***2.2.3 Universal Design for Learning (UDL)***

The UDL has its roots in universal design in creating environments and products which are universally accessible. In education it speaks to information management, the demonstration of competence and student engagement. It also requires the altering of the design, teaching style and pace, the assessment systems of the curriculum as well as the availability of appropriate teaching venues. In practice, this means the adaptation of courses, in order to accommodate all learners, including those of diverse groups. For example, in the instance of students who may not express what they know in a way that demonstrates what he/she knows, the lecturer then explores other assessment tools to address this.

Assistive Technology for Learning (ATL) which is a component of UDL are devices which enable students with various impairments to actively engage in the learning process and are still able to achieve their own goals. UDL calls for creative ways of maximizing the learning experience for the students with special learning needs (Kraglund-Gauthier *et al.*, 2014). The impact of research on this concept is receiving little attention. Due to the tenets of inclusive education which adopt a human rights approach, the quest to ask more empirical questions on inclusive practices could be helpful in the development of all students in higher education (Farrell, 2000). Although inclusive education has become an international trend in higher education, its impact has varied across developed as well as developing countries and for this purpose, the study focuses on the implementation of inclusive education in some of the developed countries as well as the way in which it has been experienced in developing countries, such as South Africa.

### **2.3 Inclusive education in HEIs in developed countries**

As highlighted in Chapter One, globally, persons with disabilities have and continue to be marginalised in the education environment including developed countries. In the mid-1980's, the New Zealand government promoted individualism and limited state interference in the economic and political arena. It was predicated on the belief that people are fundamentally

self-seeking, thereby embracing individualism and subsequently shifting other social phenomena (such as sexism, racism and disability) to the periphery (Ballard, 2004). According to Kelsey (1993) cited by Ballard (2004), neo-liberal ideology undermines values such as the ethics of care, community and compassion. It receives very little attention when formulating policies and driving practices.

Caring is especially important in education, where relations are formed and both ‘parties’ contribute to this relation based on trust. In the late 1980s, the education system in New Zealand was a public good - promoting social justice and equity (Ballard, 2004). In the early 1990s, it changed to an education system where the teacher-student relationship was a contractual one - a commodity to be bought and sold. With limited state spending and the emphasis on the free market, this neo-liberal economic system has marginalised especially the poor and ‘vulnerable’ that could not afford to be educated and therefore were ineligible for employment opportunities. It shifted the marginalised groups to the periphery of society, labelling and excluding them as the ‘Other’ (Ballard, 2004). The above suggest that caring as a culture continues to be under threat in a system predicated on neo-liberal thought.

Similar to New Zealand, Singapore’s education system is founded on neo-liberal thought, which makes inclusive education all the more difficult to introduce and enact in an educational system which is influenced by global ideas, trends and challenges, making inclusion a “...‘glocal’ phenomenon” (Goodley, 2007: 6). This speaks to the concern stated by Giroux, that a marketed education system runs the risk of creating schools which are simply “adjuncts of the workplace” (2003:3). This means the primary goal is to get a qualification to enter the workplace. Other important activities such as extra-curricular enrichment programmes, where awareness of and disabling of discriminatory practices amongst other thing, takes a backseat in pursuit of this goal. This supports the view that this approach is in enmity to the principles and values of inclusive education as defined by Ainscow *et al.*, (2006). In the UK, there are three known legislatures that protect the rights and promote the integration of students with disabilities which are the Disability Discrimination Act, 1995; Special Educational Needs and Disability Act, 2001 and the Equality Act, 2010. The UK’s Special Education Needs and Disability Act of 2001 stipulate that it is unlawful to discriminate against persons with disabilities in student services, but there is still a mismatch between policy and practice. A study conducted by Fuller *et al.* (2004), with students at the University of Gloucestershire in the UK, found that the

experience of teaching in the classroom has been difficult in that teachers would talk too fast or remove notes too fast. In terms of participating in discussions in class, some of the students felt the experience was challenging because they might find it difficult to hear or see the teacher over the other students in the class. Some of the students reported that what they experience as good practice of teaching where teachers were approachable, supportive and very engaging in terms of what material is important for assessment. In terms of assessment, the study found that students with disabilities would take up courses where the assessment tools are less challenging and more accommodative of their 'disability'. Others felt that the type of assessment also affects the kind of experience they have in terms of assessment (Fuller *et al.*, 2004).

Further to this, the study looked at how the dissemination of information has been experienced prior to enrolment, during the registration and orientation period and information within the university. Prior to enrolment, the students' experience generally was that the information would be on the acceptance into the university. In terms of accessing the information on support for students with disabilities, students did not generally use that information during the first year of study, but closer to the time of graduation. This could speak to the willingness or unwillingness of students with disabilities to seek support because they may wish to avoid exposure perhaps out of fear of ridicule or discrimination (Fuller *et al.*, 2004).

Similar to South Africa, the USA was historically highly racialised with White and Black learners being educated in separate special schools' settings. (Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001; Klingner *et al.*, 2005; Ferguson & Mehta, 2004 cited by Ferguson, 2008:112). In the USA, the inclusive movement aimed not only to educate students with disabilities in a general education (GE) setting but also to transform the philosophies of education. The program was reported to be successful as far as the Department of Education (1997) reported, 95% of students with disabilities are receiving education in the GE setting and 73% of their instructional program in the general setting (Salend, 1999). At the school level, a study revealed the impact of this arrangement in school districts in the US attracted a mixed reaction. Some schools (which were better resourced) were better able to commit to inclusive education. In terms of the attitudes of able-bodied students towards students with disabilities, the study revealed that it was more positive, there was a greater acceptance of their differences and meaningful friendships were developed. The impact of the academic

outcomes of all students showed that the experience has been positive and enhanced their academic performances rather than detracted from them.

The study revealed that the attitudes of teachers were also mixed; shaped by factors such as financial resources, support services, research and training. The recommendation made was that both schools and researchers work collaboratively to extract best inclusive education policies, practices and programs which have a positive impact on all students in a GE setting (Salend, 1999).

A study conducted at the University of Washington demonstrated a commitment to the increased participation of students with disabilities in the field of Computer Science. The initiative *Access Computing*, funded by the National Science Foundation, broadened the audience to include those with disabilities, which may not only help employers to meet the stipulations of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), but also potentially replace an ageing American population. The field of Computer Science was challenged to alter its instructional program to be more inclusive and to ensure that information and technology is available to all. This initiative proved to be successful in that the Computer departments became more accessible and more welcoming and individuals whose participation has been broadened positively benefitted from this inclusion (Ladner *et al.*, 2015). There has also been a commitment to the inclusiveness of online learning material for students with disabilities. On-line learning material has been proposed to designers, which can accommodate students with visual impairments (total blindness, legal blindness and colour blindness), hearing impairments, motor impairments and cognitive impairments (Ladner *et al.*, 2015).

The study conducted on learning disabilities at Portland State University where 11 students revealed that the barriers erected and maintained, were based on environmental factors more than individual pathology. These barriers include misperceptions of students with disabilities, the fear of being stigmatised when declaring a disability and the extra-long hours put into completing tasks. The absence of the voice of their experience is reinforced as learners or practitioners without learning disabilities conjure up responses to the disability (Denhart, 2008). The study also revealed that students with dyslexia (a learning difficulty), are more likely to find it difficult to cope with the formal education system. They therefore find writing exams or essays and organising their time as very challenging. In response to these challenges, they need more of a practical or oral assessment (Denhart, 2008).

Another study was conducted at the Open University in Israel which examined the experience and success of students with learning disabilities compared to those without learning disabilities. The study interrogated the learning experience of the 191 college students with learning disabilities and 190 students without such disabilities in 4 areas: academic difficulties, learning strategies, the experience of examinations and the students own perception of own learning support or lack thereof. The study did reveal that students with learning disabilities found the humanities subjects difficult to cope with because of the amount of reading and writing required. They prefer visual or oral teaching and they experience examinations very stressful. The study also revealed the students found concentration difficult as they are anxious about completing exams in the set times. They indicated that extra time during examinations will be useful and alternative ways of assessment will bring anxiety levels down. Overall, the study revealed that there is no significant difference in grade success (Heiman *et al.*, 2003:248).

The motto: “Disabled but not disqualified” aims to debunk the myth that those that live with disabilities have no capabilities to succeed in any area of their lives. Various social structures in Arab countries actively campaign for the full integration of persons with disabilities into mainstream society in order for them to maximize their full potential (Eid, 2015). For example, the use of Information Communication Technologies (ICT) and Assistive Technology (AT) is used as part of their political agenda. These Arab countries aim to increase the social inclusion of students with disabilities through distance e-Learning, reading digital and audio libraries, internet access and to broaden access to ICT centres for persons with disabilities in their communities (Eid, 2015).

Conversely, there is a dearth of research on how academic staff experiences their teaching process with students with disabilities. A study using a questionnaire at a small Greek University explored the attitudes and experience of academic staff towards students with dyslexia. Although there were limitations to the study with a small percentage of participants completing the questionnaire and it confined to only one small university, the outcome of the study was generally positive. One of the outcomes of the study was that the academic staff had a positive attitude towards students with dyslexia but their concern is on the inclusiveness of their teaching. This suggest that the academia faces the challenge to navigate the teaching programme to embed inclusion and offering pedagogical practices, which are inclusive of this diverse group of students in their classrooms (Stampoltzis *et al.*, 2015).

Therefore, the lack of information on reasonable accommodation available and inflexible assessment methods attributes to the high dropout rates at higher education institutions. While students declare their disability, the frustration is experienced when the university structures do not divulge this information to lecturers or teachers, which could assist and support the students better within the classroom. This lack of knowledge or understanding of the 'disability' ignores the needs of students with disabilities and subsequently their voices (Stampoltzis *et al.*, 2015).

Despite some of the challenges faced in inclusive education, according to Ainscow *et al.* (2006), inclusive education is possible even in the most undesirable learning conditions, given there is a commitment to re-direct resources and there is strong advocacy for social justice and equity-based educational policies which places inclusive education in the centre. Part of this commitment would be to emphasise the point that the process of inclusive education for students with disabilities must be seen in relation to other categories such as race, ethnicity and gender (Giffard-Lindsay, 2007). Until recently, many developing countries adopted the western approach to inclusive education and although it may evidently be more successful in developed countries, developing countries are facing various challenges in achieving inclusive education. The challenges include inadequate facilities to foster a culture of inclusion and the lack of funding of structures in order to restructure resources to reach all students of the school. Furthermore, there is an absence of enabling legislation, which in most developing countries is in its embryonic state and are not predicated on mandatory laws and policies, intended to protect the rights of persons with disabilities.

#### **2.4 Inclusive education in HEIs – South African context**

In South Africa, inclusive education is framed within the human rights approach, which is based on the ideal of freedom and equality through "... a single system of education dedicated to ensuring that all individuals are enabled to become competent citizens in a changing and diverse society" (Engelbrecht, 2006:256). Diversity has traditionally been associated with differences in race, class, gender and culture, but now broadened to include sexual orientation, age, socio-economic status and ability. According to Mandew (1999) cited by Cross (2004), diversity is about power - how it is both distributed and re-distributed within institutions. The discourse on diversity informs the terms set for discussing the issue and finding expression to the value attached to it.

There remains a gap in the scholarship on diversity which needs to find prominent expression in academic programmes. Therefore, the issue of diversity zooms into the existing power relations and aims to illuminate the uneven distribution of such power. In the context of higher education, the institutionalization of diversity has become important as part of the education debate and policy formulation process in the transformation discourse. Institutions are identified as sites that embrace the challenge of dealing effectively with issues of social inclusion and structural inequalities and the review of current pedagogical practices and diversity curricula in the context of the transformation discourse. Therefore, the construction and engagement with the knowledge on diversity can develop into a generation of knowledge on the issue of disability. This position is strongly supported by Schneider (1997) cited by Cross (2004), that it will allow the student to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and awareness to form grounded judgements (Cross, 2004).

This means that the issues of diversity should evolve from being an add-on in the curriculum to an integral part of the academic programme that would address the gap, which still exists in the scholarship of diversity. Such a programme would have a transformative approach, which provides a paradigm shift on how students traditionally view the generation and organisation of knowledge. It poses the challenge to South African scholars to develop what Fraser (1997), aptly describes as a theory of recognising diversity that embraces and advances social equity defending the "cultural politics of difference...with the social politics of equality" (Cross, 2004 : 404-405).

In the light of the above, a social justice agenda in South Africa that privilege the 'disabled' in society requires an understanding of the intersectional position of disability. It links intrinsically with the cultural and social background and hereby requires the augmentation and context-specific explanations, thereby constructing the voice of the voiceless. This means an ableism lens will allow limited understanding of disability in relation to other social issues such as race, class and gender and makes salient wider social structures, which create and perpetuate inequality and hierarchical subject-positions (Johnson, 2004).

The scholar Johnson argues that a social justice reform framework ensures that all "voices and experiences are addressed and valued justly in our classrooms...otherwise the inequalities that exclude bodies and voices marked as "different" will not be transformed" (2004:146). This will allow for the integration of disability in course contents, open dialogue

on the issue and thereby deconstruct the “silenced societal disability narrative” (Myers *et al.*, 2013). It is for these reasons that it is important for the introduction of inclusive pedagogical practices in the content of curricula across disciplines. Intersectionality asserts the recognition of this dominant, oppressive culture, which silences the ‘Other’ through various means, including violence and the imposing of sanctions to the extent that this violent imposing of discriminatory practices and other subtler silencing tactics becomes legitimated (Collins, 1998).

Collins (1998) recognises that intersectionality transcends the politics of identity and that power relations within these intersections also vary. For instance, although a White female may enjoy the privilege due to Whiteness, she is still subjected to the White male. Her power of privilege in the social space is proportionately equal to her male counterpart but could be grossly unequal in the private space of the home. Contrary to her Black female counterpart, the experience of their roles of subjection to the male can be both fundamentally far removed in both the public and the private space. It also means that an individual may experience both privilege and oppression simultaneously, depending on the elements of their identity. For instance, a White woman in a South African society experiences both marginalisation and oppression, in so far as she is marginalised as inferior to the biologically privileged male body, but experiences privilege through the embodiment of the ‘norm’ of being White. Social categories consider the man as the legitimate citizen and in possession of reason whereas the woman is considered the antithesis to this, the second-class citizen. Society endorses the man’s ‘body’ as credible, whereas the women’s body has had her voice and presence taken away.

With the emergence of feminist thought and scholarship, the body has become a site to explicate western history and thought (Oyewùmí, 2005). For Braidotti (2003) cited by Goodley (2013) the body is neither biological nor sociological but a site for the convergence of multiple codes such as sex, race and class. However, despite feminist social constructionism, the body remains central in the social arrangements in society (Oyewùmí, 2005). Dealing with the ‘Other’ therefore needs to go beyond the politics of identity but that of intersectionality. This means that it transcends to a socially constructed identity to a self-imposed identity that is worthy of celebratory recognition and equally deserving of accessing entitlements that are beneficial to the ‘Other’. The ‘Other’ therefore would no longer need to be treated in a manner of deprivation or marginalisation, but different by virtue of being different and not socially constructed. It means that the individual is recognized to be first a

person before they are categorised and assigned a 'label' which determines their position of privilege or not.

This approach to the 'Other' and the demand for the re-directing of resources and the augmented voice and presence of the 'Other' beyond the registers of race and gender parallel to inclusive education policies and practices, could be ground-breaking in the field of academia. The scholar Ballard (2004) proposes the resistance of the prevailing ideological colonisation on two levels - the political level and the personal level. He suggests a process of questioning what he terms a "culture of contentment" (2004: 101), which essentially means a resistance of turning a blind eye to social injustice, to caring about what is happening around us and see that exclusion is a feature of the society which needs to be abolished, through the active participation of citizens. This means there is a call for a social construction of humanness. Ballard (2004), further argues that at the personal level (which speaks to the ideology of engagement) is the acknowledgement of another's humanness, and through that promote and emphasise the ethics of care, which inter alia means caring about, taking care of, giving and receiving care. This process involves both engagement and action at the personal level, which has the potential to permeate the political, given sufficient effort and political will. The scholar, Ballard accordingly urges that not only through our research, but in policy formation and practice, that we "analyse, and evaluate the ethical and social implications of ideologies..." (2004:90). It suggest that the research should continuously interrogate the assumptions, the theories and ideologies we subscribe to in the knowledge production and dissemination process.

Given the above approach, this means that an intersectional understanding of disability uproots the reductionist approach of individual pathology and proposes a rethinking of disability, which prioritises a social justice framework that tackles the wider systemic oppressions towards persons with disabilities. This approach also becomes relevant in the formulation of education policy and practice as mechanisms to destabilize institutional barriers in education. This view is supported by scholars such as Skjeie & Langvasbraten (2009) cited by Liasidou (2012), who points out the importance of institutions to institutionalize intersectionality with the intention of dealing with discrimination and oppression, by taking into account the various sources of social disadvantage. In the context of higher education, the intersectional approach allows for the critique of the educational policies which obscures the injustices experienced on the various levels such as race, class,

gender and ability. This would mean that issues of disability would find prominence not only in the annual awareness-raising campaigns, but feature as formal modules in the academic programme. This speaks to the idea of inclusive education and simultaneously a step towards eradicating the institutional and attitudinal barriers experienced by many students with disabilities.

According to Johnson (2004), although inclusive education is a prerequisite for transformative institutional and curricula changes for students with disabilities, it is not sufficient. This view is supported by Knoll (2009), who argues that the mere inclusion of inclusive education is insufficient because it obscures the impact of race, ethnicity, gender and class. This means that the inclusive education approach underpinned by the principles of universal design without drawing on feminist analyses on disability and addressing and destabilising relations of power is limiting. The scholar asserts that the UDL is not reflecting a socially just change in education as it fails to embrace how the relations of power subjugate the students with disabilities. In addition he argues that the “universally designed pedagogy” remedy in addressing the educational needs of students with disabilities obscures the power inequities embedded in institutional cultures (Knoll, 2009: 122).

As such, it is imperative to tackle these inequities using a social justice framework. A social justice agenda augments disability as a political issue, emphasising its intersectionality, which in turn, allows the raising of questions about inequality and simultaneously challenge unchanged systems that “perpetuate racism, power and exclusion” (Larson *et al.*, 2001 cited by Liasidou, 2012: 305). It allows for the critique of languages, histories, cultures and religions of minority groups that are present in dominant pedagogical practices. Guillaume argues the need for an approach “that recognises the intersection of race and ableism as producing a hegemonic racialised, able-bodied order” (2010:6). In the light of this, it is important to interrogate this hegemonic perception in the context of South African higher education which inherited a particular higher education system that was designed to secure White supremacy and privilege and reproduce Black inferior educational standards and impoverishment (CHE, 2004:230, Dison, Walker & Mclean, 2008).

Historically, education in South Africa was a catalyst for the broader struggle for liberation and national unity. In the early 1980’s educational reform and the policies introduced were still drenched with inequalities along racial lines. Under a new democratic government in

1994, the different racially defined departments of education forged into one single department. In 2009, after the general elections, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) came into being and committed itself to the provision of quality post-school education and training in line with the Bill of Rights of the Constitution based on the values of human rights and equity<sup>5</sup>.

With the advent of a democratically elected government, higher education institutions received scrutiny about the extent to which they have embraced the ethos and values of a democratic state. It has become the site of contestation for overcoming the established apartheid practices in education. This has become particularly evident in historically White institutions such as Rhodes University (RU), University of Cape Town (UCT) and the University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) (Hugo, 1998; Engelbrecht, 2006). Badat (2010) succinctly articulates the role for higher education institutions post 1994 as producing well-rounded graduates and critical citizens, from which societies can benefit, to undertake rigorous scholarship for the greater good, engage proactively with communities, engage with the local, national, continental contexts and simultaneously compete in the global arena. The role of HEIs then subscribes to principles and values such as academic freedom, institutional autonomy, democratisation, equity, redress, social justice and public accountability. It hinges on imperatives such as institutional culture, curriculum and research, social cohesion, social inclusion and social engagement (DoE, 1997).

## **2.5 Higher education transformation – South Africa**

Transformation became the 'buzzword' in South African higher education institutions (HEIs) post-1994. According to Badat transformation is about the "dissolution of existing social relations and institutions, policies and practices, and their re-creation and consolidation into something substantially new" (2009:456). Therefore, transformation in HEIs for the government has become all the more important as it has seen HEIs as vital participants in the broader process of advancing the political, social and economic transition under a new social order.

With the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) in 1994, the mandate has been clear that all higher education institutions are to restructure as a means of undoing the effects of apartheid. Hence this restructuring process was significantly influenced by the NCHE

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<sup>5</sup> Government Gazette REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA Vol. 590 Pretoria, 21 August 2014, No. 37928.

report of 1996 as it raised key issues and debates on transformation in higher education. Subsequently, the recommendations from the report culminated into the development of legislation around higher education (Reddy, 2006). This has also brought to the fore the question of HEIs autonomy and the need of upholding the delicate balance between the government mandate and the freedom of higher education institutions to generate and disseminate knowledge.

In addition to knowledge production, educational transformation became part of the core business of HEIs. Professor Bengu, the Minister of Education from 1994 until 1999, unambiguously stated that “educational transformation is not an option but an obligation” (Hugo, 1998:13). The 1997 White Paper on Higher Education outlined a comprehensive vision of a transformed, post-apartheid higher education system that a “transformed, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist system of higher education will”:

- Promote equity of access and fair chances of success to all who are seeking to realise their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities;
- Meet, through well-planned and coordinated teaching, learning and research programmes, national development needs, including the high-skilled employment needs presented by a growing economy operating in a global environment;
- Support a democratic ethos and a culture of human rights by educational programmes and practices conducive to critical discourse and creative thinking, cultural tolerance, and a common commitment to a humane, non-racist and non-sexist social order;
- Contribute to the advancement of all forms of knowledge and scholarship, in particular, address the diverse problems and demands of the local, national, southern African contexts, and uphold rigorous standards of academic quality (DoE, 1997).

The above transformation goals in the Education White Paper are useful as it covers one of the key areas for transformation in higher education which is: Access and participation in higher education. It is the purpose of this study to engage with this transformation goal as it investigate the extent of support and engagement of students with disabilities in transformation processes at Rhodes University.

The Ministry of Higher Education is committed to policy formulation that will steer national higher education systems and institutions to bring about transformation in its governing

structures. The ministry does not prescribe to higher education institutions how to manage their internal affairs but rather proposes that the framework of change should be rigorous in addressing past inequalities. The Council which is the highest decision-making body should endeavour to demonstrate its own commitment to transformation in its policies and structures in order to gain the respect and confidence of all relevant stakeholders - including students. Hence, forums such as the Student Services Council and Institutional Culture Committees are crucial entities to channel transformation processes and articulate indicators of transformation.

In the light of the above, it broadens the responsibility of ensuring the creation of an enabling institutional environment which embraces and affirms diversity, coupled with promoting the rights and dignity of all as well as eradicating any forms of harassment and discrimination due to differences (DoE, 1997). Many HEIs have recognised that access to higher education is a national priority and therefore this includes removing any barriers of access to learning and living spaces. One of the government's strategies to expand access to higher education is funding provided under the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). However, over time the allocation of these funds declined. This seems to represent a global trend, where universities are subjected to "creeping austerity" – referring to the worsening of institutions financial conditions (Wangenge-Ouma, 2010). This worrying trend compels universities for a year on year increase in tuition fees, generally affordable only to a small minority. Although universities understand their mandate in higher education transformation, they are constantly challenged to strike the balance between the core pursuit of academic scholarship, to produce and disseminate knowledge within the context of competitive global political, social and economic relations.

Notwithstanding, institutions of higher learning still hold the promise of redressing past social ills when it embarks on interventions with an intersectional understanding of social categories. Against this backdrop, it has an unwavering responsibility to produce graduates who are internationally competitive and are successful conduits in the global economy. Parallel to this, it has a responsibility nationally, to uphold its mandate to advance its own social, economic, cultural, and political contexts. In spite of the undesirable conditions faced by many HEIs, there have been many developments made on increasing and broadening participation of under-privileged students.

## 2.6 Consideration for the practice of 'Ubuntu' in South African HEIs

It is in the light of the above, I argue for the consideration of 'Ubuntu' in the critical disabilities studies approach framework. 'Ubuntu' is often coined as uniquely African, but may potentially be expressed in universal terms such as community, togetherness and to an extent, humanism. Through the practice of 'Ubuntu', the sense of community opens up possibilities to promote social justice, to cultivate sympathy, care, respect, consideration for and kindness to others in higher education institutions. Various interpretations exist with regards to what 'Ubuntu' means – which has been socially constructed. However, it is important to illustrate the basic characteristics of 'Ubuntu'. It is an Nguni proverb used in the early 1990's to mean 'umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu' which means "I am because we are". Other scholars such as Motsei (2007) cited by Gade defines it as "...a philosophy that could assist in rebuilding within and amongst different communities" (2012: 492). Another African scholar, Ngcoya (2009) cited by Gade (2012) asserts that 'Ubuntu' "stresses the importance of community, solidarity, caring and sharing..." (2012: 492).

The core idea is that the existence of the self is dependent on the existence of the community, which lies in direct juxtaposition to the Cartesian notion "I think therefore I am", in which the existence of the self is dependent on the one's own existence. However, 'Ubuntu' is a concept highly regarded amongst many African people. Ramose (2002), equates 'Ubuntu' with the concept of ethics, which means you cannot have the one without the other. As ethics speaks to the moral conduct of human behaviour, it means 'Ubuntu' is a way of life – a practice where doing 'Ubuntu' takes precedence over the do-er. It also means it is a focus not on the individual but serves a greater purpose for a greater good. It is predicated on the flexibility to create harmony and balance within human relations in order to serve the society.

The scholars, Praeg (2014) and Ramose (2002) are of the view that 'Ubuntu' is about doing and is a political act that demands priority in a South African context (Praeg, 2014). This means that it is an exercise of employing power to engage in a political struggle to get recognition of rights and of asserting presence due to "institutionalised marginalisation" (Praeg, 2014: 9). It is a process of re-aligning the balance of power and to centre the classified marginalised (i.e. the Black, woman, gay, 'disabled'). 'Ubuntu' is universally expressed but should be contextualised and hence differently applied. Enslin *et al.* (2004), argues that 'Ubuntu' is not uniquely African as it is also prominent in Western/European thought. The scholars Enslin *et al.* (2004), further critiques this uniqueness and its practices

of care and compassion when on the African continent there is evidence of longstanding and prevalent practices such as genocide, homophobia and corruption. This speaks against an ideal practice of 'Ubuntu' if it is the DNA of the African (South African) continent (Enslin *et al.*, 2004). Despite some limitations, it still holds the promise of adding value to the educational transformation discourse in the context of higher education. The South African scholar Msila (2009) argues that Africans should assert their identity and agendas that mirror their realities - notwithstanding the realities of the world around them. Therefore, to bring to the fore the voice of students with disabilities requires collective wisdom and action, which promotes advocacy and awareness on disability within its socio-political and economic construction.

In the case of Rhodes University, the purpose of 'Ubuntu' would be to strive to create harmonious and equal balance of power relations between the institution and its 'subjects'. In considering the arguments of Ramose (2002) and Praeg (2014), this implies that the institution's policies and practices need to reflect the ethics of care as a commitment to centre the presence and voice of students with disabilities at Rhodes University. As aptly put by Praeg (2014), 'Ubuntu' is "...a statement we should feel, experience and understand as a challenge, as an exercise of power, as an assertion of the right of Africans to be recognised, to be present, to be part of (not apart from) the conversation..." (2014:14-15).

## **2.7 Conclusion**

The chapter revealed that inclusive education can be effective even in the worst of conditions given there is a commitment to re-direct resources and promote social justice and equity in the context of education. This has been demonstrated by the relative success of the inclusion of universally accessible instructional designs in an effort to include students with disabilities in the mainstream educational environment. This has been documented with the success achieved in the education settings of the USA, who like South Africa was historically highly racialised in terms of its separate special schools' settings.

In the South African education context, higher education institutions still hold the promise that inclusive education is possible, based on the understanding that the discourse of disability must be analysed in conjunction with other social categories such as race, gender, class and ethnicity. In this chapter I argue for the need to consider 'Ubuntu' as a practice that can be extended to and add value to the discourse of disability. This understanding of disability in conjunction with above categories and the practice of 'Ubuntu' could then result

in establishing a more humane community, which recognises the presence, the lived experiences and acknowledges the voice of students with disabilities through inclusionary educational policies and practices. In the light of this, the following chapter will analyse the extent to which students with disabilities are participating in South African higher education institutions.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS (HEIs) – SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter accentuated higher education institution still holds the promise for inclusive education if there is a commitment to re-direct resources which aims at promoting the inclusion of students with disabilities in the mainstream educational environment. Given this assertion, the study aims to analyse to what extent this inclusion has been upheld in South African higher education institutions. The chapter will undertake an overview of the history of education in South Africa since 1652. Its particular purpose is to provide an overview of the educational provisioning for persons with disabilities both in the schooling and the higher education settings. Further on, it will examine the extent to which transformation in the South African higher education system has posed challenges to students with disabilities.

The chapter will demonstrate that some of the problems far outweigh the benefits (such as provisions made in the legislature) experienced by said students in institutions of higher learning. It will elaborate on some of these problems which include the mismatch between policy and practice resulting in attitudinal and institutional barriers said students experience in the higher education environment. It will conclude the chapter by looking at how some institutions of higher learning have recognised and actively engaged students with disabilities.

#### **3.2 Historical background- South Africa's education system**

South Africa's provision of education under the apartheid system has been distinctively characterised by inequalities. The entrenchment of racially and class defined education has its origins in the advent of colonialism in 1652. These forms of institutionalised discrimination practices through unequal resource allocation and the introduction of tribalism into education, continued under the then ruling National Party of 1948 until 1994. The machinations of the apartheid system ensured that Whites are privileged in the economy at the expense of Black people, which meant that Black people were designated to occupy certain jobs (usually in low skills ranking) in order to serve the White economy (Rakometsi, 2008).

### **3.2.1 Bantu Education**

The imposition of the Bantu Education Act was a powerful and destructive tool used by the apartheid government to suppress Black people's talents and capabilities. It was conceived under the instrumental influence and machinations of the then Minister of Native Affairs, Dr Hendrik Verwoerd. The Act ruthlessly aimed at denigrating Black history and culture with the mythical teachings of White Afrikaner culture in prescribed textbooks and curricula. The Act was accordingly indicative of the apartheid government's paternalistic and racist view of their supremacy over Black people. Its practices were evident in the deeply entrenched disparities between Black and White quality of education, the overcrowded classrooms and debilitated buildings, notorious within Black schools. The forceful imposition of Afrikaans as a language of instruction for key subjects culminated in 1976 with the Soweto youth uprising, which led to a nation-wide protest against the Bantu Education Act (Hartshorne, 1992; Kallaway, 1984; Rakometsi, 2008).

Learners with disabilities who are children with specific sensory impairments (i.e. blindness and/or deafness), were provided inferior education by special schools which were mostly established by religious and other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Fagin, 2011). The National Party legally provided for specialised education through the Special Schools Act (hereafter referred to as the SSA). At the time, education was compulsory for White pupils and the Act exclusively catered for the White minority (Asmal & James, 2001; Fagin, 2011). Under the SSA, the education of Black learners "remained low on the priority list of the apartheid government" (Fagin, 2011:15). This was at the expense of Black pupils whose dominant mainstream secondary education system consisted mainly of a limited number of special schools for Black learners with special educational needs (DoE, 1998).

As a result, there was unequal service provision between Black and White pupils with disabilities (Gwalla-Ogisi *et al.*, 1998). Muthukrishna & Schoeman, (2000) cited by Fagin, (2011) distinguished South Africa's specialised educational system from those of other African countries. The special schools in South Africa for White learners with disabilities were well-funded and well-resourced in comparison to Black learners attending special schools, by categorising and separating children with disabilities in terms of both race and disability (Department of Education, 2001; Lomofsky & Lazarus, 2001). With the advent of democracy, the dissolving of racially institutionalised education systems was a priority.

### **3.2.2 Post-apartheid education system**

The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa protects and promotes the rights of all its citizens and is entrenched by the Bill of Rights, which prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities. The Constitution guarantees the recognition of the rights of persons with disabilities including recognition of Sign Language for Deaf South Africans. The past twenty-two years of South African democracy has made major strides in transforming how society treats persons with disabilities. The international and regional treaties have informed the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (WPRPD)<sup>6</sup> and the vision articulated in the White Paper of 1997 was “a society for all, one in which persons with disabilities are actively involved in the process of transformation”.

The Integrated National Disability Strategy (INDS) became the benchmark for all future policies, programmes and legislation on disability (2015:19). Its vision is to create a free and just society including persons with disabilities and the intent on accelerating the transformation agenda on equity, inclusion and integration into mainstream society. It stipulates the norms and standards for removal of any barriers which perpetuate their exclusion from mainstream society. Furthermore, the National Development Plan (NDP) vision, which is used as a strategy to eradicate barriers at all levels, also recognises that and acknowledges that barriers (both visible and invisible) hinder the development of the full potential of persons with disabilities.

### **3.3 Profile and experiences of students with disabilities in HEIs**

The 2011 Census data reveals that the North-West province has the highest prevalence (10%) of persons with disabilities. The province is followed by the Eastern Cape (9.6%), with Gauteng recording the smallest percentage of all provinces at 5.3%. The Black African has the highest percentage at 7.8%, followed by Whites at 6.5%.

The political agenda of undoing “race-based separation” (Akoojee *et al.*, 2007:390), is to increase the participation of the ‘non-traditional’ student base, which refers to Black students as well as women in higher education. Students with disabilities constitute less than 1% of the total population in higher education institutions in South Africa (Mutanga, 2017). Inherently,

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<sup>6</sup> Approved by Cabinet on 9 December 2015. It updates South Africa’s 1997 White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy (INDS).

they cannot be excluded from any educational and training opportunities because of their disability. The 2011 census data further reveals that persons with disabilities are still experiencing difficulty in accessing quality education. At tertiary education level, an alarmingly high number of young people between the ages of 20 and 24 years are not accessing tertiary education and only about 5.1% with disabilities compared to 12.1% who obtained a tertiary qualification. The statistics reveals that Whites with disabilities, who enrol in formal tertiary education, are four times higher than other population groups in South African higher education institutions (Statistics South Africa, 2014; WPRPD, 2015:113). Although South Africa is a signatory to UNCRPD since 2007, a decade later very little has been accomplished to establish inclusive institutional practices which benefit students with disabilities. The research conducted by Moodley on international legal obligations, found that despite existing laws to protect persons living with disabilities in society, the systematic discrimination and exclusion from socially acceptable activities and practices is still “a major lacuna in...society” (2016: 3).

Hence it is important that relevant stakeholders take responsibility to implement the WPRPD. The government’s National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) emphasizes the increase of the numbers of Black students, including students with disabilities in higher education and stipulates that institutions demonstrate how they will increase such participation with clear time frames. Higher education institutions understand the need for the increase of access for students with disabilities as a means of redressing past inequities. To date, the South African literature and previous research on disability and HE have focused mainly on measures being taken by HEIs to increase the numbers of students with disabilities through the NSFAS bursary scheme funding opportunities (Hammond, 2015).

Several studies (Matshediso, 2010; Swart & Greyling, 2011; and Ramakuela & Maluleke, 2011) found that despite access to higher education, students with disabilities are increasingly vulnerable to exclusionary practices in such institutions. The studies found that the experiences for an alarming 80% of said students are characterised by rejection from able-bodied students, negative attitudes and general intolerance towards them. This is further exacerbated by the lack of reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities across many South African university campuses. The general lack of provision to accommodate persons with disabilities through various exclusionary practices in education starts at schooling level and subsequently exacerbated at tertiary level. These practices further

compound the lack of self-advocacy in learners to make the transition from high school to tertiary education (Eckes *et al.*, 2005).

In the case of HEIs, they have a critical role to play in advancing the rights of persons with disabilities but also to mainstream disability through teaching and research. For this reason, the full participation of students with disabilities is an imperative to navigate the teaching, learning and other spaces at universities. This includes removing any barriers that hinder access to learning and living spaces in universities. However, the core business of higher education institutions is constantly characterised by budget constraints and inadequate financial support for talented and needy students coupled with the high demand for access to higher education (Cloete *et al.*, 2000). This highlights one of the most challenging aspects faced by HEIs, which Badat refers to as “...sites of entrenched social exclusion and marginalization...” (2010:17). This assertion implies that students with disabilities may be more vulnerable to institutional discrimination and stigmatisation as revealed in several studies which documents that the rights of persons with disabilities are not fully realised (Moswela & Mukhopadhyay, 2011).

Therefore, greater effort and commitment needs to be demonstrated for the promotion of said students’ social inclusion because the disjuncture between policy and practice is still prevalent where the physical environment and institutional practices are exclusionary and disabling to many students with disabilities in higher education institutions (Chiwandire *et al.*, 2016). Public educational institutions are therefore encouraged by the ministry of higher education to allocate resources to increase access for students with disabilities which range from material resources, infrastructure (based on the principles of Universal Design), assistive devices, transport and accessible residential accommodation. The White Paper 6 of 2001 consequently maintains that the curriculum needs to uphold the principles of flexibility on periods including the UDL framework (Moodley, 2016).

### ***3.3.1 Privileging ableism***

The physical environments in many instances are the barrier to the success for the student, owing to students being enrolled in unchanging, discriminatory (able-bodied) institutional practices and frameworks, which continue to exclude and disable. Privileging ableism necessitates an expectation to fit into this disabling environment, burdening erroneously the

student with the unreasonable task to “get on with it”. This national occurrence demands urgent and radical attention and emphasises the impetus for transformation. It is not sufficient for higher education institutions to grant access to students with disabilities. What is more critical is that there is a concerted effort made to ensure students succeed as they pursue their academic path in a conducive, inclusive and enabling environment salient of institutional and attitudinal barriers which is still prevalent in many South African universities (Chiwandire *et al.*, 2016).

### ***3.3.2 The concept of inclusion***

The concept of inclusion needs thorough interrogation, constantly reflexive of what that looks like when it comes to dealing with disability in higher education in South Africa. Beyond the access and thus the presence of students with disabilities, inclusion in higher education involves a myriad of interventions which are holistic in their approach and similarly it means student involvement in policy developments affecting them directly (Mutanga, 2017). It is therefore imperative that institutions deal with disability in seriatim and that institutional practices reflect a consideration of the variants of disability. A broadened understanding of disability begins this process through recognising how disabling practices are reproduced and normalised which subsequently entrench inequality.

### ***3.3.3 The appropriate response to students with disabilities in higher education***

Furthermore, it should be acknowledged that lived experiences of individuals with disabilities in higher education institutions differ from individuals who are able-bodied. Hence, an appropriate response to disability in higher education is to focus on individual needs in conjunction with the type of disability declared and making reasonable accommodation available for such declarations. Critical questions can be asked of the students who live with disability nuancing institutional understanding of what inclusion is and how this can be translated into practice. The inclusion of students with disabilities would accordingly mean asking questions such as: What are they included into and by whom? (Chiwandire *et al.*, 2016).

### ***3.3.4 An active and effective approach towards inclusion of students with disabilities***

The inclusion of this kind in the life and times of the institution, speaks to the fact that students with disabilities are heard and their participation and engagement in transformation processes meets the social justice imperatives. An active approach to this nature marks higher education as inclusive and proves that barriers are removed, positive attitudes towards people with disabilities are fostered and an inclusive institutional culture is created, which enables

students with disabilities to equitably access and thrive in the enabling environment of the institution.

### **3.4 The inclusion of students with disabilities: 'Access with success'**

The constitutional right and protection of students with disabilities to participate in higher education recognises a significant shift in addressing past social and educational inequalities. However, the experience of students with disabilities at these post-school settings may be daunting to access. These students may not only be challenged with adapting to the transition from high school to post-school settings but also face the possible lack of acceptance resulting in their ignorance in these settings. According to Schlossberg (1989) exclusionary HEIs' practices or policies to students with disabilities has a direct impact on their access with success.

Students with disabilities are consistently excluded from various policy and procedural development and implementation processes, which directly affect their lived experiences (Vickerman & Blundell, 2010). These exclusionary practices lead to what Goodley (2013) argues is silencing the voice and presence of persons with disabilities. Matshediso *et al.* (2007), asserts that in addition to the persistent discrepancies that exist in policy and practices, institutional discrimination are prevalent and experienced in the form of access and teaching and learning and support. It is therefore important that with consultation, there is active engagement of persons with disabilities in pursuance of inclusive education policy formulation and procedure implementation. This could alleviate their underrepresentation in the higher education sector (Moswela & Mukhopadhyay, 2011:318). A conceptual framework of self-advocacy was developed by scholars such as Test *et al.* (2005), which propose that knowledge of self, acceptance of own strengths and needs, knowledge of their own rights and taking the lead in asserting these rights in a self-assured fashion, thereby advocating for the rights of others are crucial in the build-up of a successful post-school education experience. These scholars, Test *et al.* (2005), assert that there is an absence of the instruction on self-advocacy in the academic programme in tertiary institutions.

Higher education institutions face the challenge of not only accommodating students with disabilities but also with institutionalizing diversity - which magnifies the challenge of an inclusive integration of students with disabilities. This is compounded by the behaviour of institutions who serve to locate disability as an add-on to the teaching and learning experience which is reflected in the attitudes that both student peers and staff hold towards students with disabilities. Some institutions may lack capacity in dealing with disability not

as an educational problem but rather as an issue of diversity. They need to develop this capacity to address issues of diversity. This is also evident in the infrastructure of some campuses that are partially or entirely inaccessible, the teaching material that is not accommodative and the general negative attitudes of both students and staff (lecturers) towards students with disabilities. Due to the perception that disability is a medical issue, the provision of learning support for students with disabilities is disconnected from the mainstream academic programme and the lack of inclusive teaching and learning, becomes an ongoing challenge (Howell, 2006).

The provision or the use of assistive devices during teaching and learning in some instances becomes onerous on some academic staff even though it is an important part of enabling an environment conducive to learning. Where this may be a regularly occurring challenge, there remains a gap in the effectiveness of the teaching process for students experiencing disabilities. This is evident in the case of a blind student whose needs are not catered for in terms of teaching – where the material used during class are exclusionary such as visuals without supplementing with audio material during teaching (Howell, 2006). The absence of priority on the availability of assistive technologies for students with disabilities is a global phenomenon. A study conducted on the availability of assistive technologies for the hearing impaired and loco-motorized users in the libraries of the National Capital Region in India revealed that there is a "negligible" number available (Sanaman *et al.*, 2014).

The lack in institutional practices prioritising inclusive education supports the argument of the peripheral position of the presence, voice and lived experiences of students with disabilities in the field of academia. The commitment to increase access for students with disabilities is an important imperative, however, the experience of equal participation in the academic programme is disturbingly lacking in South Africa. This is recognised and accurately documented in the Report of the National Committee on Special needs in Education and Training and the National Committee on Education Support Services. It recognises that "...higher education institutions...[are to] provide [students with disabilities] opportunities to receive the education and training required to enter a variety of job markets.... to ensure that appropriate mechanisms are put in place to ensure that appropriate curriculum and institutional transformation occurs and additional support is provided where needed " (DoE, 1998:126).

Although access is possible, the experiences of students with disabilities at tertiary level more often than not, show that their disability is a barrier to their success. Although institutions prohibit the discrimination of any student based on their impairment, there is evidence that suggests said student are persuaded to enrol for courses that 'suit' their disability and that once an institution's reasonable accommodation 'quota' has been reached, the students have a better chance to succeed at another institution (Chiwandire *et al.*, 2016). In essence, the 'problem' is shifted somewhere else. It is clear that the barriers erected and established are rooted in the attitudes towards students with disabilities. The lack of learning support and support from peers and staff are contributing factors to the high dropout rate of students with disabilities. The barriers which undermine their performances do not reflect their true potential and hence the high dropout rate reinforces the negative perceptions and attitudes towards them. The alarmingly negative psychosocial experiences of these students are also often overlooked, which can be both undermining and paralyzing.

A case study conducted with grade seven students from seven schools in central Israel revealed that the socio-emotional level of students with learning disabilities is lower compared to students without learning disabilities, even though the student with a learning disability shows higher academic achievement than the student without learning disabilities (Lackaye *et al.*, 2006). A high level of loneliness is experienced which speaks to the low level of satisfaction in social interactions. Students experiencing disability show a strong belief that they can achieve their academic aspirations if they find their own paths through goal setting, which the scholar Snyder (2002) cited by Lackaye *et al.* (2006), coins 'agentic thinking' and 'pathways thinking'. Agentic thinking refers to the confidence to achieve set goals and pathway thinking refers to how to achieve those goals and the hope it brings in believing in one's own capabilities. The lived experience of a student with a disability is a complex and intense process of constantly negotiating his or her own social, mental, spiritual, physical and emotional well-being.

Further to this, the goals and the arrangements of institution of higher learning are set up for the global market. Because of higher education links to global imperatives, its priority is to generate knowledge and produce graduates which can successfully compete in the global arena (Badat, 2010). This places students with disabilities at the bottom of the scale of priority, as it may be argued that the process of them acquiring skills and qualifications is a drawn-out, time-consuming and intensely challenging process that could compromise the

institution's competitiveness internationally. This reinforces the notion that their access does not guarantee their success at tertiary level. It further strengthens the argument that the institutions generally ignore the presence of those with disabilities, resulting in a muting of their voices (Fuller, *et al.*, 2004).

It therefore makes the active participation of students with disabilities in the decision-making process at the institution all the more difficult and in some respects non-existent because of this absence of voice and general disregard of their presence in the broader institutional transformation processes. It requires commitment, imaginative thinking and resources to ensure students' access to education guarantees their success. This is an imperative when it comes to students with disabilities. Due to their generally double-oppressive experience of an education system designed (perhaps not intentionally) to exclude the 'vulnerable'. This call for the comprehensive inclusion of students with disabilities into a mainstream education system is a prerequisite to ensure their success. Scholars such as Chard & Couch (1998), reiterate the position that the 'vulnerable' have the right to be afforded the opportunity to enjoy equal and full participation in education. This viewpoint of Chard & Couch (1998) is shared by Belyakov *et al.* (2009), who asserts that if students with disabilities are afforded full participation in education, this will result in their 'access with success' and realising their full potential academically, professionally and socially. The scholars, Belyakov *et al.* defines 'Access with success' as "...completion of a degree or certificate program that prepares one for a vocation" (2009:1-3). This level of true success is possible with a comprehensive student support package for the 'vulnerable' throughout their academic career which will allow them to "...go on to or progress within their chosen career or postgraduate study" (Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, 2014:112). It defers the myth as aptly described by scholars such as Belch (2004) and Stumbo *et al.* (2010) that enrolment in any HEIs does not necessarily translate into the possession of a post-education qualification.

Accordingly, a post-education qualification is critically important as a means of access to opportunities in the labour market. However, the reality expressed in most HEIs is that it does not necessarily expend its resources to intentionally position them to be competitive in the labour market through their academic programmes and support services which are social injustice imperatives, described by Wilson-Strydom as "a new form of social exclusion" (2011: 407). In addressing such irregularities, South Africa's current disability policy framework envisions that its policy frameworks would prevent that such forms of social

exclusion is experienced by students with disabilities. Its policy therefore aims not only to improve their success in HEI, but demonstrate clear evidence of significant improvement in their throughput rates (see Department of Higher Education and Training, 2012; Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013: xiv). In this light, the *White Paper 3 on Higher Education Transformation* in particular associates the concept of ‘access with success’ as aiming to achieve equity - this is evident when it states that “the principle of equity requires fair opportunities both to enter higher education programmes and to succeed in them” (Department of Education, 1997:7-8). This approach of ‘access with success’ has also been endorsed by scholars such as Akoojee & Nkomo (2007) who argues that ‘access with success’ fully embrace evidence of such success beyond the limited view of participation in HE.

### **3.5 The mismatch between policy and practice**

However, a great number of scholars noted the mismatch between policy and practice in South Africa. Notwithstanding several disability policies, there are persistent negative attitudes towards students with disabilities which are having a negative impact on their full inclusion in education (Pretorius *et al.*, 2011:13; Saloojee *et al.*, 2006:231; Howell & Lazarus, 2003; Matshediso, 2007:709 and Crous, 2004:231). This speaks to the argument that ‘disabled’ persons in tertiary institutions are consistently excluded from various policy and procedural development and implementation processes that directly affect their lived experiences (Vickerman & Blundell, 2010). It is therefore important that strategies such as consultation and active engagement of persons with disabilities are implemented in the development of policies and procedures within the university space as a means of creatively responding to the needs of students with disabilities. This could alleviate the underrepresentation of students with disabilities in the higher education sector (Moswela & Mukhopadhyay, 2011).

Many studies reveal that in education the exclusionary and oppressive practices experienced by students with disabilities are a daily encounter and a “common occurrence globally too” (WHO, 2011: xxi). This has been compounded by the failure on the part of government to promulgate the White Paper 6 into an act that stipulates an inclusive education-orientated piece of legislation. These limitations on the part of the White paper 6, is evidence for Duggan & Byrne (2013) that the enactment of inclusive education does not guarantee effective or adequate implementation. It could then be argued that the ineffectual implementation of the *White Paper 6* has resulted in students with disabilities being

inescapably subjected to unfair discrimination through both “attitudinal and institutional barriers”<sup>7</sup> (Silverstein, 2000:1695). This suggest that they are discriminated against based on their identity as well as being part of a minority group in society which perpetually result in their interest and voices being silenced at various and all levels in society (Silverstein, 2000).

### **3.6 Institutional and attitudinal barriers in the HE environment**

With the increase in the number of students with disabilities in HEIs, research findings show a great number of students with disabilities still experience discrimination in the post-school education environment with regard to access and participation perpetuated by institutional practices (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2015). Of interest is that several audit reports on the Council on Higher Education (CHE) revealed similar challenges of inequalities in discriminatory spaces in the HE context (Lange, 2012).

A number of studies revealed that stereotypes and negative attitudes towards students with disability continue to be perpetuated in South Africa’s mainstream educational institutions (Swart & Greyling, 2011 and Matshedisho, 2010). A study conducted by Ramakuela & Maluleke (2011) at one of the HEIs (University of Venda, South Africa) revealed that students with disabilities experience an atmosphere of intolerance and resentment by able-bodied students and an alarming number (80%) experience feelings of rejection by their able-bodied peers, as well as staff and the institution as a whole. In some overseas countries, students with disabilities are required by law to disclose their disability. This disclosure in itself could be inherently fearful for stigma and discrimination. The examples of unfair discriminations are inter alia the denial of any facilities, which could enhance their functioning in society as well as remove any obstacles to access equal opportunities. Discrimination experienced by persons with disabilities are often based on the assumptions of their capabilities, hence due consideration should be given to what is stipulated in Article 8 in the UNCRPD 2006 on promoting awareness of their capabilities and the appreciation of the fact that they can make meaningful contribution to society.

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<sup>7</sup> According to Silverstein “attitudinal barriers are characterized by beliefs and sentiments held by nondisabled persons about persons with disabilities [whereas] institutional barriers include policies, practices, and procedures adopted by entities such as employers, businesses, and public agencies” (2000:1695).

However, disclosure is important as it will inform what kind of support and reasonable accommodation could be offered based on a case-by-case basis (Eckes *et al.*, 2005). It is therefore important that students with disabilities acquire self-advocacy skills to articulate their educational needs to especially academic staff in order to ensure a positive teaching and learning experience. The commitment to ongoing programmes on awareness raising will be crucial in barring further discrimination and stigmatisation towards persons living with disabilities, which could lead to the removal of architectural, attitudinal as well as funding barriers for persons living with disabilities. Conversely, widening access, enabling legislature, but limiting participation of students with disabilities may affect negatively on student success.

It is therefore important that attention is given to the claim that it is not enough for students to be integrated, but their active participation becomes the central focus of HEIs. This can be made tangible in understanding the experiences of students with disabilities of teaching, learning and assessment in HEIs. A greater need for support is required and this should be reflected not only in policy but also in practices and procedures. It is clear that both attitudinal and institutional discrimination has had a very negative impact on the lived experiences of students with disabilities in HEIs (Department of Education, 1998; 2001a). This perpetuates the constant vulnerability of said students and can be argued that it is reflective of their low student success in universities. These outcomes have been documented in the 2012 *Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2012 cited by Badat, 2015) and the 2013 *White Paper on Post-school Education and Training* (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013: xiv).

In light of the above findings, the scholar Slee (2001) has noted that inclusive education policies integrate students with disabilities into an unchanged system. These inclusive education policies should be a fundamentally transformative process, which increases not only the access but also the active participation of those with disabilities in HEIs (Armstrong *et. al*, 2011).

### **3.7 Other South African Universities' response to disability**

Many South African universities are responding in various ways to the inclusivity and active participation of students with disabilities. The University of the Free State (UFS) has made great strides in actively integrating and including such students in all areas of campus life. The institution identified and responded to the special needs of students in the year 2000 and

established a disability unit. The unit was part of the student support services under the umbrella of the Dean of Students (DoS) and focused on offering support tailored to the special needs presented. Beyond this level of support, training and ongoing communication are held with academic staff in order to ensure the teaching and learning process is inclusive.

The institution also ensures the out of classroom experience promotes the inclusiveness of students with disabilities. This has resulted in significant achievements for the students participating in the 2011 Nedbank National Championship for Sports for the Physically Disabled. The institution has also created an environment which includes the participation of students with disabilities in the transformation processes. In addition to this, the empowering of all those experiencing disability through representation on student governance committees such as the Student Representative Council (SRC), it has designated the task of 'rethink and restructuring' of student governance to students with disabilities in the Broader Students Transformation Forum (BSTF)<sup>8</sup>. This demonstrates the institution's commitment to recognise and give expression to the voice and presence of students with disabilities at the institution.

As in the case at UFS, Stellenbosch University (SU)<sup>9</sup> is committed to recognise and affirm the presence of students with disabilities at its institution. It has an office designated to respond to the special needs of students from the first-year orientation programme to the disseminating of the information of said students and specific academic support needed to academic staff. The institution embraces the policy of inclusion by ensuring the adaptation of academic models and the proactive advocacy and holistic support amongst both able-bodied students and staff in order to ensure effective integration of students with disabilities. WITS have a well-established Disability Rights Unit (DRU) run by specialist staff that assist both students and lecturers. Apart from assisting students with reasonable accommodation needs in both academic and non-academic programmes, it extends its services to facilities, which offers general well-being, personal and career development assistance, as well as assistance with sports, financial aid and holistic student development. Its services are innovative and progressive as it also assists lecturers on how to teach students with various impairments,

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<sup>8</sup> University of Free State website <http://supportservices.ufs.ac.za/studentaffairs> [Accessed 18 August 2016].

<sup>9</sup> Information document for lecturers by the Office for Students with Special Learning Needs, Stellenbosch University [Accessed 19 August 2016].

from physical to sensory including seizure disorders and chronic illnesses. Although the Unit is in close collaboration with the Student Enrolment Centre (SEnC), the onus is on the student to seek the assistance of the DRU<sup>10</sup>

The Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University (NMMU) has an established Disability Unit (DU), which falls under the Division of Student Affairs (DSA)<sup>11</sup>. The Unit caters for the special needs of both students and staff at the institution. Its goal is to provide equal opportunity and to ensure the full participation in campus life. In addition to the provision of assistive devices, it aims to increase awareness of the capabilities of students with disabilities and advocate for their rights and needs as it envisions the offering of holistic support. At the University of Kwa-Zulu Natal, it welcomes students with disabilities and shows their commitment by responding to their diverse sets of needs through the established disability support units at all four of their campuses (Edgewood, Pietermaritzburg, Westville and Howard College). Its disability coordinator offers a wide range of support, which varies from issues of access, accommodation, academic and finances<sup>12</sup>.

At the University of Cape Town, the Disability Service is situated within the Transformation Services Office located in the Office of the Vice-Chancellor. It has developed the UCT Disability Policy which the University Council adopted in March 2011. The service is an integral part of the institution and a number of awareness and support programmes (including research) fall under its umbrella. As in the case of other South African universities, it works towards the removal of any physical and attitudinal barriers towards both students and staff and advocates the policy of equal opportunities as adopted by the university. The services it provides include but is not limited to providing advice and support in terms of reasonable accommodation and specialist services where mainstreaming is not possible. It also provides academically deserving 'disabled' people with opportunities for fair and equal educational and work experience.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Wits University website <http://wits.ac.za/disability-rights-unit> [Accessed 22 December 2016].

<sup>11</sup> Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University website <http://disability.nmmu.ac.za> [Accessed 18 August 2016].

<sup>12</sup> University of Kwa-Zulu Natal website <http://ukzn.ac.za/ssc> [Accessed 22 December 2016].

<sup>13</sup> University of Cape Town website <https://www.uct.ac.za/services/disability> [Accessed 22 December 2016].

### **3.8 Conclusion**

The chapter accentuated that even though the Constitution protect the rights of students with disabilities, there are huge discrepancies between policy and practice resulting in perpetual institutional and attitudinal barriers which hinders said students pursuit of their academic ideals. In this light, there is greater urgency to not only increase access, but the commitment to their active participation as a transformation imperative in the higher education setting. Some of the institutions of higher learning have demonstrated such commitment; however, given the persistent negative attitudes and subsequent institutional barriers, there still is a need to accelerate true transformation in higher education, which reflects the centering of the voice and presence of students with disabilities.

This urgent call for true transformation in HEIs nationally extends to the commitment required at Rhodes University. Therefore, the following chapter will analyse the extent to which Rhodes University's transformation agenda actively promote the participation of students with disabilities, ensuring their capacity to flourish within the institution.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **THE TRANSFORMATION AGENDA FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AT RHODES UNIVERSITY**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter highlighted that, although the Constitution protects and promotes the rights of students with disabilities, notwithstanding the concerted efforts made by higher education institutions across South Africa, there are still persistent institutional and attitudinal barriers which shrouds the experiences of students with disabilities. In the light of the above claim, this chapter of the study aims to analyse to what extent Rhodes University respond to the needs of students with disabilities and whether this analyses suggests that the above assertion of institutional and attitudinal barriers diverge for or resembles Rhodes University. It will begin the chapter on how it articulates its vision and mission statement and its transformation agenda, followed on how it envisions its institutional culture and if this culture enables the participation of students with disabilities in the transformation processes of the university.

In 2001, the Rhodes University Council adopted a vision and mission statement that aspires to be a non-racist, non-sexist institution that embraces human and civil rights under a new social dispensation. It aspired to be a transforming African University "committed to democratic ideals, academic freedom, rigorous scholarship, sound moral values and social responsibility" (Rhodes University Vision Statement, 2001). It committed itself to undertake inter alia; to "...provide an attractive, safe and well-equipped environment that is conducive to good scholarship and collegiality; provide a safe and nurturing student support system as well as a diverse array of residential, sporting and cultural and leadership opportunities that will foster all-round development of our students..."(Rhodes University Vision Statement, 2001).

The principles of transformation therefore infused inter alia the student admission and equitable success, transformation of the curriculum, transformation of research, community engagement, equitable employment and development of staff, governance of transformation and institutional culture. Given the robust efforts made in transforming the curriculum, the diversification of the residence system, and increasing conversation on pertinent social issues, there are still a number of students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds, who

experience the higher education setting still exclusionary, alienating and discomforting (Rhodes University Transformation Indicators Document, 2015).

In the light of the above, it is my view that access to higher education does not necessarily translate into student success without the meaningful inclusion of the 'Black child' in the higher education transformation processes. As will be discussed in this chapter, some of the exclusionary practices will be highlighted which has given rise to the outbreak of dissatisfaction in institutions of higher learning as witnessed under the umbrella of the #FeesMustFall movement (Badat, 2015). The year 2015 was a watershed year in the history of HEI which gained momentum in the year 2016. These protests have shifted and altered HEIs nation-wide, with calls for the acceleration of the transformation processes of South African universities. This period in the history of South African universities placed greater emphasis on the urgency of these institutions not only to link to national development imperatives but also to be a catalyst for promoting social justice, equity and social mobility (De la Rey, 2015).

The remarkable turn of events under #FeesMustFall highlighted and engaged with issues of race, gender and class, but disability has received scant attention in this campaign. It is clear that although attention to other registers such as race and gender are gaining momentum in the transformation agenda, disability as both a social and political issue remains largely ignored in higher education. Therefore in the pursuit of transformation in all areas of higher education institutions, disability should receive equal weight and attention.

The well renowned political theorist, Andre du Toit, in Badat (2015), argues that in addition to destabilizing what he calls the "historical legacies of intellectual colonization and racialization", the transformation of SA higher education institutions' cultures is urgent and non-negotiable. This uncompromising push was evident with the national student-led campaigns against repressive and untransformed higher education institutions, promoting a social justice framework to ensure an Afrocentric space, which promotes just pedagogies, advances the decolonised production of knowledge and a non-repressive institutional culture which is deracialised, demasculised and degendering.

The Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande, in his 2015 budget speech articulated a commitment to push back the boundaries set by colonial practices in

HEIs. His commitment to transforming HEIs included developing and increasing the number of Black academic staff; transformation of the curriculum; eliminating racism and sexism; increasing and expanding access to university education to 1.1million in 2019; increase the NSFAS budget to R9.5 billion for all HEIs; improve the academic success of students and develop a strategic disability policy framework for developing the disability policies (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2015).

Given that disability intersects with other social registers such as race, sex and class, the identities of students with disabilities are to be understood in conjunction with the ways in which race, gender and class intersect and “design” their experiences (Liasidou, 2012:299). In the context of Rhodes University, student protests and parallel discussions facilitated by the Office of Equity and Institutional Culture (E&IC), revealed that many students experienced the institutional environment as alienating, with the pervasive presence of patriarchy, racism and able-ism (Institution Transformation Plan Draft, 2015). It therefore begs the question of what true transformation means at institutions of higher learning. At this backdrop, the chapter will focus on Rhodes University’s institutional culture and the success of access for students with disabilities as it examines the response to disability as part of its transformation imperatives at the institution.

#### **4.2 Institutional Culture**

In my view, institutional culture refers to an identity an institution of higher learning aspires to have, which is informed by the principles of justice, equity and transparency in pursuit to achieve its core business of quality teaching, learning, research and community engagement. Consequently, an inclusive institutional culture as an indicator of a transforming higher education institution is underscored by sub-themes such as transforming governance and management structures; policy reviews and alignment and the professionalisation of higher education transformation work which is mainly located in the Vice Chancellor’s Office.

The most important sub-theme under the institutional culture imperative for this study is the goal of ensuring social inclusion and inclusive learning spaces for diverse students. Indicative of this would be an increase in access to students with disabilities; the increase of their representation in student associations; a comprehensive student disability policy; inclusive social projects and increase levels of participation in the transformation processes of the University. Rhodes University's equity policy recognises that inequities do exist within the University and that it contributes to a culture that is alienating some members of staff and

students; and as such recognises the need to redress such inequities. It has committed itself to eradicate any forms of unfair discrimination, which hinders the successful integration of all peoples in the institution. It has thus committed itself to effect change to the culture by removing any barriers to inclusion for designated demographic groups. These designated groups refer to Blacks (Africans, Coloured, and Indians), women and individuals with impairments (Rhodes University Equity Policy, 2003).

Several studies (Vincent, 2008; Njovane, 2015) found that the dominant culture at Rhodes University is elitist, alienating, persistently colonial and White. This is in reference to the persistent practice of racism, patriarchy, homophobia, classism and able-ism in the system. Salient in these studies was the experiences of students (and staff) with disabilities within the institution. The institution's commitment to valuing and embracing diversity towards an inclusive institutional culture is the mandate of E&IC. The office aims to facilitate discussions on pertinent issues through their advocacy and awareness projects, including removing barriers of bigotry, racism, sexism and ableism. It is therefore important that robust efforts are made in the transformational work on the dominant culture by units such as Deans and Divisional Heads, the office of the Director of Student Affairs, Human Resources (HR) and E&IC Directorate. These robust efforts by divisions and departments is an attempt to create inclusive institutional environments that are less alienating and building an institutional culture based on the right to dignity (Office of Equity and Institutional Culture, 2015).

Powell (2003) cited by Moodley (2016) urges that higher education institutions have an obligation to ensure full and active participation of students with disabilities in the curriculum. As a measure of avoiding exclusionary policies and practices, 'institutional commitment' needs to become central to the full and active participation of students with disabilities (and staff) in the higher education environment (Zurita, 2005 cited by Machika, 2013: 93). According to Lunsford & Bargerhuff (2006), such a commitment to institutional transformation would naturally result in the active removal of both institutional and attitudinal barriers.

#### **4.3 Rhodes University student access and success**

The University has committed itself to "...equitable, fair, transparent and consistent admission procedures and process...recruiting students...who can benefit from its academic offerings" irrespective of their demographic categories (Rhodes University Admission Policy,

2006). Rhodes University has successfully adhered to its admissions policy and significantly matched South Africa's population profile. It has achieved these goals through its own funding, donor funding and the NSFAS. This has increased access for students to 25% between 2006 and 2013. This increase comprises of 30% African students and over 20% Coloured students - with a plan to increase access at 3 % per annum for Black students (Office of Equity and Institutional Culture, 2014).

Although the above statistics show an impressive growth in numbers of African students on an annual basis, this commitment and steady growth are not evident for students living with disabilities. It is found that the University has not yet documented its commitment to have a similar plan for students with disabilities (Office of Equity and Institutional Culture, 2014). This raises the question of the success rate of said students. The statistics at Rhodes University reveal that although access has increased, it has not necessarily translated into success. Many Black students compared to White students do not complete the academic programme. Some of the factors highlighted are the articulation gap through curriculum interventions which in some instances result in academic exclusion and thus low retention rate of especially Black students (Office of Equity and Institutional Culture, 2012; 2014). In the instance of the access and success rate, although there are many opportunities to participate in higher education, the access and the success rate is still lower than would be equitable.

At Rhodes University it is found that the percentage of students with disabilities remains much lower (1.18%) than the national percentage (5.1%) of students with disabilities (Rhodes University Digest of Statistics, 2012; Data Management Unit Transformation Report, 2014; Statistics South Africa 2014). The commitment made by the institution is informed by the principles of universal access, the equity and the disability policies. It further commits (with time commitments) to remove infrastructural barriers and financial support for students with disabilities as well as a strategic plan for the recruitment of students with disabilities. The units that will be responsible for the implementation of this process include the E&IC directorates, Institutional Planning Directorate and Committee, the Registrar's Division, the Infrastructure and Operations Division (IFO), the DSA and the Disability Committee (Rhodes University Transformation Indicators Document, 2015).

## **4.4 Response to disability at Rhodes University**

### ***4.4.1 Disability policies***

Rhodes University could be viewed as embracing this commitment through the formulation and implementation of their three disability-oriented policies, which are in line with the national higher education policies on disabilities. These policies include the Rhodes University Staff Disability Policy, (2005); Rhodes University Student Disability Policy (2005); and the Rhodes University Equity Policy (2003), which aim to redress past imbalances with regard to the inclusion of persons with disabilities in mainstream society. These three policies are geared towards empowering persons with disability and to create a conducive institutional environment which is free of any institutional and attitudinal barriers. It aims to inculcate a culture of inclusive diversity, which fosters a sense of belonging. This is central to the institution's student [and staff] success.

### ***4.4.2 Response to students with disabilities***

Vice Chancellors of Rhodes University such as Dr Saleem Badat have championed such a culture. In many of his speeches, he has reiterated that Rhodes University is a 'home for all', which embraces people from diverse backgrounds and this 'home' is a place of belonging irrespective of "... their sex, race, sexual orientation or disability" (Vice Chancellor's Speech, 2010; 2011). The current Rhodes University Vice-Chancellor (VC), Dr Sizwe Mabizela has continued with this legacy by calling for more inclusiveness and the integration of students with disabilities in an attractive, safe and well-equipped environment that is conducive to good scholarship and collegiality (Vice Chancellor's Speech, 2014).

Consequently, to allow the holistic development of all students, the university has to ensure that positive and unprejudiced attitudes are fostered and encouraged amongst able-bodied people. Given that the experience of university studies result in students becoming fundamentally different kinds of people, it requires that the learning and living environment for all students be inclusive and conducive to student success (Vassiliou, 2014). The aim is to allow students with disabilities every opportunity to maximize their potential professionally, academically and socially.

In 2007, the Higher Education Disability Services Association (HEDSA) was established as a body to respond to the issues relating to disability in higher education. The aim of the body is to ensure equal opportunity for all students and to offer assistance to institutions nation-

wide to identify gaps in terms of policy, practice, procedure and simultaneously advise on programmes which respond to current issues and needs of students with disabilities (HEDSA, 2009). Rhodes University was part of the Foundation of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis (FOTIM). It was an interest group with a wide range of expertise in the field of disability in Higher Education. Its aim was to share best practices in the area of disability, increase awareness around disability and increase advocacy around the needs of students with disabilities and overall assist in translating knowledge into practical implementation. Rhodes University was part of the 2009 conference hosted by FOTIM. The FOTIM conference report revealed the ongoing challenges faced by students with disabilities in higher education institutions around access, attitudinal and institutional barriers, integration into student life; and units in institutions facing their own challenges in catering for the special needs in offering services and products to support and assist students with disabilities (FOTIM Conference report, 2009). Subsequent to the FOTIM report, Rhodes University as an institution started the process of engaging with and responding to the needs of students with disabilities.

In 2009, Rhodes University conducted an audit on the number of students living with disabilities. In 2010, formal disability services were initiated at the University and a disability task team formed under the auspices of the then Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic and Student Affairs, Dr Sizwe Mabizela. The response to disability has been handled on an ad hoc basis but there was a call for more coordinated efforts in responding to issues of disability at Rhodes University. Hence, the Office of the Vice Chancellor set up a task team in 2012 to articulate a strategy to respond to disability-related matters at the University. The role of the task team was inter alia to assess how divisions respond to disability-related matters, to identify gaps in policy and procedures, to respond to gaps as well as to advice on how to improve responses to the issues affecting both staff and students (Office of Vice Chancellor, 2012).

The University's enrolment of students with disabilities has increased since 2010 from 70 to 118 students in 2016. Many of the students have not requested any individual specific assistance or support. Rhodes University, therefore offers services on a case-by-case basis of which most are limited to assistance with assistive devices, modification of computers as part of library services and financially needy students with correctable sight conditions. The then Dean of Students (DoS) Division intervened where students require comprehensive assistance

for instance in the case of specialised equipment or specialised accommodation. The University does not have a dedicated resource centre such as a Disability Unit (DU). All student disability-related matters are located under the DSA formerly known as the DoS Division. It is operationalised under the Student Services Section, which advocates for students with disabilities with both academic and support services departments. The Student Services Section works with the Student Bureau on the processing of application forms of prospective students who disclose severe disabilities. This is to assist with the assessment and recommend the nature of services and support that Rhodes should be providing for them. The Student Bureau also assists the Student Services Section in making appropriate residential placements, especially where physical and mobility impairments are involved. The modification of residence accommodation for students with disabilities has been done in conjunction with the IFO division to ensure better and easy access.

The Examinations Concessions Committee receives and processes all applications from students who request concessions for exam, tests or assignments. Computers with special software such as voice recognition, text conversion, text magnification, trackball for ease of motion use, and so forth, for the exclusive use of students with disabilities, have been installed in the library<sup>14</sup>. These computers greatly assist students with visual and hearing impairments, as well as students with learning disabilities. In addition to the reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities at the institutional level, the Student Services Section works on a one-on-one basis with individual students in order to assess their needs and assist them to get support or assistive technology and devices within the resource constraints.

The past five years has revealed that most students with disabilities at Rhodes University are self-sufficient. The students generally navigate their way around their academic and social needs with the relevant parties such as academic departments and student support services divisions. The current disability policy acknowledges that physical impairment does not constitute a disability in itself and that people with impairments only become disabled when education, work and leisure opportunities are denied to them based on their impairment. It is based on the social model of disability which refers to impairment as "...the limitation in a

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<sup>14</sup> Summary of information in the Rhodes University disability support services pamphlet.

person's physical, mental (including psychological) or sensory functioning" (Student Disability Policy, 2005).

The policy defines disability as "...the loss or limitation of opportunities that prevent [them]...taking part in the normal life of the academic and social community on an equal level with others due to physical or social barriers" (Student Disability Policy, 2005). It supports the provision of reasonable accommodation be made to all students who may experience academic and social barriers. These reasonable accommodations includes making facilities easily accessible, adapting existing equipment or acquire new to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities, adapt teaching materials and examinations, tests and assignment concession (Student Disability Policy, 2005). The processing and the implementation of the policy require the intervention of academic and student support services to achieve the objectives of the policy. However, the DSA is the guardian of the student disability policy and as a result responsible for the assessing and review of the policy which could include the input of committees such as the Examinations Committee for extra time, Office of Equity and Institutional Culture and Student Services Council (Student Disability Policy, 2005).

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

In the context of Rhodes University, this undeniably begs the question whether students with disabilities are regarded as important stakeholders of advancing the Rhodes University agenda on transformation. Although there are concerted efforts made to recognise and increase the participation of students with disabilities, it still begs the question whether these efforts are adequate in advancing the intended transformation processes at the institution. Since the support of students with disabilities is based on the need to create an enabling environment to foster participation in university, the CDSA provides an analytical lens for investigating the extent of support for the participation of students with disabilities in the transformation processes of the University. For this reason, the following chapter aims to provide answers to this question in the research methodology used, which will be discussed extensively in Chapter Five.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **5.1 Introduction**

Chapter Four elucidated the transformation agenda of Rhodes University and in this light illuminating students with disabilities capacity to flourish within the university. It is the purpose of this study to focus on a holistic approach to disability which also chronicles the ethics of care in the context of Rhodes University. It therefore aims to provide answers to the following question: ‘What is the extent of support for the participation of students with disabilities in the transformation processes of the Institution? The chapter begins to give background information on the research design, the data collection methods used, the sampling process and the ethical considerations taken into account in conducting this study. The chapter concludes with a graph on the current profile of student with disabilities at Rhodes University, followed by the profile of the research participants and the challenges faced by the researcher during the interview process.

#### **5.2 Methods, procedures and techniques**

The study uses a qualitative methodological approach. Qualitative methods help explore the participants’ perspectives on the subject; the meanings attached to subject-matter and assist in drawing themes from the social phenomena (Strauss *et al.*, 1990; Guba *et al.*, 1994 ; Guion *et al.*, 2011). According to Creswell, qualitative research is interpretive research and is a process of understanding social contexts - investigating and drawing meaning from it through interaction, affording the researcher the opportunity for “contrasting, comparing, replicating, cataloguing and classifying the object of study...” (1994:161). Through qualitative research, data can be collected through observations, interviews, documents and visual images which are tools used to enhance the researcher’s understanding of the social problems (Creswell, 1994).

The research was conducted on Rhodes University premises. As researcher, I gathered information through in-depth and informal interviews. In-depth interviews are a useful and appropriate tool for open-ended questions that elicit the depth of information from a relatively small sample group. It allows the deep exploration of the participants’ feelings and perspectives on a subject and assists in drawing out themes on the social phenomena (Guion *et al.*, 2001:2-3). The research obtained will assist in broadening our understanding of the

daily struggles of the research participants and as such, is included in this research study (Hammersley, 1993). The research enabled the unearthing and analyses of the unknown phenomenon relating to the lived experience of students with disabilities, as well as to explore the participants' perspectives on the subject and assist in drawing themes on the social phenomena. This further allowed inferences to be made regarding the values and meanings attached to individual experiences of various disabilities, which in turn inform certain actions for those living such experiences (Guion *et al.*, 2011; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

The scholar, Fetterman argues that informal interviews are useful "...in discovering what people think and how one person's perceptions compare with another's" (1989:48). Such comparisons help identify shared values in the community – values that inform behaviour and social interaction. The informal nature of the interviews allowed the researcher to build rapport with the participants and gain their trust while maximizing participation in the research process. However, interviews were semi-structured in a focused way with a range of different participants who declared different types of disabilities in order to "...yield as much information about the study phenomenon as possible and also be able to address the aims and objectives of the research" (Gill *et al.*, 2008:292).

To get a deeper insight into the lived experiences of students with disabilities at the institution, as a researcher it was important to actively listen to these experiences in order to unearth the visible and hidden barriers they encounter on a daily basis (Jayram & Scullion, 2000; Gaze, 2000). As the scholar Young stresses "with careful listening, able-bodied people can learn to understand important aspects of the lives and perspective of people with disabilities" (1997:42). Concurring with Young (1997), Hosking (2008) asserts that it is through this process that greater insights are gained by able-bodied persons to perceive disability in a manner beyond some of the apparent impairments to the daily experiences of a person with a disability may face.

### **5.3 Sampling process**

To place the research in context, the intended support for students with disabilities at Rhodes University falls under the Student Services Section and is part of my duties as Student Services Manager. Therefore, as the Manager of the 'vulnerable' group of students at Rhodes University, I was aware of the potential risk of interviewing. For this reason, I was sensitive to their needs and reassured them that as a researcher I will stop the interviews if they

experience any distress. The information on the 118 students with disabilities and their various types of disabilities formally disclosed can be accessed via the Data Management Unit (DMU). A formal letter of request to these records was sent to the Registrar in consultation and with the permission of the Director of Student Affairs. The formal disclosure of any type of disability is important because in the higher education sector of South Africa, the failure to disclose such information results in the Sector regarding such students as able-bodied (Mutanga, 2013).

As the researcher, I sought the written and oral permission of participants and explained the purpose of the study. All participants were emailed individually (to observe confidentiality) and thus personalized email letters requesting their participation in the study. For those students who were partially sighted I enlarged the font of the letter. The letter sent to participants motivated that as the Student Services Manager, my goal throughout this research project is to improve the response of this section to the services necessary to integrate the student experience; with particular input from students with disabilities. As a researcher, I explained that this is an academic project whose findings could be a guide to programs which can better the response to the needs of students with disabilities within the university.

#### **5.4 Data Collection**

I obtained the biographical details of the student participants in order to draw a profile of the sample. The sample size provided sufficient analysis on the kinds of challenges and the coping strategies adopted by students living with varying disabilities. It provided insights on the kinds of platforms available for student activism, as well as the existing support structures that are in place. The most appropriate tool is purposive sampling which will ensure that the researcher "...identify particular types of cases for in-depth investigation. The purpose is less to generalize to a larger population than it is to gain a deeper understanding of types" (Neuman, 2003:213).

##### ***5.4.1 In-depth interviews***

Furthermore, I conducted in-depth interviews with nine student research participants with various types of disabilities in the study. For the purposes of this research, pseudo names are used. A set of interviews were conducted with nine students at Rhodes University, each living with a different disability. The range of disabilities experienced include: physical disability (person suffering from muscular dystrophy), partial sight (suffering of photophobia

and has albinism) , partial hearing, Bipolar type II, lupus, cerebral palsy (stage I), dyslexia , myoclonic epilepsy and more than one (1) disability (person diagnosed with Bipolar type II, ADHD, stress vulnerability and general Anxiety disorder) . The students answered questions pertaining to five key areas integral to life at Rhodes University as isolated by the researcher: academic support, physical environment, support services, institutional culture and the Rhodes University student disability policy.

Through this process, the data collected allowed for a deeper understanding of the complexity of their experiences as they articulate their “views, experiences, beliefs and /or motivations” (Gill *et al.*, 2008:292). Due to the sensitivity of the topic, the interviews were conducted face-to-face allowing “for [the exploration of] sensitive topics, where participants may not want to talk about such issues in a group environment” (Gill *et al.*, 2008:292).

This led me to enquire into the experiences of students with disabilities at Rhodes University, with the intention to validate some of the claims made by said students. I decided to interview members of the support staff and a lecturer who are directly interacting with assisting students with disabilities. This was done in order to gain insight into the academic programmes, the student disability policy and the general support services offered to students at the University and the students’ experiences of the above. Therefore in-depth interviews were conducted with 5 key informants (members of staff). The key informants were the Director of the Office of Equity and Institutional Culture, who is also the Chairperson of the Disability Committee; a lecturer in the Department of Accounting who is also the Chairperson of the Examinations Concessions Committee. The Director of Student Affairs, the Acting Manager of the Counselling Centre and the Deputy Director of Residential Operations were also key informants for the study. All key informants were interviewed in their respective offices.

The student research participants were interviewed in the office of the DSA. However, one of the interviews was conducted at the student research participant’s place of residence where she felt comfortable. Another student research participant was unable to physically access the offices of the DSA, due to the fact that at the time of the interview process, the participant was away from the University premises and as a result was interviewed electronically.

## 5.5 Ethical Considerations

The aim of ethical research is to protect the rights and welfare of student research participants which further means to avoid causing any emotional, psychological and physical harm. These include respecting their privacy and observe confidentiality when given informed consent by the targeted group (Terre Blanche & Durheim; 1999; Litchman, 2010). As the researcher, I explained that the research is solely for academic purposes. They were given full details of the purpose of the study before they consented by signing the consent form. The interviews were recorded using an audio recorder, except in the one case where the student research participant's responses were recorded electronically.

Further on, the participants were reassured that their responses to the interviews were confidential and that they had the right to opt out if they feel the interview process was too strenuous. This was followed by the offer to access the Counselling centre if they thought it necessary. The Counselling Centre was made aware of the study and was requested that they make their services available to the individuals if they require their assistance. This was also articulated in the consent form which each student participant signed before the interviews were conducted. Their language of preference was also respected and the researcher indicated that a translator can be selected and be bound by confidentiality if they feel comfortable conducting the interview in their language of choice.

## 5.6 Students with disabilities at Rhodes University

### 5.6.1 The current picture at Rhodes University

The following is a breakdown of students who declared their disabilities, registered under the DMU of Rhodes University, broken down as follows:

| Type of Disability | 2016 | 2015 | Visible - 2016 | Hidden - 2016 | Unknown -2016 |
|--------------------|------|------|----------------|---------------|---------------|
| Blind              | 0    | 2    |                |               |               |
| Cerebral palsy     | 2    | 1    |                |               |               |
| Communication      | 1    | 1    |                |               |               |
| Deafness           | 3    | 1    |                |               |               |
| Diabetic           | 12   | 18   |                |               |               |
| Dyslexia           | 21   | 23   |                |               |               |
| Emotional          | 9    | 7    |                |               |               |
| Intellectual       | 12   | 17   |                |               |               |
| More than one      | 7    | 5    |                |               |               |

|                   |            |            |           |           |           |
|-------------------|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Paraplegic        | 0          | 4          |           |           |           |
| Partial hearing   | 10         | 9          |           |           |           |
| Partially sighted | 7          | 13         |           |           |           |
| Physical          | 7          | 11         |           |           |           |
| Speech defect     | 2          | 1          |           |           |           |
| Unspecified       | 25         | 28         |           |           |           |
| <b>TOTAL</b>      | <b>118</b> | <b>141</b> | <b>12</b> | <b>74</b> | <b>32</b> |

### 5.6.2 Research participants' profile

| Type of disability declared                                     | Visible  | Hidden   |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------|----------|----------|
| ADHD/Bipolar II/ General Anxiety disorder/ Stress Vulnerability |          |          |
| Bipolar II                                                      |          |          |
| Cerebral palsy                                                  |          |          |
| Dyslexia                                                        |          |          |
| Lupus                                                           |          |          |
| Myoclonic Epilepsy                                              |          |          |
| Partial Hearing                                                 |          |          |
| Partially sighted/anxiety                                       |          |          |
| Wheelchair/muscular dystrophy                                   |          |          |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                                                    | <b>2</b> | <b>7</b> |

**Patricia** is an African female student who is completing her Bachelor of Journalism degree. The disability she declared is physical disability - muscular dystrophy. She is on financial aid. She has been in residence for the past four years. The residence was more convenient and accessible as well as safer because of her disability. She has been very involved in residence activities in her first and second years. She also served as a member of the house committee in her second year of study.

**Bryony** is a White female student, studying towards a Bachelor of Science degree currently in her third year. The disability she declared is Bipolar type II. She has been on medication for the past five years. She is not on financial aid. She is currently an oppidan student but lived in residence for two years, and one of those years she served as a house committee member. She chose to move out of residence because she needed her own space. As an

oppidan student, she has not been involved in oppidan life events because there has been a lack of contact from the Oppidan representatives due to the physical distance.

**Zoleka** is an African female student, studying towards a BSc degree currently in her second year of study. The disability she declared is cerebral palsy 1%. She is on financial aid. She has been a very involved residence activities for two years and one of the years, she served as a house committee member in the year 2015.

**Charné** is a White female in her second year of study. She is studying towards a Bachelor of Arts degree. She has been a student living in residence for two years. The disability she declared is dyslexia. She is not on financial aid.

**Claudia** is a White female. She is studying towards a Bachelor of Social Science degree. She is currently in her third year of study. The disability she declared is lupus (which attacks the body, not the virus). She is an oppidan student currently. She spent her first year in residence. She is not on financial aid.

**Andrea** is a Coloured female. She is studying towards a Bachelor of Science degree. She is currently in her second year of study and has been living in residence for two years. She is not on financial aid. She declared more than one disability: Bipolar, ADHD, stress vulnerability and general anxiety disorder. She has been seeing a psychologist at Rhodes University since May 2015.

**Nelisa** is an African female. She is completing her third year as a Bachelor of Arts student. She is on financial aid. The disability she declared is a partial sight. She also has albinism and photophobic. She has been living in residence for three years and six months and has been very involved in residence activities for two years. The residence has been a good choice for her as she has space which is hers and is also the kind of person who needs human contact which gives her social and emotional security.

**Liezel** is a Coloured female. She is on the extended studies programme and in her 1<sup>st</sup> year academically. She studies towards a Bachelor of Arts degree. She has been living in residence for two years and has been very involved in her 1<sup>st</sup> year. The disability she declared is myoclonic epilepsy. She is on financial aid.

**Siphokazi** is an African female currently in her first year of study towards a Bachelor of Arts degree. She is not on financial aid. She is an Oppidan student. The disability she declared is partial hearing.

### **5.7 Challenges faced throughout the interview process**

As the researcher, I initially proposed conducting in-depth interviews with ten students who declared different types of disabilities as participants for the study. I used purposive sampling

with the said participants to explain certain perspectives from the “homogeneous subsets of that population” (Babbie *et al.*, 1998:191). I initially set out to select approximately two participants from the various categories of disabilities. However, I encountered problems in interviewing the ten student research participants and was only able to interview nine out of the ten. I emailed fifteen students who declared various disabilities and only ten positively responded to the request to be interviewed.

However, the other one who expressed an interest to be part of the process was not able to participate because he completed the 2016 November examinations and went home for the holidays before it was possible to interview him. With regard to another interviewee, the researcher had trouble physically accessing the person who declared a physical disability. She left Rhodes University to work as an intern at the end of 2015. She was one of the participants I was engaging with during the year. She was actively involved in advocacy and lobbying during her tenure at the institution. She was for this reason a strong candidate to interview for the research and her many years of experience of the institution as she was a fourth year Journalism student. As agreed, she emailed her responses to the interview questions.

The interview process was also difficult due to six- weeks of student protests at the institution and it was difficult to engage any of them during that time. Fortunately, no problems were faced in interviewing the staff as key informants for the study. They were all keen and made themselves readily available to be part of the interview process.

## **5.8 Conclusion**

In this chapter, I discussed the aims of the study and I highlighted that it followed a qualitative research design which employs interviews to collect data and the researcher will select participants through purposive sampling. A profile of the student research participants and key informants was also outlined in detail, coupled with the various challenges I faced as the researcher in conducting the study. The following chapter will focus on the research findings, outlining the experiences of students with disabilities at Rhodes University in terms of academic support, general support services and the physical environment of the institution. It will also explore in detail the extent of their involvement in policy making and development and in their opinion what institutional transformation means for students with disabilities at Rhodes University.

## **CHAPTER SIX**

### **EXPLORING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES' EXPERIENCES OF THE ACADEMIC PROGRAMME**

#### **6.1 Introduction**

Chapter Five outlines the research method used for eliciting the experiences of students with disabilities of the academic programme, the support services and the support of their participation in the transformation process of Rhodes University. Chapter Six will focus on analysing the experience of students with disabilities of the academic programme.

In this chapter, the question on what body matters takes centre stage in the study. The body classified as 'Other' has increasingly beckoned recognition in various spheres of society and now this study has been extended to the field of academia. The centering of this issue has become important as the positioning of the 'Other' has increasingly been shifted to the periphery, therefore ignored and silenced. This can be seen in the provision of social services to the 'Other'. Consequently, current debates on this issue have challenged and continue to challenge this construction and this ideology with the emergence of the sociology of disability. No longer is it satisfactory to describe disability in terms of physical attributes to which value is placed on what body matters in society. There is now a call to disarm and re-construct this body in society.

In the study, as researcher I draw on the Critical Disability Studies Approach (CDSA), using the social justice framework and the concept of inclusive education to highlight the important concept of intersectionality in higher education, specifically in its construction at Rhodes University. The study analysed the extent of inclusion of students with disabilities, said student's political engagement, the recognition and response by the institution of their lived experiences, the priority placed on the funding of disability and the importance of the ethics of care through the arrangements of its student support services. All these aspects and considerations will be indicative of the University's institutional culture. For example, is it a culture that is inclusive of students with disabilities and does it centre their voice and their presence irrespective of the small number they represent at the institution?

There is a strong argument by many scholars (Pretorius *et al.*, 2011; Saloojee *et al.*, 2006; and Vickerman & Blundell, 2010) that in higher education institutions nationally, there is a

constant disjuncture between policy statement and its implementation which perpetuates the stigmatisation and discrimination against students with disabilities. It is further supported by the argument made by scholars such as Chiwandire *et al.* (2016), that students with disabilities are given access to a disabling environment that privileges ableism. It can for this reason be argued that due to this disjuncture, it hinders students with disabilities to successfully participate in higher education institutions. The concept of ‘Access with success’ is critical when it centres the experiences of students with disabilities in higher education institutions when their navigation of the space and adapting to the various practices and unrealistic expectations placed on them, becomes challenging and twice as hard to accomplish whilst expected to flourish in an unchanging, able-bodied framework. The ‘Access with success’ goes beyond the notions of access to the notions of participation in higher education institutions, which should result in realising their full potential academically, professionally and socially (Belyakov *et al.*, 2009). It is a position that is strongly upheld by Rhodes University as it articulates in the 2005 student disability policy where students with disabilities should be given the opportunity to flourish in all spheres of their life whilst at the University.

In this chapter, the study will reveal the extent to which students with disabilities have experienced the academic programme at the University. It will focus on said students experience of any institutional and attitudinal barriers with a specific focus on the physical layout of the University and its impact on their classroom experience. In addition, it will focus on how the students with disabilities navigate the University space which hinges on an able-bodied framework, highlighting the coping mechanisms they have to put in place to navigate the physical space. Furthermore, the chapter will interrogate the extent to which the students with disabilities at Rhodes University access and participate in this space that would ensure they flourish during their tenure at the institution. Therefore, interrogating the impact of the physical environment on the experiences of students with disabilities of the academic programme, will be indicative of the Institution's commitment to ensuring students with disabilities participate in a manner that contributes to the flourishing and realising of their full potential.

## **6.2 Physical Environment: barriers identified in the physical buildings and layouts**

The data revealed that at Rhodes University, many buildings including some residences and lecture venues are old. The majority of the participants noted that not enough is done at Rhodes University for physical disability, referring to the many stairs, which characterises the

University campus. The above concerns were highlighted by most of the student participants and key informants:

It's no secret that Rhodes is easily one of the most inaccessible institutions in South Africa. The dining halls, residences, bathroom facilities within those halls and residences, the lack of ramps on campus and not wide enough entrances for wheelchairs, are just some of the biggest infrastructural problems."<sup>15</sup>

"To be absolutely blunt, it is atrocious. At the main admin building, there is no way someone in a wheelchair can enter the building."<sup>16</sup>

Both student participants and key informants responded that the physical environment is hostile and a barrier and hindrance to the academic success of students. The issue of access to the administration block and the University library is a telling matter which is glaringly inaccessible towards persons in wheelchairs. The main administration building of the University has a number of steps leading to its main entrance. This suggests that the building cannot be accessed by those who have physical impairments, with the absence of a lift or well-equipped ramps. Similarly, the library entrance has a number of steps that may be accessed with great difficulty by especially those with a physical disability, with only one back entrance with a lift into the library. It can therefore be argued that given the reports of the inaccessible main administration building and the main library, is symbolic of the importance placed on issues of disability at the institution. Furthermore, it can be argued that this current picture speaks of the institutional barriers because of the stigma attached to persons with disabilities and persistent negative attitudes displayed in the layout of the buildings.

The above highlights the need to consider the installation of ramps and installation of additional lifts for instance in the library in order for these buildings to be wheelchair friendly. Furthermore, some of these buildings and laboratories of the University is found to have bad lighting, which is not conducive for studies by any students but more impactful especially for students with sight difficulties. This is highlighted by one of the key informants:

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<sup>15</sup> Interview with Patricia, muscular dystrophy, Rhodes University, 13 January 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Mr Richard Poole, Lecturer in Accounting department and Chairperson of the Examinations Concessions Committee, Rhodes University, 8 December 2016.

“The GLT<sup>17</sup> needs to be looked at. Those with sight problems we need to look at where we put them in the front or the back. We can’t have someone with albinism put in the lab with glaring light.”<sup>18</sup>

The study also revealed that Rhodes University has limited parking facilities for the ‘disabled’. In the case that there is such parking available, it is either far from the buildings which need to be accessed or is quickly taken up by staff members. This is pointed out by one of the student participants:

“To get my disability parking sticker, it took me two weeks and I eventually got it at CPU<sup>19</sup>. It took a long time.”<sup>20</sup>

The study further revealed that the experience of the physical environment for each of the participants was specific to their disability. One of the participants with partial sight highlighted three integral areas in which her disability plays a role in her daily life: residence life, lecture venues and the paving on access walkways (which the study also revealed more needs to be done for students with visual impairments). The student participant said the following:

“They put blinds in my room because I am photophobia. In terms of lecture venues, if I ever needed a curtain pulled in somebody’s office they will pull the blinds. Even when we are walking past Debonairs, I never walk that side. I walk the other side, but the paving is done badly. I can’t see where the puddles are on rainy days so I always walk very slowly on those days.”<sup>21</sup>

The above responses reveal that some student participants navigate the space with great difficulty and found the space extremely hostile towards them. Some student participants revealed that it requires them to work twice as hard in raising awareness on the experiences of students with disabilities and often confronted with negative attitudes experienced by both students and the institution as a whole. This is empathetically expressed by the student participant diagnosed with muscular dystrophy:

"On several occasions, I posted on a public Rhodes Facebook page about the inconsideration of drivers and motorists who park on the ramps. It was an inconvenience because I would be late for appointments driving around trying to find a ramp that no one had parked on. I was often almost run over by drivers on campus while I was crossing in a pedestrian crossing.

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<sup>17</sup> Refers to the General Lecture Theatre at Rhodes University.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Mr Richard Poole, Lecturer in Accounting department and Chairperson of the Examinations Concessions Committee, Rhodes University, 8 December 2016.

<sup>19</sup> Refers to the campus security unit of Rhodes University.

<sup>20</sup> Interview with Claudia, lupus, Rhodes University, 25 November 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Interview with Nelisa, partially sighted, Rhodes University, 25 November 2016.

“Apparently, I’m not a pedestrian – my wheelchair resembles a car so I have to wait for other cars in order to pass to the other side”.<sup>22</sup>

“Noise makes me incredibly anxious and unfortunately, the only disability room in my res is by the front door. Many students would sit on the front door steps and make a noise. On several instances, I had to leave my bed, walk to the door (open it and let me tell you, it is an impossible door to open in my condition) and ask for the noise to be lowered. This is a really physical tiring exercise for me – and I would communicate that to the house group Facebook. I received a lot of negative comments and of course, nothing ever changed so I found myself refraining from going to the door and I just took my anxiety medication more often.”<sup>23</sup>

The above clearly portrays that in the instance of Patricia and Claudia that the institutional and attitudinal barriers they experience are in the physical distances, poor infrastructural layout and negative attitudes to their disability by some members of staff and the student body. Although Claudia has a hidden disability, her condition has an impact on her physical ability to get around the university campus which compelled her parents to get her a car to get around campus more easily:

“My biggest problem is that the walking distance is far. I have to at least leave 20 -25 minutes earlier before the next lecture. My parents got me a car.”<sup>24</sup>

It is observed, especially as narrated by Patricia, that the campus has become increasingly challenging to navigate, which has a profound impact on the student’s all-round academic and social well-being. This is evident as Patricia articulates her experience of the Health Care Centre (HCC):

“Only when I was diagnosed with a mental illness did I think that the HCC was incredibly good at providing health support. Prior to that, we had bad arguments about their half-hearted commitment in providing support (counselling) and physical support such as offering to take ‘disabled’ students to pressing medical appointments that were far away from campus. That’s where the entire system, for me, was a let-down.”<sup>25</sup>

From the responses above, it reveals that the gravity of the impact on students’ success in the institution is in many ways dependent on the infrastructural arrangements to be inclusive and welcoming to students with disabilities. It can be argued that the institution needs to re-examine its physical layout and prioritise reasonable accommodation provisions because of its impact on the academic success and overall well-being of students with disabilities.

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with Patricia, muscular dystrophy, Rhodes University, 13 January 2017.

<sup>23</sup> *ibid*

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Claudia, lupus, Rhodes University, 25 November 2016.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Patricia, muscular dystrophy, Rhodes University, 13 January 2017.

### ***6.2.1 Reasonable accommodation provision***

Some of the examples listed in the student disability policy of 2005 of reasonable accommodation include adapting existing facilities and re-organising work areas in residences to make them accessible. The question asked to key informants on what have been achieved since 2005 on the provision of reasonable accommodation and what more can be done, the general response is not much has been done over the past ten years. Some of the changes that can be noted are in the food services section under the Residential Operations (ResOps) Division. It has over the years introduced a variety of diet options for all students in the dining halls as an attempt to make the institution welcoming of all. However, there is still a great deal that needs to be achieved especially looking at the residence buildings surrounding these dining halls which are not disability friendly. The majority of the residence buildings are characterised by stairs, which makes accessibility very challenging for the students living in residences. What was highlighted is that the relatively older residences are disability-friendly and new buildings are compliant and easily accessible to all. This is noted by some of the key informants:

“I know that Beit House is wheelchair friendly, even Botha House and Graeme House. Maybe not enough to accommodate students with disabilities.”<sup>26</sup>

“At Oakdene<sup>27</sup> we have one room that is disability friendly.”<sup>28</sup>

“The biological science building bathrooms passed and there are specifically designated bathrooms.”<sup>29</sup>

However, a concern was raised by one of the key informants with regards to the compliance of some of the new buildings in regards to the fire safety of these buildings. Data has revealed that even though the new buildings are more accessible, issues of safety, particularly for students with disabilities, needs further investigation and modifications are needed. This is indicated by two of the key informants:

"In the Hamilton building, questions were raised about the access of buildings with swing doors and how to exit the building in case of smoke in the building. So the long and short right now, is there are more barriers for people with disabilities.”<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Interview with Ms Jay Pillay, Deputy-Director of Residential Operations Division, Rhodes University, 1 December 2016.

<sup>27</sup>, A postgraduate residence built in 2014 and occupied from 2015.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Ms Jay Pillay, Deputy-Director of Residential Operations Division, Rhodes University, 1 December 2016.

<sup>29</sup> Interview with Mr Richard Poole, Lecturer in Accounting department and Chairperson of the Examinations Concessions Committee, Rhodes University, 8 December 2016.

“On the negative side, we have buildings which do not have infrastructure that is necessary to include individuals with particular impairments, not just for wheelchair access, e.g., this is question of safety, if you got a fire alarm, how will people who are hard of hearing know there is a fire in the building?”<sup>31</sup>

As seen above there are some positive strides made to make new buildings more accessible and accommodating to persons with disabilities at Rhodes University. It speaks to the willingness of the University and the mindfulness and commitment that certain changes are needed towards reasonably accommodating students with disabilities both in the lecture and the residence spaces in the light of financial resource availability. There are plans to make Rhodes University universally accessible and part of that planning involves consideration of a medium-term plan, given its current financial constraints, to fund for a Disability Unit. These plans have been noted by some of the key informants:

"The long-term objective is making sure universal access is realised. It involves looking at how adaptable our residences are in terms of accessing buildings. This goes beyond the DSA to the academic arena."<sup>32</sup>

"From a financial point of view, start budgeting and fund for a Disability Unit at least for the medium term."<sup>33</sup>

The above demonstrates that although there is political will and a culture of care amongst the leadership and the staff on the issues of disability, the majority of the student participants expressed that very little commitment is evident to making the small, necessary changes to modify the infrastructure in order to be more inclusive. The thought expressed by most key informants is adopting creative ways of instituting incremental changes such as painting white strip on stairs, which is required by law as a matter of safety. This will demonstrate the institution's willingness to adopt an inclusive approach to disability. Small interventions, therefore, would go a long way in making the institutional landscape more inclusive.

One of the key informants and one of the student participants highlighted this:

"Small infrastructural modifications and changes, for example, making sure steps are painted white. Those who have limited visibility can see the beginning of a step. Those are things that don't cost a lot of money."<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> *ibid*

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Ms Noluxolo Nhlapo, Director of Equity and Institutional Culture Office and Chairperson of the Disability Committee, Rhodes University, 9 December 2016.

<sup>32</sup> Interview with Mr Malinge Gqeba, Director of Student Affairs, Rhodes University, 6 December 2016.

<sup>33</sup> Interview with Mr Richard Poole, Lecturer in Accounting department and Chairperson of the Examinations Concessions Committee, Rhodes University, 8 December 2016.

“I can’t see. I usually feel my way up and down the stairs during fire drills. Now I know when I go up the stairs to look at the stairs. All stairs should have a strip of white paint. It matters for people's safety in general.”<sup>35</sup>

The above portrays that although the University has made significant strides to the accessibility of buildings, it has a long way to go to be universally accessible. Given the above, it is argued that this could be one of the reasons that there are persistent negative attitudes and exclusionary practices in place that is discriminatory towards students with disabilities. The scholar Ballard (2004) urges the resistance to a culture of contentment to these systems that perpetuate oppression and marginalising the ‘Other’. The system must be disarmed and transformed to be inclusive of this group. The Rhodes SRC of 2015 has played a significant role in this as they rebelled against the system which is exclusionary to this ‘vulnerable’ group. A petition was drawn up and signed by a number of students against the move of the DSA to the Steve Biko building.

Due to the fact that the DSA is dealing with all student affairs matters (including the affairs of student with disabilities), it can be perceived that the Division is insensitive to move to a building that is inaccessible for a ‘vulnerable’ group of students who are inarguably entitled to access all the services which are provided by the Division. The message that the petition conveyed is that Rhodes is not disability friendly to a particular group of students – in this case, students with a physical disability. The installation of the lift was erected after the petition by the students. It seems that it was not initially part of the institutional planning. It can be argued that little commitment has been demonstrated to prioritise this. Furthermore, it could be that the University is hamstringed by other factors beyond its control but also it demonstrates the value it places on recognising and effectively respond to the needs of students with disabilities.

In the light of the above, it can be argued that the sociology of acceptance in the sociology of exclusion has been achieved through the courageous leadership of the SRC, where the consciousness was raised in the institution on firstly the issue of disability and the need for the unhindered access of student support services. Secondly, this means it can only be

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with Ms Noluxolo Nhlapo, Director of Equity and Institutional Culture Office and Chairperson of the Disability Committee, Rhodes University, 9 December 2016.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Nelisa, partially sighted, Rhodes University, 25 November 2016.

achieved with the installation of a lift for especially the students who lived with physical disabilities. This is what has been imagined and articulated by the SRC of an institution which is inclusive and accepting and a home for all including the 'Other'.

There is therefore a need to re-direct some financial resources towards responding to the needs of students (and staff) with disabilities, in addition to time frames which are clearly communicated to the university community. It is also important that given the creeping austerity, with less and less state funding to continue offering quality tertiary education, financial constraints should not be seen as a 'get out' clause on prioritising disability at the University. The implications are firstly; this will send a message to the university community that the University disregards persons with disability and secondly, the University could be liable if it does not reasonably accommodate students with disabilities. This has been raised by one of the key informants of the study:

"The question is do we have the money? We sit between a rock and a hard place. The university must show commitment, but what they can't do is to be selective who to accommodate. We could face a lawsuit. We need to show a long-term commitment to improving."<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, it is also important that the University cultivates a culture of transparency about its financial resources and how it plans to distribute it. These concerns have been highlighted by one of the key informants:

"To show commitment, identify and be quite clear about our limitations, say what we intend to do, earmark some money, for example, X amount in the budget. Look at what are the priorities and have some feedback and time frames."<sup>37</sup>

The above addresses to some extent the issue of social injustice by redressing past inequalities as demonstrated with the installation of the lift in the Steve Biko building. In addition, it served to dis-arm and disable a system that is discriminatory towards students with disabilities. As stated by the scholar Schillmeier (2010), thinking more on the lived experiences of persons with disabilities with the potential of simultaneously disarming social structures and exclusionary practices, will give prominence to the presence and voice of students with disabilities. Therefore in the context of Rhodes University, the SRC played a significant role in challenging and in some ways dismantle disabling practices and attitudes

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<sup>36</sup> Interview with Mr Richard Poole, Lecturer in Accounting department and Chairperson of the Examinations Concessions Committee, Rhodes University, 8 December 2016.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Ms Sarah Green, Head of Counselling Centre, Rhodes University, 7 December 2016.

towards students with disabilities at the institution with the drawing up of the petition. It calls for a change in thinking on disability beyond the notions of the physical manifestations to highlighting the experiences of students with disabilities of the physical environment. This is critical because the thinking on disability will be evident in the infrastructural arrangements in place that is either inclusive or exclusionary of the 'disabled' student.

### ***6.2.2 Beyond the notion of the physical manifestation of disability***

The shift in mind-set will allow the university community to translate this to challenging and changing the physical environment. Therefore, continuous education and awareness-raising are crucial towards making the environment disability conscious and friendly and universally accessible through the universal design of buildings and products. There is also an admission from key informants that the negative attitudes towards students with disabilities further isolates, alienates and marginalise them from the institution hence the evident lack of resources and products to accommodate students in the lecture venues. This highlights the importance of raising awareness of disability and its integration in higher education as an important imperative of transformation. This is noted by one of the key informants:

“There is lots of negativity towards persons with disabilities. There needs to be awareness created amongst the Rhodes community. The DSA see this as a priority. The starting point is the removal of barriers, a total configuration of the structure of the university. The concept of universal access comes to the fore again. The university must make sure all persons with disabilities can access services and the structures of the university, without any hindrance, therefore, the university must adapt itself to accommodate students and staff with disabilities.”<sup>38</sup>

The shift in mind-set should also be extended to an awareness of the many hidden disabilities that needs equal attention and provision in order to accommodate the needs of such students. Even though the stigma and discrimination experienced by those who have visible disabilities may be more profound, there is a degree of stigma and discrimination experienced by those who have hidden disability. Even though inadequate provision is made for those with physical disabilities, the ones with hidden disabilities may feel forgotten because their disability is not seen and therefore considered as not important. This view has been expressed by the following student participants:

“They (students) are not very accommodating. They think I'm lazy. People in general, do not understand, people see there's nothing wrong with me. They just expect me to do things.”<sup>39</sup>

“I have had my ups and downs with people understanding my partial hearing and others who absolutely do not care about my disability.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Interview with Mr Malinge Gqeba, Director of Student Affairs, Rhodes University, 6 December 2016.

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Claudia, lupus, Rhodes University, 25 November 2016.

The above responses reveal that the navigation of this hostile space for students with different types of disabilities may have a negative impact on their emotional well-being in an able-bodied space, forcing them to fit into unchanged systems and structures. This has been proven with the lived experiences as highlighted by both Claudia and Siphokazi. These experiences confirm the argument by Eckes *et al.* (2005), that the response to disability needs to be conducted based on their experience of a disability. This is because the experiences of a person with a physical disability (who may arguably experience more stigma and discrimination), can be potentially different or even the same to those with an invisible disability and therefore appropriate responses is required. Therefore a ‘one-size-fits-all’ approach is not adequate and appropriate.

It also confirms the position made by scholars such as Chiwandire *et al.* (2016), that ‘disabled’ students are integrated into an unchanging, disabling environment, which could further debilitate the overall well-being of students with disabilities. It is noted by student participants that the onus lies with them to manage, cope and navigate the able-bodied space but it should become more important that said students do not solely rely on their coping mechanisms of the physical space. It should be that this environment becomes less hostile and allow the student to navigate it easily without having to sacrifice their sense of agency, which reiterates the small and necessary interventions. This would go a long way in making the environment more inclusive.

It can therefore be argued that the current infrastructural arrangements of the university are perilously close to permanently relegate student with disabilities to the periphery and be found wanting for threatening the academic success and well-being of said students. Given the current physical environment at Rhodes University, the study will discuss how students with disabilities experience the academic programme.

### **6.3. Students with disabilities’ experiences of the academic programme**

The vast amount of literature reviewed on disability in HEIs globally reveals that very little commitment has been made towards inclusive education policies amongst HEIs, which recognises and equally caters for the educational needs of students with disabilities. Despite this recognition as enshrined in Article 24 of 2006 UNCPRD and in the 1994 Salamanca

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<sup>40</sup> Interview with Siphokazi, partial hearing, Rhodes University, 26 November 2016.

Statement committing to an *Education for All* ‘within a regular education system’, there are persistent negative attitudes toward students with disabilities and a general ignorance of their presence and disregard for their capabilities. In HE, there is a call for inclusive education, which goes beyond integrating students with disabilities to where provisions are to be made for the installation of certain facilities which will enable them to have an equal footing in the academic programme. This will be indicative of acknowledging their presence and recognising their voice as important in HEIs.

According to Ainscow *et al.* (2006), the main aim of inclusive education is to disable exclusionary practices which are barriers to the full participation of students with disabilities in educational policies and practices which directly affect them. Secondly, it is underscored by the ethics of care and the right to quality education as part of its human rights approach to education. In addition to this, inclusive education is still possible even in undesirable conditions. Therefore, despite many HEIs in South Africa facing worsening financial conditions (Wangenge-Ouma, 2010); inclusive education under these undesirable conditions is still possible if there is a commitment to re-direct resources and to be creative in restructuring where necessary, without committing big budget when offering reasonable accommodations. Institutions are therefore required to be cognizant of this in order to avoid liabilities if it fails to make these provisions to students with disabilities. As noted above it would infringe on their constituted right to education.

In the context of Rhodes University, the question posed is the value placed by the institution on the participation of students with disabilities, as part of its transformation agenda. It is in the light of above that this section will explore the extent to which said students’ special educational needs are catered for and their recognition in the classroom and the curriculum as a whole. Analyses of the institution's response to students with disabilities in the classroom set-up will be indicative of the extent to which it embraces inclusive education and hereby engage them in its transformation processes.

### ***6. 3.1 Experiences in the classroom: attitudes of both students and staff***

According to the scholars (Matshedisho, 2010; Ramakuela & Maluleke, 2011 and Swart & Greyling, 2011), a number of studies revealed stereotypes and persistent negative attitudes toward students with a disability who experience an atmosphere of intolerance and resentment by able-bodied students. There is an alarming number (80%) experiencing feeling

rejection from their able-bodied peers, staff and the institution as a whole. At Rhodes University, the reports have been that 7 out of 9 student participants (approximately 80%) reported that they have been treated as 'normal' when their disability is known. The following student participants indicated this:

"Many of my peers went out of their way to ensure that I felt supported. I was never overlooked and neither were my challenges regarding my academics. I would make it a point to introduce myself in a new class to a new lecturer so that they understood why someone would have to help me up from my seat to leave the class and that I didn't expect any preferential treatment." <sup>41</sup>

"All lecturers, they are neutral, normal. They treat me like every other student in the class. It makes me feel good because I don't like being babied." <sup>42</sup>

However, it became evident in the study that the participants with lupus and partial hearing respectively, experienced the environment as hostile and therefore their experience with their lecturers and their peers is not as positive compared to the majority of the other students. The following student participants have highlighted these experiences:

"They (the students) are not very accommodating. Generally, they think I'm lazy because people see there's nothing wrong with me." <sup>43</sup>

"I went to her (the lecturer) and told her about my hearing problem and asked if she could give me extra notes because she talks the whole lecture and only has the one slide on display. She told me No", that she will give me the reading list, not the extra notes. Some lecturers are not so accommodating." <sup>44</sup>

Similarly, the experience of one other student participants who declared more than one disability is fearful of stigma because of her disability. She commented the following:

"I try for them not to know because there are a certain stereotype and stigma. I know that people with Bipolar are seen as the crazy bunch." <sup>45</sup>

The experience of Siphokazi and Andrea is not unique as a similar report was found with a study conducted at the University of Gloucestershire and Portland State University respectively (Fuller *et al.* 2004; Denhart, 2008). The study at the University of Gloucestershire found that students with hearing difficulties are often overlooked by the

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<sup>41</sup> Interview with Patricia, muscular dystrophy, Rhodes University, 13 January 2017.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Zoleka, cerebral palsy, Rhodes University, 22 November 2016.

<sup>43</sup> Interview with Claudia, lupus, Rhodes University, 25 November 2016.

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Siphokazi, partial hearing, Rhodes University, 26 November 2016.

<sup>45</sup> Interview with Andrea, bipolar II, ADHD, stress vulnerability and general anxiety disorder, Rhodes University, 24 November 2016.

lecturers and robbed of the opportunity to participate in discussions. The special educational need is for the lecturer to slow down his/her pace or provide supplementary material to assist the student outside of the lecture venue as a means of accommodating the student. The study conducted at Portland State University (Denhart, 2008) on learning disabilities revealed that the fear of disclosing disability could lead to stigma and discrimination.

In the light of the above, it can be argued that despite the disability, the common denominator is stigma and discrimination which is experienced by all students with disabilities although at different levels of intensity. It portrays the need to establish consciousness through education and orientation mainly amongst lecturing staff on the special needs of students with disabilities in their classroom. In addition, in the context of HE, this includes making assistive devices and online material available, using different font sizes as a matter of priority. This could serve as part of the short-term plan of the University towards universal access. The above interventions are emphasised by one of the key informants:

“Definitely education to orient staff to the issues of disability. Many of the staff don’t have an in-depth understanding of disability, how to teach students with impairments in order for them to have a full quality of life at the institution”<sup>46</sup>

"Assistive devices, that is hearing devices and notes in a larger font is easy to accommodate in the short term. Hearing devices they can plug in. We have not done anything to plug into this and this should be prioritised. I announce to students if they need a larger font, it will be on RU Connected. Lecturers should automatically do it, especially if they know if they have students with those problems."<sup>47</sup>

It can be argued that with the above interventions in place, it could promote flexibility in the uptake of subjects and minimise the possibilities of rejection to enrol for a specific subject choice because of their disability. Therefore in the light of the above, the study also explores the impact that their disability has on subject choice and their overall academic success.

### ***6.3.2. Impact of disability on subject choice on their overall academic success***

The study has revealed that with regards to their subject choice, most of the student participants highlighted that their subject choice was not influenced by their disabilities. However, three of the participants diagnosed with muscular dystrophy, lupus and partial hearing respectively highlighted that they were unable to take up a specific subject because they could not physically access the lecture venue because of its many stairs, distance and

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<sup>46</sup> Interview with Mr Richard Poole, Lecturer in Accounting department and Chairperson of the Examinations Concessions Committee, Rhodes University, 8 December 2016.

<sup>47</sup> *ibid*

demands of the course for a chosen career path. This is expressed by the following participants:

“I was asked not to take French as a subject in my first year because the University was struggling to move it to an accessible floor. I was coerced into taking up Classics – a subject I didn’t enjoy at all.”<sup>48</sup>

“Yes, it did. I get fatigued, so I can’t choose subjects which are rigorous, so I chose subjects that are more meaning based, like self-study. In my 1<sup>st</sup> year journalism class, which was in Eden Grove, it was too far to walk for me. Also, to run from the Barratt to Chemistry building and GLT, I literally had to run between buildings.”<sup>49</sup>

“I was actually planning on studying law, then I realized a legal career will require me to talk, to hear and listen properly, which would be too hard for me. So, I decided to take up psychology, but I wanted to study law, but because of my disability, I can’t.”<sup>50</sup>

The above responses portray that infrastructural arrangements indeed plays a role on how students with disabilities experience the overall academic programme especially as seen in the case of Patricia and Claudia. Leading from this, the data also confirmed students’ disability had an impact on their overall academic success. Except for two participants, the majority of the participants highlighted that it did have an impact on their overall academic success. Two of the participants highlighted that her Bipolar stage II cause anxiety. One of the participants highlighted that because of her partial sight, she was unable to see the teaching material from a distance. Furthermore, one of the other participants highlighted because of myoclonic epilepsy, she struggles to concentrate on her studies. Another participant has highlighted that because of her partial hearing, she cannot follow the lecturer at the speed at which she lectures. Here are excerpts from the interviews:

“With my bipolar, there is the mania, the depression. With the depression, when I am studying, it is hard to be productive.”<sup>51</sup>

“I can’t learn anything in class if I can’t see it. I literally have to rely on hearing and I am a visual learner.”<sup>52</sup>

“Sometimes for instance when I try to study, I start shivering, or start getting Myoclonic jerks which is a distraction.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Interview with Patricia, muscular dystrophy, Rhodes University, 13 January 2017.

<sup>49</sup> Interview with Claudia, lupus, Rhodes University, 25 November 2016.

<sup>50</sup> Interview with Siphokazi, partial hearing, Rhodes University, 26 November 2016.

<sup>51</sup> Interview with Andrea, bipolar II, ADHD, stress vulnerability and general anxiety disorder, Grahamstown, 24 November 2016.

<sup>52</sup> Interview with Nelisa, partially sighted, Rhodes University, 26 November 2016.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Liezel, myoclonic epilepsy, Rhodes University, 25 November 2016

Overall, the above portrays that to some extent the choice of subjects is impacted by the infrastructural arrangements of the institution. In addition, the onus lies solely with the students to navigate an able-bodied space which in some ways has a direct impact on both their physical and emotional well-being. It can be argued that this has been the case for Patricia, Claudia and Siphokazi who experienced the environment as hostile by placing them in a position to make sacrifices on their future ideals and putting twice as much effort in advocating for their rights while pursuing their academic ideals.

#### **6.4 Coping mechanisms in place to cope with the academic demands**

Leading from this, the student participants were asked what mechanisms, if any, they had developed to cope successfully with the academic demands of their courses. The study revealed that all of the participants had to put coping mechanisms in place to meet the demands of their studies as someone with a disability. The coping mechanisms varied in terms of the disability declared by each participant. One of the participants highlighted engaging in self-talk and having a strong primary support system in place helps her to cope. One other participant also highlighted her friends and psychologist as a support structure. Another participant copes with her challenges by doing breathing exercises and going to the gym. Another participant copes with her challenges by attending her lectures regularly to keep on top of her work and also doing art and gardening in her spare time. Another participant highlighted that having a car at her disposal to go to the university and get from one venue to the next, makes her cope better, as noted by the following student participants:

“I need lecturers to give me extra notes only on what they did not say in class. Every week I would have to go to my specific lecturer, explain what I didn’t hear and understand properly.”<sup>54</sup>

“I’m strict about going to lectures, it actually decreases my anxiety. I also need to ensure that I have a release other than academics, so I do that through art and I recently started gardening.”<sup>55</sup>

This is how they need to cope over and above having to deal with the academic demands and still be able to aspire to live well-balanced and successful lives as students. This becomes extremely challenging when students with bipolar, lupus, mycolic epilepsy, mental disorders (anxiety mainly) and ADHD and multiple disorders having to cope with their academics and social lives. Fortunately, they are able to cope with the implementation of their own creative coping mechanisms and with the primary assistance and professional intervention of a psychologist which is mainly accessed from the Counselling Centre.

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<sup>54</sup> Interview with Siphokazi, partial hearing, Rhodes University, 26 November 2016.

<sup>55</sup> Interview with Bryony, bipolar type II, Rhodes University, 28 November 2016.

The above reveals that despite the impact of students' disability on their academic success, the coping mechanisms they have put in place has to some extent allow them to maintain their autonomy and not be 'babied'<sup>56</sup> as expressed by one of the student participants. Beyond the impact of disability on subject choice and the coping mechanisms students with disabilities put in place to cope with the academic demands, their experience of assessments also plays an important role in their overall academic success. Therefore more attention is needed to ensure they are assessed appropriately to ensure they still have an equal footing with able-bodied peers without been given preferential treatment.

According to Silver *et al.* (1998), with universal access to buildings, universal instructional design (refer to Chapter Two) in academia, holds the promise that that teaching and learning are inclusive and innovative. This means that universal design for learning is effective to accommodate students with different learning abilities. This includes the use of assistive technology for learning and their assessment in appropriate venues. The study revealed (as previously discussed) that the sharing of assistive devices would go a long way in disarming negative attitude towards those living with disabilities but also more emphasis is placed on consultation and learning options for students with disabilities. This has been expressed by one of the student participants:

"People can use the same devices I use, it's a resource. We are not trying to divide people by devices. If I thought at the time, I could've posted on a page, getting people to learn in a way that works."<sup>57</sup>

The above promotes flexibility in teaching and learning. This flexibility does not only grant an opportunity to decide how and what is taught but also the opportunity to consult with students on what and how they wish to learn in the classroom, which could become important to consider when embarking on curriculum transformation. This thought is expressed by one of the student participants:

"I remember one of my professors was open on how we prefer to be examined, asking us what we want to talk about, what we would like to discuss today. It was really awesome! I wish more lecturers would take time out to do that."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> A term which refers to being pampered or being overprotective towards them.

<sup>57</sup> Interview with Nelisa, partially sighted, Rhodes University, 26 November 2016.

<sup>58</sup> *ibid*

The study also revealed that students with dyslexia experience the formal assessment challenging. The student participant found that oral assessment is more suitable for her. Herewith an excerpt of the interview:

“I struggle a bit with reading my assignments and even during exam times because write poorly and I’m penalised because they don’t understand what I am writing. I have concessions to help me with this and it works for me.”<sup>59</sup>

The above response from Charné confirms the experience of students with dyslexia which finds writing exams difficult and prefers oral assessment in order to be on par with her peers in her class. In addition to the above, the study also revealed that some of the participants find meeting deadlines and ‘sit-down’ examinations very daunting which increase their anxiety levels. This has been commented on by the student with partial sight:

“I struggle being tested, because of the amount of reading I have to do that I know I will not get done. I put so much pressure on myself and I become anxious and my anxiety debilitates me. If someone asks me how to be tested, I feel I have the option. The sit down did not work for me but with the take-home exams, I felt so much better because I know I would take my time and don't have the anxiety coupled with sit-down exams. I am cornered in a method that doesn't work for me. There is too much rigidity in learning models. It tells me that if I'm not learning, the transcript not reflective my abilities, so I am doomed before starting in the working world.”<sup>60</sup>

The above suggests that their examination marks are dismal, which does not necessarily reflect their capabilities. What seems to be helpful is if the students could be asked how they can be assessed, and it seems the take-home assessment format is a better option in its role to decrease the anxiety levels of some of the students with disabilities. The above also portrays that a flexible curriculum in conjunction with universal instructional design and universal design for learning complemented with the use of assistive devices is necessary to enhance the learning experience of students with disabilities and in so doing allow them to flourish in an inclusive learning environment. It therefore necessitates discussions on curriculum transformation to ask critical questions about what, when and where teaching takes place as indicated by one of the key informants:

"Transformation is beyond what people can see. It goes into our thinking, how we teach when we teach if we teach.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Interview with Charné, dyslexia, Rhodes University, 26 November 2016.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with Nelisa, partially sighted, Rhodes University, 26 November 2016.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Mr Richard Poole, Lecturer in Accounting department and Chairperson of the Examinations Concessions Committee, Rhodes University, 8 December 2016.

"If someone who can't see uses a podcast, record lectures, and makes notes available online. We have to be inventive - thinking way beyond chalk and talk."<sup>62</sup>

Further to this, lecturing staff should be cognisant firstly; that they may have students with possible learning difficulties and the need to find different ways of assessment to demonstrate their competence. Secondly, the deadlines should be more flexible, not in favour of them, but rather to give equal footing in progressing well and in so doing level the playground. This is made possible through appropriate concessions in the academic programme.

The above portrays the adoption of universal instructional design at Rhodes University can be a useful and effective tool in teaching and learning, with the potential of balancing the power relations between students and lecturers and also when consideration is given to apportioning time to consult with and allow discussion to be facilitated by students with disabilities in the classroom. Adopting this approach could create more discussions on students with disabilities lived experiences, which would increase understanding of and sensitise both students and staff on the special needs of said students.

It confirms the assertion made by Silver *et al.* (1998) that a universal instructional design holds the promise of creating an inclusive learning environment where students with disabilities are both seen and heard. This also suggests that it allows them the opportunity for self-advocacy which is globally sorely lacking as asserted by the scholar's Test *et al.* (2015). In creating inclusive environments, broader discussions with students with disabilities on concessions are a necessity in order to ensure that adequate and appropriate concession is made available.

### **6.5 Concessions in the academic programme**

The concessions committee is an important conduit for students who may struggle with meeting deadlines due to a temporary impairment or a declared disability which may impact on the student's academic success. At Rhodes University, the concessions committee processes all applications from students who request concessions for examinations, tests or assignments. The committee is chaired by an academic who also lives with a disability who also allows for the empathetic or caring approach to concessions, without compromising on

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<sup>62</sup> *ibid*

the rules or regulations governing the committee that should make decisions which are fair and consistent as highlighted by one of the key informants who also live with a disability:

"Provided the student provides enough medial support. The university will go out of their way to accommodate them. It is the sympathetic answer because I know how it is to live with a disability and I can be very sensitive to the needs of persons with disabilities. If they haven't provided enough information to grant a permanent concession, it's more a case the person didn't do what we ask them to do. We want to be fair and consistent. Once a student is in the system, they must be afforded all opportunities, which extend to exam concessions."<sup>63</sup>

The study revealed that concessions should not only be extended to the three areas in the academic programme but to provide on-going concessions. This is highlighted by one of the student participants:

"We have exam concessions. I don't stop needing concessions when I'm preparing for exams. It is an ongoing thing and additional pressure on those students who need extra time for assignments. I then live with this level of anxiety and so I think I would've appreciated an overall understanding that concessions does not stop with the exam. It doesn't click for most people and they don't realise is not a stop and start for me."<sup>64</sup>

Beyond the provisions of adequate and appropriate concessions for students with disabilities by the University, the bigger question is how said students experience the curriculum. This question will raise the importance of the content of the curriculum. It is therefore important for the study to explore the extent the curriculum is transforming in augmenting the presence and the voice of students with disabilities.

## **6.6. Curriculum transformation**

The scholar, Msila (2009) advocates that the curriculum should feature and reflect African realities to which the study of disability feature as part of this process. This new thinking has been supported by one of the key informants:

"On one level there is a huge call out for the university to rely less on the Eurocentric text. We are an African university. In my own department, the textbooks we use are Eurocentric. I would love to see a book written by Patrice Motsepe. Maybe our thinking should be what their success models are. We should as academics pay more attention to what South Africa has done of their own success stories, and the 'disabled' be part of those success stories, thus inform us how we teach, what we teach and so develop our own culture."<sup>65</sup>

In addition to this, the curriculum should be in line with the principles of 'Ubuntu' which speaks to a caring and nurturing approach at the Rhodes University. It can be argued that this

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<sup>63</sup> Interview with Mr Richard Poole, Lecturer in Accounting department and Chairperson of the Examinations Concessions Committee, Rhodes University, 8 December 2016.

<sup>64</sup> Interview with Nelisa, partially sighted, Rhodes University, 26 November 2016.

<sup>65</sup> Interview with Mr Richard Poole, Lecturer in Accounting department and Chairperson of the Examinations Concessions Committee, Rhodes University, 8 December 2016.

approach to disability in academia is necessary for the curriculum transformation process and would seem to find greater relevance or could be a starting point in the Humanities and can then be permeated into the other faculties. This is argued for by one of the key informants:

"Have modules on disability and how to include students with impairments in the lecture room. It speaks to curriculum transformation. It should include issues of disability, certainly, the humanities curriculum and increasingly in the science. All these differences we create should be part of the curriculum."<sup>66</sup>

The study revealed there have been in-roads made of immersing disability in the formal education programme as part of centering it in academia as highlighted by one of the key informants:

"I think it should be an imperative. I talk about disability issue all the time in my lectures. We should bring it into our teaching. It should or could form part of every syllabus. It should be part of awareness, the social justice programme. If we don't talk about it specifically, people will remain ignorant. Education is what makes a better society."<sup>67</sup>

It can be argued that the formal recognition in the curriculum can be a good starting point in de-mystifying disability and is a stepping stone in disarming practices which are discriminatory to persons with disability. Therefore, the question posed on the teaching and learning of disability as an issue of diversity and social justice, the responses included that it should be an integrated part of teaching and learning in order to increase awareness on disability issues, beyond the annual disability awareness events and ad-hoc and staggering presentations in the classrooms. It can be argued that in making it part of the curriculum, teaching and learning are inclusive, caring and nurturing towards students with disabilities.

The study reveals that Rhodes University has to commit itself a great deal more in the area of disability in the academia. Ad-hoc and reactive assistance are offered and are not part of the institution's planning programme. Aside from the annual awareness-raising campaign, a designated structure for the formal immersion of disability is urgently called for. Therefore, consideration should be given for the establishment of a DU which can respond to all issues on disability. A DU offer coordinated support to academic staff and students on how to deal with disability in and out of the classroom room set-up. In the context of Rhodes University,

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with Ms Noluxolo Nhlapo, Director of Equity and Institutional Culture Office and Chairperson of the Disability Committee, Rhodes University, 9 December 2016.

<sup>67</sup> Interview with Mr Richard Poole, Lecturer in Accounting department and Chairperson of the Examinations Concessions Committee, Rhodes University, 8 December 2016.

an establishment such as this holds the promise of taking the pressure off in certain departments and divisions to take it upon them to deal with disabilities on an ad-hoc basis, not giving it the attention it deserves.

On the question of the necessity and feasibility for a DU to provide academic support, which is fair and equitable, the study reveals there is unanimous support for such a Unit. However, the current financial constraints experienced by the University, might not make it feasible at this stage. Therefore, it requires the institution to think on creative ways to effectively address the needs of students with disabilities which will ensure they are treated fairly and equitably. This can be explored in the absence of a structure which may require committing big budget. The general consensus is to find ways of addressing their needs in the short term, but that the Unit should become part of the medium to the long-term strategic goals of the institution to ensure that there is a designated structure which addresses issues of disability, not only for students but for staff as well. This is accentuated by the following key informants:

"Get one! It has to become a strategic objective. I think new buildings build and having Disability Unit goes hand in order to provide adequate support. Somewhere along the lines, as a medium strategic objective is to have a Disability Unit, which would take pressure off from people of the Registrar's Division and the DSA. What it boils down to is how university prioritise. At least we need to plot a path. People will turn around and say we talk about universal access, but there is no action. My feeling is we would've failed our students because a lot is ad hoc. Responsibility will be given to the dedicated unit, which can inform best practice that academics, the residence systems and others can use to provide adequate resources and support to students with disabilities."<sup>68</sup>

"It is imperative that every institution, not only for support student in academic but overall student life. Also in assisting staff including staff with impairments that have to make the life of students enriching. We do get staff who means well but don't have the knowledge and a Disability Unit will help such staff members gain the knowledge that they need. An academic then should be able to go to one person with skills and knowledge to assist a student."<sup>69</sup>

The above portrays that inclusive education in the context of Rhodes University is possible but would require a commitment to identify and respond to certain obscurities in the transformation agenda that is imperative to address in the discourse of disability. It includes restructuring support sections and programmes in order to centre disability at the institution. The DSA also sees its role as significant to effectively responding to the diverse needs of

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Mr Richard Poole, Lecturer in Accounting department and Chairperson of the Examinations Concessions Committee, Rhodes University, 8 December 2016.

<sup>69</sup> Interview with Ms Noluxolo Nhlapo, Director of Equity and Institutional Culture Office and Chairperson of the Disability Committee, Rhodes University, 9 December 2016.

students with disabilities at the institution. It would require specialist staff to achieve this as the support for students with disabilities as it currently sits in the Student Services Section of the DSA and this can be perceived as an add-on, which is problematic when responding using a holistic approach to disability. This is noted by one of the key informants:

"At the moment, we need to position our sections to make sure our services speak to students with disabilities. Ideally, we should have a Disability Unit as part of DSA, having the equipment to respond to the challenges. We need specialists to work with the students with disabilities."<sup>70</sup>

Furthermore, it is important that the University considers the social justice approach to disability made by scholars such as Johnson (2004), to critically engage and respond to disability in a holistic manner which means disability in relation to the other registers such as race, class, ethnicity as well as gender. It can be argued that this approach would go a long way in unearthing obscurities embedded in the traditional thinking of disability to evolve into the ethics of care which involves centering the experiences of students with disabilities as it intersects with class, race and gender in an able-bodied framework. It would extend to what the scholar Schillmeier (2010), asserts as creating structures with the most appropriate response to disability that gives prominence to the multiple voices in the disability discourse.

Therefore in the transformation of the curriculum, it should be underscored by intersectionality in the discourse of disability. This approach and the implementation of the curriculum would be indicative of the institution's new way of thinking about disability and through the lens of politics as part of its commitment to inclusive education. It is disconcerting that students could graduate from the institution without any teaching on disability other than being aware of the annual awareness-raising events. In exploring students with disabilities experience of the academic programme, it illuminates that inclusive education with a social justice approach to disability is possible and an important step in recognising and elevating the voice of students with disabilities by balancing the power relations between the habitus<sup>71</sup> and the agents<sup>72</sup>.

## **6.7 Conclusion**

The discussion in this chapter has revealed that there are still persistent institutional and attitudinal barriers which are a clear indication that disability is at the bottom of the trajectory

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<sup>70</sup> Interview with Mr Malinge Gqeba, Director of Student Affairs, Rhodes University, 6 December 2016.

<sup>71</sup> Referring to the institution's structures, practices, essentially the culture.

<sup>72</sup> Referring to the students (students with disabilities) of the Institution.

in the discourse of transformation as highlighted by the participants. In the light of this, there is a need for urgent interventions to unearth and dis-arm the institutional habitus which will require on the part of the institution to re-examine the physical layout of its buildings starting with buildings such as the library and the main administrative block. Although there is a desire and will to change the current picture, very little is evident in the small and necessary changes. These small changes include the painting of white strips on stairs for especially those with visual impairment and proper paving for walking and for the use a wheelchair.

Accordingly, there is a need to look beyond the financial constraints to finding creative ways of bringing about these small changes which may not require substantial financial commitment. The onus is therefore on the institution to be mindful of this and be proactive in creating an environment that is safe, well-equipped and attractive and inclusive for students with disabilities. For this reason, an enabling institutional environment is necessary to embrace and celebrate diversity and at the same time eradicate institutional and attitudinal barriers be it financially, infrastructurally or in the academic programme. On re-thinking of disability, it re-iterates the point that inclusive education becomes all the more important in the context of Rhodes University.

Furthermore, consideration needs to be given to universally designed buildings and resources which are sharable as a practice to breaking down stigma and discrimination. In addition, it requires of the institution for the provision of online learning material for students with disabilities such as advocated by scholars Ladner *et al.* (2015), where students such as Nelisa, Siphokazi and Patricia could benefit from such accommodations. It also requires a broader understanding of concessions as an ongoing process and beyond how it is currently instituted at the University. It is a position strongly advocated by Kraglund-Gauthier *et al.* (2014), that the above accommodations would ensure an enriching learning experience in the classroom and flexibility in the curriculum to accommodate students with disabilities. This can be successfully facilitated in a designated unit with specialist staff to assist both students and staff when responding to disability at the institution. In addition, equal value needs to be placed on the formal studies of disabilities as is the case with gender studies, using a social justice framework underscored by an intersectional approach to disability. Teaching and learning in this way would be indicative of the tangible steps taken towards curriculum transformation where there is not only consideration of how, when and where teaching and learning take place, but what teaching and learning takes place.

Lastly, all the above indicates an urgent need for the institution to escalate the review of the 2005 student disability policy. Given the above responses and recommendations, the policy statement should reflect a broader definition of concessions given above responses of student participants and also promoting inclusive education with a social justice approach to disability, underpinned by the principles of 'Ubuntu'. Such features in the policy would go a long way in tackling the stigma attached to and negative attitudes towards students with disabilities. In addition to the above, the institution needs to be cognisant that, beyond the experience of the curriculum, the experiences of other offerings that support the academic project also impact on the success of students with disabilities. In this light, the next chapter will explore the experiences of the students with disabilities of the general support services with a particular focus on the social, sporting and cultural offerings.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN**

### **EXPLORING STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES' EXPERIENCES OF THE SOCIAL, SPORTING AND CULTURAL OFFERINGS AT RHODES UNIVERSITY**

#### **7.1 Introduction**

Chapter Six highlighted some of the pertinent problems experienced by students with disabilities as they access the academic programmes in pursuit of their academic ideals. This chapter will articulate the experiences of students with disabilities of the general support services offered at the University, particularly the social, sporting and cultural offerings available. In interpreting the experiences of the students, the study also applies Rowland's idea of "nothing about us, without us" (2004:10), to illuminate the impact of institutional arrangements on their all-round student experience.

In this chapter, the study will briefly highlight the role of the DSA as a conduit to students' academic success and the all-round student enriching experience of campus life. It will follow by highlighting the impressions students with disabilities have of the support services available and what they recommend could be improved. It will also investigate if there are any formal platforms available through which they can voice their lived experiences. The chapter will conclude by looking at what other Universities have in place to support students with disabilities and draw comparisons and highlight gaps which Rhodes University may need to consider in creating an inclusive environment of engagement for students with disabilities as part of its transformation processes.

#### **7.2 The role of the Division of Student Affairs (DSA)**

Rhodes University has various departments and divisions which offer student support and are catalysts for creating welcoming and inclusive spaces for students. The main support division which directly impacts on the students lived experiences at the institution is the DSA. This is seen as a critical division to ensure students are successful graduates, who not only obtain a degree but have an all-round enriching student experience in their three to four-year tenure at the University. The role of the DSA is to bridge the gap between academic success and support services, which enable the creation of an inclusive and conducive environment that contributes to student success. The work of the DSA is mainly supported by the ResOps Division which supports the wide range of student services that complement and enhance the

educational experience of all students at the University. This includes, but is not limited to excellence in food services and housekeeping.<sup>73</sup>

In ensuring the all-round development and enriching student experience, the approach of the DSA is the total involvement of student with disabilities. This means high levels of consultation on issues around policy, the residential and sporting needs and established platforms to give feedback on their lived experiences and to articulate how these should and could be addressed. It also requires the efficient provision of cross-sectional services and at times going the extra mile when supporting students with disabilities. This speaks to the concept of access with success when the institution adopts what Rowland argues as “Nothing about us, without us” (2004:10). This is supported by one of the key informants:

"I'm reminded of involvement theory. It says students who are involved, perform academically better. Unless we open opportunities to participate in all aspect of student life, we will not do justice to them. Sports Admin needs to make sure students with disabilities are accommodated. They should enjoy recreational opportunities and all other services we provide. We need to specifically say how students with disabilities access our services." <sup>74</sup>

### **7.3. Students with disabilities overall experience of the general support services**

Beyond the students' experience of the academic programme which has had an impact on their overall academic success, the students recorded a positive experience of the support services offered especially in the residence system as noted by them:

“Living in residence has been quite an experience, where I dealt with people of different cultures and different nationalities with different personalities being in one place. I've learnt a lot, so overall I have had a positive experience”.<sup>75</sup>

“Rhodes has been quite a jolly place. Everyone has been welcoming at Milner House and the warden is very caring”.<sup>76</sup>

“In terms of quality of living, res life was pretty good. I enjoyed the experience”.<sup>77</sup>

Although most student participants found the experience positive, the student participants living with muscular dystrophy, lupus and the partial sight did not have the same experience. They found that the services were not inclusive. They indicated the following:

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<sup>73</sup> [www.ru.ac.za/divisions/residentialoperations](http://www.ru.ac.za/divisions/residentialoperations) [Accessed 19 August 2016].

<sup>74</sup> Interview with Mr Malinge Gqeba, Director of Student Affairs, Rhodes University, 6 December 2016.

<sup>75</sup> Interview with Liezel, myoclonic epilepsy, Rhodes University, 25 November 2016.

<sup>76</sup> Interview with Zoleka, cerebral palsy, Rhodes University, 22 November 2016.

<sup>77</sup> Interview with Bryony, bipolar type II, Rhodes University, 28 November 2016.

“Terrible! The entire University’s culture is ableist. Many students with disabilities have to go out of their way to be included particularly in social events and sport. I didn’t do serenades. No one cared that dancing and standing were strenuous to me. So instead of being asked how I could be incorporated into the performances, I was asked to just sit out serenades and many other physical house events.”<sup>78</sup>

“I don’t think it is inclusive at all. From a cultural level, they don’t understand the needs of people with albinism. Generally, people making assumptions about our appearances. It talks about their level of awareness. There is a great level of discussion that needs to take place amongst people who are not our academic teachers such as our co-curricular teachers and our social clubs. These are niches of our communities that we need to make aware that anybody with a disability can fit in. If they don’t know, these are discussions and spaces we need to take advantage of”<sup>79</sup>.

The above portrays a picture that although most students had a positive experience, a student with physical disabilities and sight impairments are in some ways denied the all-round student enriching experience of the institution's social and sporting offerings. It can be argued that a lack of understanding of the special needs of students with disabilities and the need to make accommodations in the social, cultural and sporting activities, are due to the persistent negative attitudes towards students with disabilities.

The experiences of Patricia and Nelisa confirm the studies conducted by a number of scholars, (Swart & Greyling, 2011, Matshediso, 2010 and Ramakuela & Maluleke, 2011) that there are still negative stereotyping and a general atmosphere of intolerance by able-bodied students towards students with disabilities. There is a need to evaluate some of the sporting codes on offer to adapt or make small changes without committing a big budget in order to be inclusive of students with disabilities. As a starting point, sporting codes such as chess, tennis and basketball can be promoted for participation amongst students with disabilities. This could be the start of forging a partnership with the students with disabilities in a consultative manner that is also mutually beneficial. Even though the general experiences have been recorded as positive by student participants, the study revealed that there is room for improvement on how services (social, sporting and cultural life) are offered.

### ***7.3.1 Improving the services generally to be accommodating for students with disabilities***

Most of the participants described the student support services as poor to average saying the following:

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<sup>78</sup> Interview with Patricia, muscular dystrophy, Rhodes University, 13 January 2017.

<sup>79</sup> Interview with Nelisa, partially sighted, Rhodes University, 26 November 2016.

“Only when I was diagnosed with a mental illness did I think that the HCC was incredibly good at providing health support. Prior to that, we had bad arguments about their half-hearted commitment in providing support (counselling) and physical support such as offering to take ‘disabled’ students to pressing medical appointments that were far away from campus. That’s where the entire system, for me, was a let-down.”<sup>80</sup>

“It took me two weeks to first find out where I should get my disability sticker and then eventually I got my parking sticker from CPU.”<sup>81</sup>

Following from this, the student participants were asked how the support services can be improved. Most of the participants emphasised the need for better marketing of disability services, beyond the annual disability week as indicated by the following student participants:

“I feel like they don’t even market disability issues enough. I feel like since I came to Rhodes two years ago, this is the first time someone actually acknowledges there are ‘disabled’ people in Rhodes. I don’t know about support services which cater to students with disabilities.”<sup>82</sup>

“They (the University) need to advertise instead of a slight week. They really need to go out there, and do something, because it feels disability week is just a cop out because they have to do it.”<sup>83</sup>

As it is the role of the DSA to offer effective student support services, the above portrays that there is a need to improve the efficiency of student disability support services as a means to ensure they too have an enriching student experience. The support staff of Rhodes University recognises that a myriad of interventions is necessary to offer excellent services to students with disabilities. These effective interventions will demonstrate that Rhodes University is an institution that nurtures and cares for said students by making the institutional culture inclusive and a home for all. A significant part of this is the changes needed to the infrastructural arrangements of the institution (as highlighted in Chapter Six). This will also demonstrate the commitment by the institution in their response to disability beyond the physical manifestations and despite the recurring financial constraints. In addition to the provision of effective student support services in an inclusive environment, it will grant students with disabilities the channels to articulate their daily lived experiences.

Given the responses from the student participants on their daily lived experience and their recommendations on what would improve their experiences at Rhodes University, the participants were asked whether they have found any platforms available to articulate their

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<sup>80</sup> Interview with Patricia, muscular dystrophy, Rhodes University, 13 January 2017.

<sup>81</sup> Interview with Claudia, lupus, Rhodes University, 25 November 2016.

<sup>82</sup> Interview with Zoleka, cerebral palsy, Rhodes University, 22 November 2016.

<sup>83</sup> Interview with Claudia, lupus, Rhodes University, 25 November 2016.

lived experiences. The study revealed that only one of the participants was aware of any platforms to articulate their lived experience which is mainly because of her social capital as an avid activist for disability issues. This is an excerpt from the interview:

“I was interviewed several times by student media on a variety of disability issues. This was a platform because of my social capital and my public activism.”<sup>84</sup>

#### **7.4 Platforms for students with disabilities to articulate their lived experiences**

The Disability Committee is seen as a platform for students with disabilities to articulate their daily lived experiences. The key informants could clearly identify the platforms available for students with disabilities, such as the SRC, the Disability Committee, the DSA and the Student Services Council:

“I would say the disability committee provides such a platform. Other platforms are the SRC itself and the Directorate of Student Affairs.”<sup>85</sup>

“Through the Student Services Council, it does need to have student input in order to hear their struggles.”<sup>86</sup>

However, the study has revealed that the past two years saw a decline in student representation at especially the Disability Committee meetings. This decline in student representation may require more investigation. It could be argued that the dwindling of student representation is due to a lack of commitment and marketing to addressing disability issues. In addition, it could be due to the student protests that emerged since 2015 which caused the issue of disability to be side-lined. This is highlighted by one of the key informants:

“I think the first year (2014) of the committee was exemplary. Unfortunately, 2015 and 2016 were very strange years with the emergence of the national student protests.”<sup>87</sup>

The study confirmed that there is little evidence that the students are aware of committee structures as platforms to articulate their lived experiences. Most of the student participants (approximately 90%) indicated that they were not aware of such platforms:

“I don’t know if there are any platforms, to be honest.”<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Interview with Patricia, muscular dystrophy, Rhodes University, 13 January 2017.

<sup>85</sup> Interview with Ms Noluxolo Nhlapo, Director of Equity and Institutional Culture Office and Chairperson of the Disability Committee, Rhodes University, 9 December 2016.

<sup>86</sup> Interview with Ms Sarah Green, Head of Counselling Centre, Rhodes University, 7 December 2016.

<sup>87</sup> Interview with Ms Noluxolo Nhlapo, Director of Equity and Institutional Culture Office and Chairperson of the Disability Committee, Rhodes University, 9 December 2016.

“I am not aware of anything if there is.”<sup>89</sup>

All the above portrays there is a need for these committee structures to be marketed better. It further means there is a need for both students and staff who are interested in disability issues to be given the opportunity to make valuable contributions in centering issues on disability and hence elevate the voice and presence of students living with disabilities. In addition to the official structures, there is also the need for ongoing awareness raising programmes which could take place in residences halls and during the first-year orientation programmes as steps towards breaking down any barriers as noted by one of the key informants:

“I could talk about my disability, to give a platform for interaction and take that model to other Halls as well. These platforms need to be developed right at the beginning of the year. Also, during O-week have a few students say something about living with their disability.”<sup>90</sup>

There are various other ways that the institution can cultivate a culture of involvement and engagement of students’ living with disabilities. One of these ways is to create opportunities for them to serve in leadership positions to champion the cause on disability.

#### ***7.4.1 Leadership opportunities for students with disabilities at the Institution***

The study has revealed that students with disabilities express a desire for the formation of a student society as an official structure which would serve a dual role. Firstly, to serve as a support structure and secondly, as a recognised structure that will articulate their lived experiences with the aim of influencing policies that directly affect them. The above recommendations are also supported by the DSA which identifies the SRC as the entity which can actively facilitate establishing student formations for students with disabilities as a channel for asserting their presence and elevating their voice in all spheres of the institution. Furthermore, it involves their engagement in policy formulation and development as highlighted by the Director of Student Affairs:

“We need to make sure students with disabilities are represented in all committees that we don’t speak for them without them.”<sup>91</sup>

Although the SRC is the officially recognised body that represents students, the student participants express a strong need to establish their own society to share their lived

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<sup>88</sup> Interview with Nelisa, partially sighted, Rhodes University, 26 November 2016.

<sup>89</sup> Interview with Bryony, bipolar type II, Rhodes University, 28 November 2016.

<sup>90</sup> Interview with Mr Richard Poole, Lecturer in Accounting department and Chairperson of the Examinations Concessions Committee, Rhodes University, 8 December 2016.

<sup>91</sup> Interview with Mr Malinge Gqeba, Director of Student Affairs, Rhodes University, 6 December 2016.

experiences. The above indicates that advocacy and lobbying for the needs of students with disabilities should be driven by the students whose lived experiences need to be elevated at the institution. This is expressed by one of the student participants:

“I definitely think there should be a student society and a chairperson who can attend disability-related meetings, which will allow the chairperson to be involved in the policy process.”<sup>92</sup>

The above portrays that a paternalistic approach to disability would have the reverse effect of disempowering and further silence the voice and ignore the presence of students with disabilities. As stated by the scholars Test, *et.al* (2015), these practices are exacerbated by the lack of self-advocacy amongst students. This suggests that the institution needs to cultivate an inclusive environment that will encourage students with disabilities to embrace their rights and to advocate for the rights of others through recognised structures in the institution. It further highlights that the institution will achieve the goal of de-marginalizing disability in the social context when student-led committees are also representative of students with disabilities where they can play an active role in championing the cause of students with disabilities. It can give rise to exploring the different aspects of disability, such as disability in education, disability in the residence, in sports and other.

As part of its commitment to effectively respond to the needs of students with disabilities, Rhodes University could benefit from benchmarking with other universities in finding creative and cost-effective ways of offering efficient services and promote the active participation of students with disabilities, irrespective of the creeping austerity currently facing many universities.

### **7.5 Other South African Universities’ response to disability vs Rhodes University’s response to disability**

Literature has revealed that Universities across South Africa have establish many ways of effectively responding to the special needs of students with disabilities that is inclusive and promoting their active participation through representation on student governance committees such as the SRC, recognising and give expression of their voice in student-centred transformation summits<sup>93</sup>, to policy development<sup>94</sup>, focusing on providing assistive devices<sup>95</sup> and promoting educational and work experience opportunities<sup>96</sup>.

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<sup>92</sup> Interview with Claudia, lupus, Rhodes University, 25 November 2016.

<sup>93</sup> University of Free State website <http://supportservices.ufs.ac.za/studentaffairs> [Accessed 18 August 2016].

The question on the response to the needs of students with disabilities at Rhodes University in comparison to the response of other universities, the study has revealed that disability is a relatively new issue in its transformation agenda. As such it is in its early stages and a great deal needs to be addressed in the field of academia as well as in student support services. The staffing issues may call for re-dress in order to best serve students (and staff) with disabilities. One of the key informants points out the following:

"I must say, we are in the early stages of taking care of students with disabilities, compared to other universities. For other universities, when resources were still there, they could establish fully fledged disability units. It is a luxury we don't have as Rhodes. At Rhodes, we have staff members who have other responsibilities, who also have to make sure they look after students with disabilities. It is not ideal, but this is the situation we find ourselves in."<sup>97</sup>

The above portrays that compared to other universities such as the University of the Free State, University, Stellenbosch, Nelson Mandela University and the University of Cape Town, Rhodes University still has a long way to go in promoting inclusivity and centering the voice and presence of students with disabilities. The above portrays a need to envision a different support structure that is not perceived as dealing with disability in an ad-hoc fashion. It suggests that a re-shuffling in departments and divisions may be necessary in order to centre issues of disabilities. It could be argued that there may not be a need for restructuring, given that the majority of students with disabilities at Rhodes University are mostly self-sufficient and records confirmed that issues are dealt with on a case-by-case basis which has been the general practice at the University. However, it can be argued that despite the case-by-case approach to currently registered students with disabilities, it becomes important that the transformation agenda is centred as it is indicative of the position the university takes on what 'body' matters in the institution. Therefore in comparison to other universities, it would be in the interest of Rhodes University to find creative ways in the short term to cultivate an environment that promotes and enhance the representation of students with disabilities in university structures such as the SRC, the Disability Committee, Student Services Council and the house committees as tangible steps towards the institutionalising of disability.

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<sup>94</sup> Information document for lecturers by the Office for Students with Special Learning Needs, Stellenbosch University [Accessed 19 August 2016].

<sup>95</sup> Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University website <http://disability.nmmu.ac.za> [Accessed 18 August 2016].

<sup>96</sup> University of Cape Town website <https://www.uct.ac.za/services/disability> [Accessed 22 December 2016].

<sup>97</sup> Interview with Mr Malinge Gqeba, Director of Student Affairs, Rhodes University, 6 December 2016.

## **7.6 Conclusion**

The discussion in this chapter elucidated the experiences of students with disabilities of the social, sporting and cultural offerings at Rhodes University. It further revealed that, although they generally have a positive experience as students at the university, said students found that the offerings are not inclusive at all. There is a general understanding amongst members of staff that students with disabilities are recognised for their capabilities, that they are self-sufficient and do not wish to be ‘babied’, and as long as there are sufficient resources available to them, they would adequately cope being at University. Furthermore, the study reveals that it would be of great value that said students are made aware of what and where services and products can be accessed. This would engender a culture of ownership and self-agency as part of an access with success approach to education.

Part of the services on offer is the opportunity to serve as student leaders in the residence systems and student societies in the SRC. This would go a long way to debunk the myth that persons with disabilities are not able to fulfil their daily obligations without the help of others. In offering these opportunities, it will allow them to be treated as normal when they are integrated into the different social, sporting and the cultural life of the institution. This would allow able-bodied people to gain better insight into their lived experiences, but also of their capabilities to successfully lead and make positive contributions in the institution.

The study also found that there is the general consensus amongst students and staff, that efficient student support services and recognised channels are necessary in order for students with disabilities to articulate their lived experiences as well as influencing policies that may directly affect them. The implementation of the above would go a long way in developing what Oliver (1990) proposes as a social theory of disability, raising the consciousness amongst able-bodied persons on the capabilities of and special needs of students with disabilities and the need for recognition.

This approach to disability has been embraced by most South African universities enabling students with disabilities to be actively involved in various sporting, cultural and leadership opportunities that are on offer. Although the issue of disability in the transformation agenda is a fairly new discussion, Rhodes University can draw from the best practices of other universities in creating an enabling and inclusive environment for students with disabilities without committing exorbitant financial resources.

Lastly, given the various responses relating to the support services, the study confirmed that the ‘body’ that still matters is the able-bodied one as reflected in the social arrangements at Rhodes University. In the light of the above, the process of disarming a disabling environment requires on-going education, training and awareness-raising in order to create an inclusive, caring and nurturing environment for students with disabilities. An important part of this process of consciousness would be for the institution to articulate how it envisions a transforming institution and how it plans to engage students with disabilities in its transformation processes. In the light of this, the next chapter will explore the extent of contributions made by students with disabilities to the transformation processes of the institution.

## **CHAPTER EIGHT**

### **EVALUATING THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES TO INSTITUTIONAL TRANSFORMATION**

#### **8.1 Introduction**

In Chapter Seven, the key informants articulated their views on the support given to students with disabilities at Rhodes University. It further provides a synthesis of the study findings on some of the pertinent problems outlined by the student participants on the support services. Given the above, this chapter addresses the main question of the study – What is the extent of support for the participation of students with disabilities in the transformation processes of the Institution? In an attempt to answer the main research question, attention is drawn to the power relations between the students with disabilities and the University as expressed in the policies and practices and the impact of the latter on their success at the institution.

The chapter will begin with a description of what transformation means, with reference to how the scholar Badat (2009), describes what institutional transformation means, in order to formulate a framework for evaluating the contributions of students with disabilities at Rhodes University. Furthermore, the study will highlight what institutional transformation means to students with disabilities and support staff with an analysis of the extent of their contributions to the student disability policy. Leading from this, the chapter will conclude by looking at what an inclusive, mainstream living and learning space for students with disabilities would look like at Rhodes University. It is the aim of the study to ascertain the level of commitment demonstrated by Rhodes University to promote the active engagement of students with disabilities in its transformation processes. As a point of departure, the chapter will conceptualise transformation in the context of South African higher education settings.

#### **8.2 Conceptualising transformation**

Given that South Africa has a particular history, the acknowledgement of that history is imperative in taking steps to redress past imbalances from a national point of view into the microcosm of higher education institutions. Some of the transformation imperatives in higher education institutions are the diversification, in terms of race, class and gender, of both the student and staff body. This diversification suggests altering the very nature of higher education institutions; which involves the removal of any barriers with regard to structures, policies and practices that hinder the true success of both students and staff at higher education institutions. The Department of Education envisions a transformation in higher

education institutions as a catalyst in facilitating a re-expression of its role in the wider society in achieving the goals of social justice against the backdrop of an inherited apartheid legacy (1997:6). Therefore the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 1997, expressed in the Integrated National Disability Strategy, is geared to remove any barriers which perpetuate exclusion of persons with disabilities. Therefore in pursuit of removing barriers to education, there should be continuous endeavours to promote inclusion and inclusive education policies and practices.

With reference to disability, there is an urgent call for such inclusivity and active participation on issues of disability as part of and not apart from existing transformation programmes. In defining what would constitute transformation in higher education, reference is made to the scholar Badat (2009), who defines institutional transformation as creating institutional cultures that genuinely respect and appreciate differences and diversity. It is acting and doing things in new and different ways to ourselves and others. This definition suggests that transformation is a process and not an absolute state. It could be argued that given the nature of transformation in the context of higher education, institutions should constantly dedicate time to thinking about transformation and ask critical questions on what and how it is transforming especially in the discourse of disability.

It is therefore the focus of this study to evaluate what and how Rhodes University is transforming particularly in relation to the contributions of students with disabilities in the policy formulation and development process. It is worth highlighting the current profile of students with disabilities in order to advance the discussion on showcasing their overall contributions to institutional transformation.

### **8.3 Current profile of students with disabilities at Rhodes University**

As highlighted in Chapter Four, the percentage (1.18%) of students with disabilities registered at Rhodes University remains much lower than the national percentage of 5.1% of students with disabilities (Statistics South Africa, 2014). The response of the institution to this diverse group in the student body ranges from removing any barriers, offering financial support, universal access, the student disability policy and a strategic recruitment plan. However, in reference to the strategic recruitment plan, statistics reveal that the enrolment figures of students with disabilities and the steady growth of access of said students are alarmingly lower compared to other diverse groups (Office of Equity and Institutional Culture, 2014). These statistics suggest a need for the institution to commit itself to redress

this imbalance (resources permitted) as a social justice imperative in order to create an inclusive, diverse environment which is a home for all. While it is beneficial to quantify transformation indicators (such as a number of students with disabilities registered), the study considers the qualitative aspects of transformation, which highlights the experiences of the power relations between the students with disabilities in relation to institutional transformation. As a step towards evaluating this, the study will articulate how both student participants and the key informants articulate a transforming institution.

#### **8.4 Envisioning a transforming institution**

The student participants' responses range from transformation at a personal level, to universal access, inclusive student activities, awareness raising, student support, institutionalising disability and 'Ubuntu'. This was reflected in a number of the interviews with the student participants:

"Well for me, an institution that is inclusive, teaches its students and staff and everyone to learn and unlearn stuff every day." <sup>98</sup>

"I don't think it is small things like the name change. It is about everybody living together and about learning and growing." <sup>99</sup>

"What take us closer to transformation are systems which are fluid but controlled. It makes people excited for creating spaces for learning to be easier and more accessible." <sup>100</sup>

In exploring the responses of key informants, it will demonstrate the institution's commitment to care, support and engage students with disabilities beyond the notions of access. The study reveals that key informants envision transformation which includes curriculum transformation, better access to the physical environment, services to students and new ways of thinking. With reference to the new ways of thinking, it is reflected in the kind of changes made and the pace at which these changes take place. The general consensus amongst the key informants is that these processes of change should be underscored by respect and a commitment to redress past imbalances in order to promote the social justice imperative.

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<sup>98</sup> Interview with Zoleka, cerebral palsy, Rhodes University, 22 November 2016.

<sup>99</sup> Interview with Andrea, bipolar II, ADHD, stress vulnerability and general anxiety disorder, Rhodes University, 24 November 2016.

<sup>100</sup> Interview with Nelisa, partially sighted, Rhodes University, 26 November 2016.

The above responses highlight a general consensus amongst both student participants and key informants that transformation goes beyond the physical environment (such as name changes), to promote new ways of thinking as a prerequisite to true transformation. This view is highlighted by the chairperson of the Examination Concessions Committee and the Head of the Counselling Centre who noted the following:

"Transformation is far beyond building buildings. Transformation goes beyond what people can see, it goes into thinking, and how we teach when we teach if we teach."<sup>101</sup>

"It would be an institution that's open to different ways of thinking and of being. An institution that is willing to engage and be criticised and think critically but at the same time think realistically. It is about changing existing ways of doing things, recognising human rights and who is also transparent and who establish ways of communicating."<sup>102</sup>

The above supports the view of the scholar Badat (2009), that the principles of transformation hinge on reflective and new ways of thinking in an ever-changing higher education environment. Given that there is a common understanding on what qualifies as a transforming institution, both student participants and key informants were asked to describe Rhodes University's commitment to engage students with disabilities in its transformation processes. The study found that the majority of the student participants felt the commitment shown by the institution is not visible. Reference was made to this by the following student participants:

"Ever since I came to Rhodes, I never heard of any meetings or seminars on ways of transforming the University. I think I can conclude that Rhodes University's commitment is poor. We need a platform to speak on how they can help us."<sup>103</sup>

"At least we have one lift so far. I didn't know about the lift in the chemistry building."<sup>104</sup>

"At the disability week, they just talk about the research they've done on disability. But in the 3 years, I've been here, they haven't made any difference. I heard about the new elevator, and I didn't even know about it!"<sup>105</sup>

The question to key informants on the extent they are aware of the involvement of students with disabilities in transformation processes, there is a mixed understanding of what this

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<sup>101</sup> Interview with Mr Richard Poole, Lecturer in Accounting department and Chairperson of the Examinations Concessions Committee, Rhodes University, 8 December 2016.

<sup>102</sup> Interview with Ms Sarah Green, Head of Counselling Centre, Rhodes University, 7 December 2016.

<sup>103</sup> Interview with Siphokazi, partial hearing, Rhodes University, 26 November 2016.

<sup>104</sup> Interview with Zoleka, cerebral palsy, Rhodes University, 22 November 2016.

<sup>105</sup> Interview with Claudia, lupus, Rhodes University, 25 November 2016.

involves. This involvement is seen as dealing with disability on a case-by-case basis and their representation at the Disability Committee. The Deputy-Director of Residential Operations and the Director of Equity and Institutional Culture noted the following:

“We did provide a wheelchair. Like I said, there’s been a lot of support for those who have come to us, but we do not attract students with disabilities. We have reasonably accommodated when the need arose.”<sup>106</sup>

“We’ve got some students on the disability committee right now.”<sup>107</sup>

The above responses reveal that although student participants acknowledge that the university has made strides at a small scale to make the environment disability friendly, the above responses suggest that there is a top-down approach in the communication of issues on disabilities. It is therefore important that the university embarks on a ‘rethinking disability’ political project as advocated by the scholar Schillmeier (2010), which challenge imposing practices and policies that are embedded in an able-bodied framework. An approach of this kind lends itself to the possibility of unearthing the specificities of disabling practices and policies as a pathway on augmenting and giving prominence to the presence and experiences of students with disabilities at Rhodes University.

The above suggests that beyond the representation in the SRC, this representation is extended to the Student Services Council, which is a crucial entity for advancing such transformation processes. The distinct representation means that they articulate their struggles themselves at such platforms as highlighted by the Head of the Counselling Centre who indicated the following:

“The Student Services Council does need to have their input, to hear their struggles.”<sup>108</sup>

The distinct representation of students with disabilities at forums such as the Student Services Council suggests that the University through this will be given an opportunity to hear about their struggles and the opportunity to be transparent on what it can realistically and reasonably provide in responding to the special needs. Furthermore, the above highlights the

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<sup>106</sup> Interview with Ms Jay Pillay, Deputy-Director of Residential Operations Division, Rhodes University, 1 December 2016.

<sup>107</sup> Interview with Ms Nhlapo, Director of Equity and Institutional Culture Office and Chairperson of the disability Committee, Rhodes University, 9 December 2016.

<sup>108</sup> Interview with Ms Sarah Green, Head of Counselling Centre, Rhodes University, 7 December 2016.

need for the University to consider round-table discussions on a common understanding of what transformation means for the institution and the students with disabilities and the steps to be taken to advance its transformation agenda. By the same token, this process requires transparency from the University on its limitations, which may be affected by the creeping austerity faced by many higher education institutions nationally (Wangenge-Ouma, 2010).

Further to this, these external factors may negatively impact on the institution's ability to accomplish its set transformation goals. It could be argued that in this scenario, external factors have an impact on the pace at which transformation takes place. With this in mind, it can be claimed that there is value in a culture of transparency that would eradicate a top-down approach to issues on disability. It can be further argued that it will break the barriers of communication between the student and the University and has the potential of inculcating a culture of ownership amongst the University community on issues of disability in its transformation processes. This discussion begs the question, that given how the student participants articulate what qualifies as a transforming institution, followed by the level of engagement experienced by said students, the extent students with disabilities engage in the disability policy formulation and development process.

### **8.5 Student disability policy formulation and development**

To recap- the University's student disability policy is based on the social model of disability and defines disability as "...the loss or limitation of opportunities that prevent [them]...taking part in the normal life of the academic and social community on an equal level with others due to physical or social barriers" (Student Disability Policy, 2005). The policy emphasises that the environment is disabling if the offerings of the University dissuades students with disabilities from participating in higher education. The statement of intent is to support the rights of students with disabilities in the University through various academic and student support structures. The question that is posed: Does the current student disability policy reflect the appropriate responses to the special needs of the current students? Given the statement of intent, the study aims to address this question in the framework of institutional transformation as defined by the scholar (Badat, 2009).

#### ***8.5.1 The current policy***

The official student disability policy of 2005 as it stands mainly address the physical immobility of students. The study revealed that the general consensus amongst key informants is that the said policy is outdated and does not reflect the changes that have taken

places over the past ten years. Some of the changes include the annual disability awareness week and the extended Leave of Absence (LoA) for students who attempted suicide or cause self-harm. It is evident from the responses by the key informants that given the changes that occurred over the past ten years, the update of the policy is urgent in order to reflect the changes and note-worthy efforts accomplished on the ground. Some of these changes illustrated by the chairperson of the Examinations Committee and the Head of the Counselling Centre include the following:

“This year (2016) and last year (2015), we did a lot to raise awareness around disability, covering the broad issues the average student and academic are not aware of.”<sup>109</sup>

“The issue around assessment and extra concessions which is an issue for us is not reflected.”<sup>110</sup>

Further to this, the policy refers to divisions who have either restructured or dissolved over the past ten years. As the current policy implementation process stipulates, the Estates Division and the DoS Division plays a pivotal role in ensuring the objectives of the policy is achieved. With reference to the above-mentioned divisions, the data reveals that both structures have undergone review processes and has been changed to the Facilities Division and the Division of Student Affairs respectively. These changes are therefore required to be included in the updated policy. This is noted by the Deputy Director of Residential Operations:

“It talks about Estates Division, which needs to change to Facilities and it speaks about Dean of Students which we no longer have. It is now the Division of Student Affairs”.<sup>111</sup>

The above changes implemented as highlighted by the key informants, suggest that these changes have not been broadly communicated to the University community, especially to students with disabilities. This indicates there is a gap in the policy formulation and development process. In reference to one of the objectives of the disability policy - which is to (as far as resources reasonably permit) ensure that the needs of the people with impairments are met in a way that will allow them to maximise their all-round potential. The question asked of the key informants was their opinion on the extent that the policy has been implemented in this regard. What became clear from the responses of the key informants is

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<sup>109</sup> Interview with Mr Richard Poole, Lecturer in Accounting department and Chairperson of the Examinations Concessions Committee, Rhodes University, 8 December 2016.

<sup>110</sup> Interview with Ms Sarah Green, Head of Counselling Centre, Rhodes University, 7 December 2016.

<sup>111</sup> Interview with Ms Jay Pillay, Deputy-Director of Residential Operations Division, Rhodes University, 1 December 2016.

that there is political will at senior management level; however financial constraints hinder the prioritising of resources geared towards addressing the needs and maximising the potential of students with disabilities.

This position is supported by the Director of Student Affairs who noted the following:

“Having interacted with senior management, I realised that responding to students with disabilities is top on the agenda. Due to the increasing financial difficulties, the noble ideas cannot be realised. However, the will is there, but the resources are not there at the moment”.<sup>112</sup>

In spite of the dire financial situation and the various challenges experienced by students with disabilities of the physical layout of the University, the study reveals that there are efforts made in addressing issues of disability beyond its physical manifestation. The chairperson of the Examinations Concessions Committee noted there have been efforts made in awareness raising and education on issues of disability and stressed the following:

“I talk about my personal experiences as a person with disabilities. Disabilities can be taken to any sphere in academic, the psychology, the sociological, and the political - at the heart is the education programme.”<sup>113</sup>

In the light of the effective implementation of the student disability policy, the question of how key informants would describe how this is taking place, the general expression is that there seems to be a caring culture amongst the staff who directly and indirectly offers student support. The data also revealed that there is a commitment to engage on disability issues and an acknowledgement that there is still a great deal of work to be done in terms of committing budget, the reconfiguring of infrastructure and policy development. The Director of Student Affairs and the Deputy Director of Residential Operations shared the same position on the above claim:

"I think there is a commitment, particularly in the DSA. There is an acknowledgement that there is no funding to have a Disability Unit, but the political will is there."<sup>114</sup>

“I think we are not engaged. I just think there are other priorities, but we can make it a strategic imperative. The University is a caring community – people have their hearts in the

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<sup>112</sup> Interview with Mr Malinge Gqeba, Director of Student Affairs, Rhodes University, 6 December 2016.

<sup>113</sup> Interview with Mr Richard Poole, Lecturer in Accounting department and Chairperson of the Examinations Concessions Committee, Rhodes University, 8 December 2016.

<sup>114</sup> Interview with Mr Malinge Gqeba, Director of Student Affairs, Rhodes University, 6 December 2016.

right place. If information can filter through, we can engage and not just meet because it is on the University calendar”.<sup>115</sup>

The above responses indicate that this awareness-raising effort in the formal academic programme is evidence that the University is cognizant of the need to embrace current debates on disability. This further demonstrates that it is the beginning of small steps in disarming the resistance in understanding the seemingly unknown world of disability and has the potential to permeate to other academic programmes at Rhodes University. This is in line with the ‘re-thinking’ disability political project argued by the scholar, Schillmeier (2010) and the importance of inclusive education as argued by the scholars Ainscow *et.al.* (2006), which promote the disarming of hegemonic practices in spite of any undesirable financial conditions faced by institutions nationally. It therefore becomes important that in the process of reviewing the student disability policy, the university is abreast with developments in the area of disability and furthermore be cognizant of inclusive education to ensure a positive effect on students with disabilities’ lived experiences.

#### **8.5.2 The review of the current policy**

Understanding the way in which students view and experience university policies is important because it offers an insight into whether or not the policy is having any ‘on-the-ground’ effect for those it is targeting towards advantaging. In order to assess the kind of ‘on-the-ground’ effect for students with disabilities, student participants were asked whether they are aware that Rhodes University has a student disability policy. The majority of the student participants, sans one indicated that they were unaware that such a policy existed and accentuated the following:

"I am not aware. I am saddened about that because I would've utilised it then."<sup>116</sup>

"I know there is a student disability policy because my uncle told me about it, but I've never seen it. I thought they will introduce us to the policy."<sup>117</sup>

The above responses indicate a severe disjuncture between policy and students in terms of awareness, and as such, effectiveness. The study further reveals that the extent of involvement in the policy-making and development for students living with disabilities is significantly low. The majority of the student participants responded that besides not being

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<sup>115</sup> Interview with Ms Jay Pillay, Deputy-Director of Residential Operations Division, Rhodes University, 1 December 2016.

<sup>116</sup> Interview with Nelisa, partially sighted, Rhodes University, 26 November 2016.

<sup>117</sup> Interview with Siphokazi, partial hearing, Rhodes University, 26 November 2016.

aware of the policy, they were not consulted in any way on the policy. This is highlighted by the following student participant:

“If I knew about it, but because I don’t know, I was not involved. I don’t even know who wrote the policy.”<sup>118</sup>

Given the above responses, it can be argued that this lack of information, lack of marketing and awareness raising on the policy and access to the policy, contributes to the lack of engagement in the policy formulation and development process. It can be further argued that an outdated policy and the ongoing review process of the policy and no tangible evidence of consultation and joint partnership efforts with students with disabilities, attributes to the persistent exclusion of students with disabilities in transformation processes. This therefore leads to the question of what recommendations can be made on the current student disability policy and its implementation policy.

### ***8.5.3 Recommendations on the policy development process – student and staff perspective***

On the question of what recommendations can be made to improve the policy and the protocols, the responses for the student participants range from the marketing of the policy to engaging students with disabilities on their input of the policy. There is a strong emphasis that the development of the policy should be a consultative process where students with disabilities are at the centre of the process. As a strategic move in the effective marketing of available support services and platforms available for said students to articulate their lived experiences, both student participants and key informants highlighted that more emphasis should be placed on developing the policy to speak to the current needs of students with disabilities. This is highlighted by the Head of the Counselling Centre and one of the student participants who said the following:

“I think information about where students can access specific services, where to go, who are the contact persons, the resources available. All this will be making learning easier. Quite a lot of people should be part in giving input in the policy.”<sup>119</sup>

“A policy where there is room for dialogue, for mutual problem solving and mutual discussions of what the actual needs are and the freedom to enter the space of negotiations. This is where real transformation happens. A policy that would allow students with different needs to own their own education. I hope the policy will highlight and acknowledge the person in the struggle. Just by sending them that policy, they can start joining in the discussion.”<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Interview with Zoleka, cerebral palsy, Rhodes University, 22 November 2016.

<sup>119</sup> Interview with Ms Sarah Green, Head of Counselling Centre, Rhodes University, 7 December 2016.

<sup>120</sup> Interview with Nelisa, partially sighted, Rhodes University, 26 November 2016.

The above approach to disability speaks to what the scholar Rowland (2004), emphasises as a “Nothing about us without us” approach to disability. This suggests that students with disabilities are actively part in the process of all social constructions at the institution. Adopting this approach further suggests that the University would benefit in garnering the input and forge a joint partnership with students with disabilities on what should be included in the updated policy. It further offers the opportunity to disable institutional practices and policies by fostering unprejudiced and positive attitudes amongst the Rhodes University community towards students with disabilities. Therefore, in the light of new ways of thinking about institutional transformation, as part of making recommendations to the updated policy, is it my view that an intersectional approach underscored by a social justice framework is an appropriate and effective response to disability.

### **8.6 Intersectional approach with a social justice framework of the student disability policy**

With reference to inclusive education in the context of South Africa with its particular history, the social justice imperative is important as it speaks to the concept of human rights, intersectionality, elevating the voice of the voiceless and balancing the power relations. As highlighted in Chapter Two, a social justice agenda in South Africa that privilege the ‘disabled’ in society requires an understanding of the intersectional position of disability – that it is intrinsically linked to other social registers and providing responses which are context specific as a way to construct and augment the voice of the voiceless.

It is my view that at Rhodes University, a social justice agenda should privilege the ‘disabled’ body which applies an intersectional approach to disability that recognises and give prominence to the lived experience of students with various types of disabilities. As argued by the scholars, Oyewùmí (2005) and Braidotti (2003) cited by Goodley (2013), the ‘body’ remains central as a socially constructed entity. It is therefore my view, that the ‘body’ that matters is the body whose presence, voice and lived experience is acknowledged and recognised and in this study it is the student with disability. I am further of the view that such a holistic approach to disability in the student disability policy will not only centre their voice but elevate their experience from an intersectional point of view underpinned by a social justice framework.

An approach of this kind could assist custodians of the policy, especially the DSA, on how it re-directs resources to appropriately and effectively respond to the special needs of students with disabilities. Given the above responses and discussions on the current disability policy, the study aims to assess the extent that Rhodes University has accomplished “access with success” for students with disabilities.

### **8.7 ‘Access with success’ – did Rhodes University achieve this for students with disabilities?**

Although major strides have been made in transforming how society treats all persons with disabilities, the on-the-ground impact has revealed that there is still a disjuncture between policy and practice and the resultant persistent negative attitudes and discriminatory practices.

At Rhodes University, the study reveals that access with success is not fully accomplished because of the lack of the involvement of students with disabilities in the policy formulation and development process. This confirms what is asserted by scholars such as Pretorius *et al.*, (2011); Saloojee *et al.*, (2006) and Vickerman & Blundell (2010), that in higher education because of the disjuncture between the policy and implementation, it has the potential to hinder students with disabilities to participate successfully in higher education institutions. This reinforces the notion that their access does not guarantee their success at tertiary level. In the light of this, it is important that the University clearly articulate how it envisions an inclusive, mainstream learning and living space for students with disabilities.

### **8.8. An inclusive, mainstream learning and living space envisioned for Rhodes University**

A fundamental principle underlying ‘Access with success’ is the inclusive integration of students with disabilities into the mainstream. Hence, the policies and practices should promote inclusion, and it is my view that it can be best advanced in a spirit of ‘Ubuntu’ as defined by Ramose (2002) and Praeg (2014). This means that the policies and practices of the institution reflect the caring nature of the institution with a commitment to re-align the balance of power between the marginalised student and the University. This will speak to the culture of the institution to centre the presence and voice of students with disabilities and make them part of and not apart from the conversation on institutional transformation. The definition of institutional transformation by the scholar Badat (2009), seem to suggest students with disabilities being mainstreamed has the potential of influencing institutional practices.

At Rhodes University the experiences of students with disabilities (highlighted in Chapter Six and Chapter Seven), indicates an imbalance of power between the student and the University and therefore an acknowledgement of the presence and voice of students with disabilities is critical to the transformation agenda of the institution. Although the current policy acknowledges the rights of students with disabilities, it does not extend this recognition of their voice and therefore their lived experiences. The policy needs to articulate the intent to disable and disarm practices that are exclusionary which generally disregard the presence and the voice of students with disabilities.

As a tangible step towards this, it involves a policy not solely based on the social model, but a policy which is based on challenging the structural and socio-cultural exclusion of students with disabilities and intends to actively advocate for a change in attitude and promotion of their integration into the mainstream. Furthermore, a policy that is predicated on the ethics of care which recognises the political and economic climate - a necessary condition in South Africa with its particular history. For instance, the statement of intent should go beyond recognising their rights and their accessibility of support systems to enhancing their academic and social lives<sup>121</sup>. The argument is that resources should be re-directed to ensure that an enriched student experience is centred and the agents responsible for the implementation of the policy centres this experience and adopts practices which speak to this.

The above suggests inclusive practices across all university departments and division. For instance, the suggestion of on-going concessions in academic departments, the provision of sporting codes that is inclusive and easily accessible especially for the students with visible disabilities. In addition, it involves the offerings of leadership opportunities to students with disabilities within the residence system and also in the SRC which centres disability issues. Currently, the policy speaks mainly to the responsibilities of the office of the Division of Student Affairs, but an updated policy that needs to articulate the role that each section<sup>122</sup> of the DSA should play in centering the presence and voice of students with disabilities.

## **8.9 Conclusion**

As articulated in the introductory section of this chapter, transformation is an ongoing process and that the principles of transformation hinges on reflective and new ways of thinking and doing things in an ever-changing higher education environment. Disability is conceptualised

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<sup>121</sup> Quotes under policy declaration which states that the support systems provided by Rhodes University to enhance the academic and social lives of students with impairments will be limited only by their affordability.

<sup>122</sup> Reference is made of these 3 sections of the Division of Student Affairs highlighted in Chapter Four which are: the Student Wellness Section, Sports Administration and the Student Services Section.

as going beyond the physical manifestation, to shifts in the policies and practices that encourage the active engagement of students with disabilities in the institution. It is therefore my argument that transformation has been achieved if the student disability policy centres the voice and experiences of students with disabilities from an intersectional, social justice framework, predicated on the principles of 'Ubuntu'.

Notwithstanding the importance of the increase in the enrolment numbers of students with disabilities, it is arguably not the best indicator for evaluating transformation. Hence the purpose of the study is to interrogate the lived experiences of students with disabilities of the habitus in relation to the power balance between the two agents in the light of institutional transformation. The study has revealed that to a great extent there is little commitment evident to inclusive education policies. The Rhodes University Student Disability Policy of 2005 is evidence that the institution has not aligned itself with current debates and practices of disability. It becomes all the more important that the institution re-examine its policies on disabilities.

As it currently stands, the policy enacted in 2005, has not been updated since and therefore does not reflect the current debates and the on-the-ground accomplishments achieved at the institution. It is worth noting that although the current policy is outdated, it seems that the intentions of the University to respond to students with disabilities are comparable to those of other South African universities. Secondly, given that said students are seen as a marginalised group, their voice and therefore their presence gets perilously lost amongst the voices of other marginalised groups.

Furthermore, given the above findings, there is an urgent call to prioritise and centralise the voice of student with disabilities by establishing partnerships to allow for their input on the student disability policy. It is for this reason that the institutional culture values and embraces diversity and it is an enabling and inclusive environment that will empower them to advocate for their rights and recognise their presence and value their contributions to institutional transformation and thereby to flourish (beyond the notions of access) at Rhodes University.

To turn back to the main research question – What are the extent of support for and the participation and engagement of students with disabilities in the transformation processes of the Institution? This chapter concludes by arguing that, despite the challenges posed in the physical layout of buildings and in support services available to students with disabilities at

Rhodes University, there is a growing awareness of current debates on issues of disability and the experience of students with disabilities and the importance of engaging said students in the transformation agenda of the University. The university's positive response to restructuring buildings and to raise awareness of disability in the academic programmes suggests shifts in institutional responses to the struggles of students with disabilities.

It is worth noting that 'Access with success' is a complex issue, which requires on-going conversations on the issue and institutional reflection on identifying (through consultation processes) the elements and the conditions necessary to accomplish this for students with disabilities. It is further noted that current institutional practices alone cannot be perceived as the only element to redress past imbalances. It is also worth noting that in addition to engaging students with disabilities on the policy, the implementation of an updated policy which features recommended imperatives, the availability of resources is a necessary condition for a commitment to inclusion and the engagement of students with disabilities in the transformation processes of the institution. Furthermore, the transformative potential of the student disability policy lies in the potential of students with disabilities to contribute, shift and advance institutional practices that ultimately creates an inclusive institutional culture.

Lastly, it is important to note that the scope of the study did not cover the intricacies of said students' experiences as part of a privileged group or previously disadvantaged group with both visible and invisible disabilities and its influence on infrastructural and social arrangements at the University. For this reason, the limitations and recommendations of the study are provided in the concluding chapter.

## CHAPTER NINE

### CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

#### 9.1 Introduction

The previous chapter attempts to answer the main research question which is to investigate the extent Rhodes University supports and engage students with disabilities in its transformation processes. Central to this process is the removal of any institutional and attitudinal barriers for students with disabilities in order to ensure their holistic development in a learning and living environment that is inclusive and conducive to student success. The study finds that irrespective of the challenges posed in the physical design of buildings and support for students with disabilities at Rhodes University, there is a positive response to revamp buildings and to raise awareness on current debates on issues of disability which is evidence of a shift in the institutional response to students with disabilities.

The final chapter of the thesis provides an overview of the key findings of the study. This will include a discussion of the main contributions of the study as well as implications of the study for educational policies and practice. Following on this, the chapter aims to highlight the limitations of the study. The chapter will conclude with recommendations for responses to disability and further research on engaging students with disabilities in transformation processes at Rhodes University.

#### 9.2 Key findings of the study and emergent themes

The key findings are summarised according to the research objectives.

##### *9.2.1 The impact of the physical environment, the academic programme and student support services on their overall student success*

The study has revealed that there are still persistent institutional and attitudinal barriers which have an impact on the overall student enriching experiences as well as their overall student success at the institution. The study has revealed that at Rhodes University, ‘Access with success’ has not been fully accomplished due to the institutional and attitudinal barriers. For instance, the physical layout of its buildings is mostly inaccessible for students with physical disabilities but also for those who are of partial sight. Furthermore, it is noted that small modifications such as the painting of white strips on stairs are a necessity, especially for students with partial sight and this is not fully accomplished.

The study has further revealed that the lighting in some of the lecture venues and the perceived lack of consideration displayed by some lecturers is not accommodating students of partial hearing who may struggle to keep up with the pace of the lectures and require extra time in order to record notes, are denied an enriching learning experience. The university is implored to re-examine its physical layout, starting with the installation of ramps into the main buildings and the many student residence buildings which have many stairs. In addition, and as part of universal access, is inculcating a culture of sharing resources that are universally designed and accessible. The instituting of the above would go a long way to breaking down institutional and attitudinal barriers. Related to this, is understanding disability beyond the physical manifestation. Beyond the visible barriers for persons living with a disability at Rhodes University, more effort needs to be made with regard to hidden disabilities such as mental illness.

The study revealed that a number of students have mental illnesses and suffer from anxieties which impact negatively on their quality of life. It is therefore important that emphasis is placed on this especially in times of national crises directly affecting institutions of higher learning such as the #FeesMustFall campaign. It is important that the university is mindful of the experiences of the students during such crisis times and strategically plan around the safety nets available. This should be done in consultation with the affected students as a way of empowering them as well as to foster confidence and self-agency amongst themselves. Recognising their rights, their capabilities and the provision of effective support services for them, will go a long way in engendering a culture of ownership and self-agency as part of ensuring said students have an overall enriching university experience. The argument made by Oliver (1990) for a social theory of disability that elevates the presence and voice of students with disabilities, inculcates an inclusive institutional culture which enables disabling of ableism at Rhodes University.

### ***9.2.2 The impact of the student disability policy on their experiences at the institution***

The student disability policy offers insights into whether it has any positive ‘on-the-ground’ impact on the lived experiences of students with disabilities at Rhodes University. The study has revealed that, with the exception of a few students, most students interviewed in the study reported that they were not aware that there is a student disability policy. In addition, they reported that if they were aware of the policy, they would have engaged with the University on what it should include in the policies that are reflective of their lived experiences.

Therefore, in considering Rowland's "nothing about us, without us" (2004:10) approach to disability, it provides ways of understanding the complex lived experiences of students with disabilities if the University embraces this approach to students with disabilities.

Although Rowland (2004) advocates for an inclusive approach to disability, the theory on inclusive education by scholars, Ainscow *et al.*, (2006) suggests that educational policies should not only recognise the rights of persons with disabilities but that they should be underpinned by the principles of the ethics of care that can be translated as 'Ubuntu'. This highlights the importance that centering the presence and voice of students with disabilities is a collective effort, which means it is an institution-wide responsibility that concerns and affects the Rhodes University community.

In the residence system, leadership opportunities should be created for students living with disabilities on the house committees as well as the SRC. It would be indicative that Rhodes University is a place where student leaders lead the transformation processes in places such as the residence system. It is the most appropriate place to augment the experiences of students living with disabilities and to debunk the myths and disable the practices which are exclusionary. It would therefore mean that the student leadership development programmes insert aspects of disability, equipping student leaders on the topic in the residence system and equipping them on how to respond effectively to it.

### ***9.2.3 Addressing the main research question: To what extent are students with disabilities engaged in transformation processes at Rhodes University?***

While the study has revealed that the Rhodes University community is generally caring and willing to go the extra mile if required, the University has not fully accomplished 'Access with success' for students with disabilities because of the persistent disjuncture between policy and practice. The on-the-ground effect of the policy of the students with disabilities lived experience reveals that students with disabilities are still largely ignored and their voices are not heard and valued in the transformation processes of the institution. This is in reference to the physical layout of university buildings which are mostly inaccessible for students with physical disabilities but also for those who are of partial sight as highlighted above.

### **9.3 Significance of the study**

This thesis makes contributions in the field of academia, namely in raising and increasing awareness of the presence of students with disabilities at Rhodes University through initiating and centralising the importance of disability studies in the transformation discourse of the University. It augments their lived experience within the institution while highlighting the challenges they face and heightening the variety of support needed to ensure the success of students with disabilities. This research can provide insight on how the practice of 'Ubuntu' can be meaningful in the higher education context. It aims to demonstrate that disability cannot be addressed in a silo but must be seen as intersecting with other important registers such as race and gender, sharpening attention on the plight of students with disabilities in higher education institutions. It further hopes to offer guidance on how to create an enabling environment that will empower students to engage in policymaking and development, documented as a decisive and strategic plan implemented by Rhodes University in response to students with disabilities.

### **9.4 Limitations of the study**

The study had the following limitations which (not because of lack of eliciting the views of the males) are the absence of data on the lived experiences of male students living with different types of disabilities. For instance, data was absent on the experience of a White (privileged) male with a physical disability and or hidden disability and the drawing of comparisons with their female counterparts. In addition, the study was limited in that it did not explore the lived experience of a Black (poor) male who is a queer and how they articulate their lived experience at the institution, in the context of disability.

The factors that hindered the study in exploring a holistic enriching analysis of the said students lived experiences was the #FeesMustFall campaign and the university's decisions to re-evaluate the examination period which impacted on the availability of the targeted students for the study. It would have added value to the study if there were male students consenting to participate in the study. It would have been of interest given the concept of intersectionality on how they articulate their lived experiences.

In addition, the absence of data on students who have graduated from Rhodes University or who may have pursuit post-graduation studies further, made it difficult to make absolute claims about the lack of support for and engagement of students with disabilities in its transformation processes. Although one of the students was tracked, the number is too

insignificant to make absolute claims about how graduates or postgraduates students experienced the institutional culture. Lastly, the absence of data on the support for students with mental illness across gender, race and culture would have added value to the study.

## **9.5 Recommendations**

Given that the institution's mission aims to provide a safe and nurturing student support system that will foster the all-round development of our students, the following recommendations are offered as possible ways Rhodes University can showcase its commitment to engage students with disabilities in its transformation processes:

### ***9.5.1 A student disability policy with an intersectional, social justice framework***

This can be best accomplished with an intersectional social justice student disability policy that speaks to the following but not limited to: universal access to buildings and assistive technology; ongoing curriculum transformation seminars; provision of ongoing concessions; various education awareness-raising programmes; formal disability studies; leadership opportunities for students with disabilities as well as inclusive sporting and cultural activities. It also underpins what Praeg (2014) asserts that the concept and practice of 'Ubuntu' should focus not on the individual, but serves a greater purpose for a greater good. It is a process of re-aligning the balance of power, to centre the classified marginalised (i.e. the Black, woman, gay, 'disabled') expressing care, compassion, understanding of their lived experience and institutionalise it and in that make them part of (and not apart from) the conversations on institutional transformation.

### ***9.5.2 Investing in universally accessible buildings and academic resources***

Rhodes University should invest in the universal design of building where there is a greater presence of appropriate ramps that can be used by all and not only by those who declared a physical disability. Relating to this is visible signage in order for students (and staff) to easily access the environment. In addition to this, in light of universal design of buildings and products, is the provision of affordable assistive devices for especially students who are of partial hearing and with partial sight.

### ***9.5.3 Determine how and when assessment takes place***

At the backdrop of the 2016 #FeesMustFall campaign, Rhodes University leadership granted the option to students to defer the 2016 examination or to write the examinations in November 2016. This has opened up the opportunity for the University to explore the 'how' and the 'when' and 'where' take-home examinations as an assessment method take place. It is therefore important that even greater effort needs to be made for the institution to be

mindful of consulting with students living with disabilities on how best they can be assessed. The argument is that as long as the person lives with the impairment, there needs to be ongoing support for the individual student needs. An innovative and caring approach such as this could make teaching, learning and assessment more inclusive and thereby transforming.

#### ***9.5.4 Institutionalising intersectionality through formal disability studies in academic programmes***

Formalising (as is the case with gender studies) disability studies in the institution in conjunction with other registers such as race, gender, class and ability. This will centre the teaching, learning and research on disability and also assist in developing what Oliver refers to as the “social theory of disability” (1990: 10). The formalising of this disability in the curriculum will allow for the broader understanding of people’s lived experience through an intersectional lens within a social justice framework in the light of the prevailing political and economic climate.

#### ***9.5.5 Creating an inclusive, mainstream learning and living space for students with disabilities***

An involved student has a better chance to be a successful student. Therefore, these opportunities should be consciously offered to students with disabilities at Rhodes University. This involves inculcating a culture of actively encouraging said students to assume leadership positions in the residence system as well as in student societies and the SRC. In the light of this, all the recommendations made are best accomplished through the establishment of the Centre for Inclusive Diversity Studies and Support Services.

#### ***9.5.6 Centre for Inclusive Diversity Studies and Support Services***

Given that the role of the DSA is to bridge the gap between academic success and its support services, which enable the creation of an inclusive and conducive environment that contributes to student success, the Centre is well placed in the DSA. The Centre can therefore be integral to institutional transformation in providing adequate, appropriate and specialist support to both students and staff with the aim of making the institution's environment more inclusive. This would mean that a dedicated Centre with a complement of professional staff and key specialists will assist both students and staff in academic and wellness programmes including career guidance and development assistance, extended LoAs, sports offerings and facilities and financial aid assistance.

The Centre is then able to provide adequate and appropriate support to all persons be they paraplegic, of partial sight, have hearing problems or have physical disabilities. Its services

could also assist academic staff on how to teach students with various impairments, from physical to sensory and chronic illnesses. It can also inform best practices through research that academic staff and the residence wardens can access in order to provide adequate resources and support for students with disabilities.

Furthermore, the Centre can offer staff and student induction programmes to increase their knowledge of disability and inform them of what resources and reasonable accommodation offerings the institution has. The role of this Centre would not only provide academic support to students with disabilities (thereby making access to the education fair and equitable) but mechanisms of support to ensure an overall enriching student life experience. Therefore, its position under the DSA should be part of the institution's strategic planning. This could be best accomplished through its three sections namely: the Student Wellness Section, the Sports Administration Section and the Student Services Section.

Through the proposed Centre, the hostile physical spaces could be constantly challenged as it is a barrier to the personal growth and all-round enriching experience of students with disabilities living in the residences. Further to this, in supporting the student governance mandate of the SRC, the establishment of a student-led support programme will also assist ensuring there are formal platforms available to articulate their lived experience. This will enable the Centre to identify the institutional and attitudinal barriers still prevalent and instituting mechanisms to remove such barriers through various formal educational and awareness raising programmes which involve the joint partnership with students living with disabilities on the formulation and procedural development of the student disability policy.

These inclusive practices and strategies would be indicative of an integrated mainstream living and learning space for students with disabilities at Rhodes University. This would then qualify Rhodes University as a transforming institution which places at its centre the presence and voice of students living with disabilities.

### **9.6 Opportunities for future research**

Given the key findings and limitations of the study, I recommend that the study would have done well in the following areas:

- i) A study that highlights the implications that national student protest actions may have on the lived experience of students with disabilities but more importantly

answers questions on how their presence and their experiences during a national student protest is augmented;

- ii) A study that asks questions on the impact the physical space has on the physical as well as mental condition of the person living with a disability over a period of three years while at University and linked to this;
- iii) Research to explore how Rhodes University adapts this physical space to ensure students thrive despite their declared disability;
- iv) It would be of interest to explore what the throughput rate is of students with different types of disabilities at Rhodes University.

## **9.7 Conclusion**

Literature has revealed a dearth of research on the studies of disability in the field of academia. This is a consequence of a historical and global phenomenon that persons with disabilities have been, and continue to be marginalized in society. One of the main reasons for the discriminatory practices against persons with disabilities is that it is perceived as an individual pathology. The treatment of persons with disabilities has found its roots in the medical model of disability with a top-down approach to development which has informed social policy and practices of organizations such as the WHO.

This construction has been no different in the context of education where students with disabilities have been marginalised and still experience persistent negative attitudes with the imposition of discriminatory practices, both in some developed and developing countries. Therefore, the call for inclusive education has become more and more crucial as it is predicated on the social justice imperative and holds the promise of the successful integration and inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education institutions. Although it has some limitations, overall the practice of inclusive education has the potential to break attitudinal and institutional barriers enabling the creation of an inclusive institutional culture which centres the presence and voice of students with disabilities. It has therefore been the intention of this study to adopt the critical disabilities studies approach to analysing disability.

This approach views disability through the lens of politics where disability is not detached from the socio-economic and political spaces in society but an uncharted discourse demanding interrogation and scholarship. This approach has been useful for examining current debates and trends on the issue of disability which challenges the structural and socio-

cultural exclusion of persons with disabilities with the aim to promote the integration of persons with disability into the societal mainstream. Therefore, the critical disabilities studies approach has been an appropriate theoretical framework as it offers a nuanced transdisciplinary approach to the study of disability which deconstructs and decolonizes traditional views on disability (Goodley, 2013).

The study reveals that Rhodes University still has a long way to go in creating an inclusive institutional environment which is accommodating to all people with different abilities. One of the main and glaring challenges is that the institution's physical space is inaccessible and unwelcoming for persons with physical disabilities. Very few of its buildings have applied the principles of universal design which will grant universal access to products, services and buildings. Even though the Rhodes University community is a caring one, it needs to evolve beyond the enrolment of students with disabilities, to the provision of a myriad of support interventions which directly affects and benefits them. One such practice would be consulting and involving them in the formulation of a comprehensive and inclusive disability policy which centres their presence and augments their voice. This can only be realised and be indicative of a transforming institution, if the university is mindful of the motto expressed by Rowland, which is "nothing about us, without us" (2014: 10).

Therefore, if the intention is to alleviate any forms of barriers in higher education for students with disabilities, the onus is on HEIs to shape learning and living spaces of persons with disability in such a way that it involves their full and active participation. As stated by Moodley (2016), access and inclusion create a fundamental and significant shift in the social, cultural and economic spheres of society.

Rhodes University's most effective and transformative approach to students with disabilities would be to listen actively to these complex lived experiences of students with disabilities, which will enable the institution to elicit both the visible and hidden barriers (Healey *et al.*, 2006). According to Young (1997) and Hosking (2008), it is through this process that able-bodied persons gain greater insights about disability which goes beyond some of the apparent impairments to their lived experiences as persons with disabilities. This could play a critical role in alleviating social injustices and creating more transformative spaces in society. This may address the concern raised by various scholars such as Biklen (2010); Fuller *et al.*,

(2004) and Goodley (2013) that more often than not, disability is interpreted through the able-bodied person silencing the voice of the ‘disabled’.

As stated by Fuller (2004), for students with disabilities to participate in decision-making on issues that affect them, emphasis on creating equal opportunity and empowerment is important. Beyond these, what is critically important, according to Fanon (2008) cited by De Wet (2013), is that it should translate into real political change and social re-organisation if transformation is to be an active reality. This therefore calls for a more vigorous approach to creating an institutional climate which promotes the active participation and engagement of students with disabilities that recognises their presence and centres their voice in the intended transformation processes of the institution.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix 1 – 2005 Student Disability Policy

RHODES UNIVERSITY

#### POLICY PROTOCOL

#### STUDENT DISABILITY POLICY

##### **1. POLICY PARTICULARS**

**DATE OF APPROVAL BY RELEVANT COMMITTEE STRUCTURE:**

Equity Committee in 27 July 2005.

Student Services Council on 14 October 2005.

Institutional Forum on .....

DATE OF APPROVAL BY SENATE: 21 October 2005

DATE OF APPROVAL BY COUNCIL: 15 December 2005

**COMMENCEMENT**

DATE:

REVISION HISTORY: July 2005

REVIEW DATE: To be reviewed at the end of 2006 and thereafter, every 3 years.

POLICY LEVEL: All students.

**RESPONSIBILITY:**

- IMPLEMENTATION & MONITORING: Students Services Council, Academic Development Centre, Psychology Clinic, Counselling Centre, Estates Division, Dean of Students Division, Human Resources, Registrar's Division, Heads of Departments.
- REVIEW AND REVISION: Student Services Council and thereafter the Equity Committee but any of the above structures may recommend changes.

**REPORTING STRUCTURE:**

Director (Estates) → Vice Principal → Vice-Chancellor

Academic Development Centre → Vice Principal → Vice-Chancellor

Heads of Departments → Deans → Vice-Chancellor

Registrar → Vice-Chancellor

## **2. POLICY STATEMENT**

### **2.1 POLICY DECLARATION:**

Rhodes University is committed to the promotion of equal opportunity for all persons. It therefore supports the right of people with impairments to be involved in higher education both as employees and students. This policy specifically deals with issues of students. There is a separate policy to deal with staff issues.

Following what is commonly termed the *Social Model of Disability* (Ref. [www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia](http://www.nationmaster.com/encyclopedia)), Rhodes University acknowledges that physical impairment does not constitute a disability in itself and that people with impairments only become disabled when education, work and leisure opportunities are denied to them on the basis of their impairment.

Accordingly, the criteria used by Rhodes University to screen and admit students (on the basis of academic ability and suitability for course/degree) shall apply equally to impaired students. However,

- 2.1.1 In cases of mental impairment, the University retains the right to request a formal assessment of the impairment;
- 2.1.2 In the case of impairments which arise after a student has registered, the University may require an evaluation of the student's ability to continue studying and reserves the right to exclude her/him on the basis thereof;

Support systems provided by Rhodes University to enhance the academic and social lives of students with impairments will be limited only by their affordability. Rhodes University anticipates that there may be particular cases where the student may be expected to provide his/her own support systems.

### **2.2 POLICY OBJECTIVES:**

To ensure that:

- 2.2.1 Positive and unprejudiced attitudes towards people with impairments are fostered and encouraged;
- 2.2.2 In as far as resources reasonably permit, the needs of people with impairments are met in a way which will allow them to maximize potential professionally, academically and socially;
- 2.2.3 Individuals are provided with a choice as to whether they will disclose their impairment, except where this is required by law.

### **2.3 DEFINITIONS:**

Please note that these definitions follow the *Social Model of Disability*.

**Impairment:** Refers to the limitation in a person's physical, mental (including psychological) or sensory functioning.

**Disability:** Refers to the loss or limitation of opportunities that prevents people who have impairments from taking part in the normal life of the academic and social community on an equal level with others due to physical or social barriers.

## **3. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION**

### **3.1 THE ACTIONS AND PROCESSES BY WHICH THE OBJECTIVES OF THE POLICY WILL BE ACHIEVED:**

#### **3.1.1 The Career Centre will:**

3.1.1.1 Advise and counsel prospective students on possible courses of study which are available. Because of the need to liaise with academic departments and other University divisions, late applications will not normally be accepted from students with impairments.

3.1.1.2 Advise and counsel students who suffer an impairment while they are registered at the University of possible courses of study which are available.

3.1.1.3 Liaise with academic departments, support services and the Library to ensure that, in as far as reasonable resources admit, access to learning is provided.

3.1.1.4 Liaise with the Estates Division to ensure that, in as far as reasonable resources admit, suitable adaptations are made to learning, residential, sport and leisure facilities in order to accommodate the physically impaired person.

3.1.1.5 Advise the Dean of Students and Hall and House Wardens on impaired students' needs.

#### **3.1.2 The Academic Development Centre will:**

3.1.2.1 Provide support to academic staff that teach and assess impaired students.

3.1.3 Within the context of confidentiality as legally required, the **Counselling Centre** will:

3.1.3.1 Liaise with the Sanatorium Sisters;

3.1.3.2 Liaise with academic departments;

3.1.3.3 Liaise with the Dean of Students and Hall and House Wardens;

3.1.3.4 Offer socio-emotional counselling services to students.

3.1.4 The **Heads of Academic Departments** will, where feasible:

3.1.4.1 Meet requests to accommodate students with impairments. This would involve arranging alternative teaching venues as well as considering how teaching and assessment might best be modified;

3.1.4.2 Liaise with the Examinations Officer regarding any special provision for assessment which might be required;

3.1.4.3 Sensitise staff to the needs of individual students.

3.1.5 The **Estates Division** will:

3.1.5.1 Modify physical access to and within buildings where possible and where funds permit;

3.1.5.2 Where possible, and within the limits of reasonable resources, make suitable adaptations to study, residential, sport and leisure facilities to accommodate physically impaired students.

3.1.6 The **Psychology Clinic** will:

3.1.6.1 Liaise with external assessors with regard to determining capacity for succeeding at University and/or degree of impairment related to psychological disability;

3.1.6.2 Offer socio-emotional counselling and therapy to students;

3.1.6.3 Offer an assessment service to students regarding educational needs (e.g. extra time applications, learning disabilities, etc) and clinical/emotional assessment (e.g. major depressive episodes, etc).

### **3.1.7 The Dean of Students Division will:**

3.1.7.1 On a regular basis, report on how the University is catering for the needs of impaired students.

3.1.7.2 Serve as the place where students may seek help if their unique needs are not addressed, or where staff may report if students' needs are not being addressed.

### **3.2 REVIEW PROCEDURE:**

The Dean of Students is regarded as the guardian of this policy and will be responsible for assessing adherence to the policy, identifying any problems with the current policy and procedures and therefore the identification of any changes that need to be made to the policy. In addition, other staff who serve on the various structures e.g. Examination Committee (extra time), Equity Committee and Student Services Council can also raise issues of concern.

#### **Examples of reasonable accommodation include:**

- Adapting existing facilities to make them accessible
- Adapting existing equipment or acquiring new equipment including computer hardware and software
- Re-organizing work areas e.g. in residential areas
- Changing lecture and assessment materials and systems
- Restructuring jobs so that non-essential functions are reassigned
- Adjusting time for examinations, tests and assignments
- Providing electronic readers and
- Providing specialized supervision, training and support.

**Appendix 2 –2015 SRC Petition Poster**



## **Appendix 3: Interview Questions**

### ***Appendix 3.1 Interviews with students with disabilities***

- Gender:
- Race:
- Degree:
- Year of study:
- Disability declared:
- Are you on financial aid?
- Are you a resident student or an oppidan student?
- How long have you been a resident student or oppidan student?
- How often got involved in residence or oppidan life events?
- A. Experience of the academic programmes**
- Did the disability influence your subject choice?
- What impact does your disability have on your academic success?
- What mechanisms (if any) do you need to have in place to cope successfully with the academic demands of your studies?
- How would you generally describe the academic support services available to you at the University?
- How are your peers treating you for your known disability in the classroom set-up?
- Please describe how your lecturers treat you in the classroom set-up?
- B. Experience of the physical environment**
- How would you describe the physical environment of Rhodes University in terms of accommodating or not accommodating you to ensure your student success?
- Have experienced any institutional and attitudinal barriers? If yes, please could you elaborate on what these barriers were and how you experienced it?
- C. Experience of the support services**
- How would you describe Rhodes University as a space for students with disabilities in terms of social, sporting or cultural life?
- Have you found any platforms available for articulating your daily lived experience at Rhodes University?
- How would you describe your living and learning experience at Rhodes University?
- Describe the efficiency of the support services available to students with disability at Rhodes University?
- How can the services be improved/most effective/useful in accommodating for students with disabilities at Rhodes University?
- As a resident student, what is your opinion on how Rhodes residences accommodate students with disabilities?

**D. The student disability policy**

- Are aware that Rhodes University has a student disability policy?
- Describe the extent as a student you are involved in the policy making and development for students living with disabilities
- In your opinion, what more can be done in terms of the student disability policy?

**E. Institutional Transformation**

- Transformation became the buzz word in higher education institutions, how would you describe a University who qualify as a transforming Institution?
- How would you describe Rhodes University's commitment to engage students with disabilities in its transformation processes?

**Thank you for your participation**

***Appendix 3.2 Interview with the Director of Student Affairs: Mr Malinge Gqeba***

**A. The Student Disability Policy**

1. Are you aware that Rhodes University has a student disability policy?
2. One of the objectives of Rhodes University is : 'In as far as resources reasonably permit; the needs of people with impairments are met in a way which will allow them to maximize potential professionally, academically and socially' In your opinion, to what extent is this objective being practically realised with regards to students with disabilities at Rhodes University?
3. As the DSA, how can positive and unprejudiced attitudes towards people with impairments be fostered and encouraged?
4. In your opinion, how does Rhodes University residences make provision for students with disabilities compare to that of other universities in South Africa?
5. Are you aware of the extent students with disabilities are involved in policy making and development?
6. Understanding budget constraints of the University which can easily provide a "get out clause", are there other ways the University can show commitment without committing big budget in accommodating and providing an enriching experience for students with disabilities?
7. Do you feel that the 2005 student disability policy and its implementation is satisfactory?
8. Understanding that the 2005 policy is under review. In your opinion, what more should be highlighted in the reviewed policy?

**B. Student support services**

1. Explain the structure of the DSA
2. The DSA aims to bridge the gap between academic success and its support services, which enable the creation of an inclusive and conducive environment that contributes to student success. How does/should this translate to students with disabilities?
3. In your opinion, what more can be done by the DSA and Institution to be more efficient in their support services to students with disabilities?

4. As the DSA, what role does it play/should play in identifying barriers and create/identify opportunities for improving accessibility
5. The main task of a Disability Unit is to provide academic support to students with disabilities thereby making access to education fair and equitable. Rhodes University does not have a disability unit. Is the DSA thinking on this as a support service to students with disabilities?

**C. Institutional Transformation**

1. Transformation became the buzz word in higher education institutions. How would you describe a University who qualify as a transforming Institution?
2. In 2001, the Rhodes University Council adopted a vision and mission statement that reflected the institution's aspiration to transform into a university different from the one that it had been in the period of apartheid. It has inter alia undertook to provide a nurturing student support system as well as diverse array of residential, sporting, cultural and leadership opportunities and to provide an attractive, safe and well-equipped environment that is conducive to good scholarship and collegiality. In terms of the DSA, what are the tangible outcomes up to date and how does Rhodes University fair in realising this vision for students with disabilities?
3. How would you describe Rhodes University's commitment to engage students with disabilities in its transformation processes?

**D. Any additional comments you wish to make?**

Thank you for your participation

***Appendix 3.3 Interview with the Deputy-Director Residential Operations: Ms Jay Pillay***

**A. The Student Disability Policy**

- Are you aware that Rhodes University has a student disability policy?
- In the policy the Rhodes University Objective states : 'In as far as resources reasonably permit; the needs of people with impairments are met in a way which will allow them to maximize potential professionally, academically and socially' In your opinion, to what extent is this objective being practically realised with regards to students with disabilities at Rhodes University?
- 'Positive and unprejudiced attitudes towards people with impairments are fostered and encouraged'. Are there any tangible protocols in residence administration to attain this objective?
- The policy statement concludes with a list of "examples of reasonable accommodation." Here included is 're-organizing work areas e.g. in residential areas AND 'adapting existing facilities to make them accessible. To what extent have these goals been achieved in residences since 2005? What more needs to be done?
- As the Residential Operations Division, how can positive and unprejudiced attitudes towards people with impairments be fostered and encouraged?
- In your opinion, how does Rhodes University residences make provision for students with disabilities

compare to that of other universities in South Africa?

- Are you aware of the extent students with disabilities are involved in policy making and development?
- Understanding budget constraints of the University which can easily provide a “get out clause”, are there other ways the University can show commitment without committing big budget in accommodating and providing an enriching experience for students with disabilities?
- Do you feel that the 2005 student disability policy and its implementation is satisfactory?
- Understanding that the 2005 policy is under review. In your opinion, what more should be highlighted in the reviewed policy?

#### **B. Student Support Services**

- How many residences are disability-friendly?
- Is there a policy in place to accommodate students with disabilities closer to campus?
- How would you describe the efficiency of the support services available to students with disability at Rhodes University?
- In your opinion, what more can be done by the Institution to be more efficient in their support services to students with disabilities?

#### **C. Institutional Transformation**

- Transformation became the buzz word in higher education institutions. How would you describe a University who qualify as a transforming Institution?
- In 2001, the Rhodes University Council adopted a vision and mission statement that reflected the institution’s aspiration to transform into a university different from the one that it had been in the period of apartheid. It has inter alia undertook to: Provide a nurturing student support system as well as diverse array of residential, sporting, cultural and leadership opportunities and an attractive, safe and well-equipped environment that is conducive to good scholarship and collegiality. In terms of the Residential Operations Division, what are the tangible outcomes up to date and how does Rhodes University fair in realising this vision for students with disabilities?
- How would you describe Rhodes University’s commitment to engage students with disabilities in its transformation processes?

#### **D. Any additional comments you wish to make?**

Thank you for your participation

***Appendix 3.4 Interview with the Lecturer in the Accounting department and  
Chairperson of the Examinations Concessions Committee: Mr Richard Poole***

**A. The Student Disability Policy**

- Are you aware that Rhodes University has a student disability policy?
- Do you feel 2005 student disability policy and its implementation is satisfactory?
- In your opinion, what more can be done in terms of the policy?
- In the policy the Rhodes University Objectives states :
  - ‘In as far as resources reasonably permit; the needs of people with impairments are met in a way which will allow them to maximize potential professionally, academically and socially’ In your opinion, to what extent is this objective being practically realised with regards to the academic project at Rhodes University?
  - ‘Positive and unprejudiced attitudes towards people with impairments are fostered and encouraged’. Are there any tangible protocols in place to attain this objective?
- As an academic have you received any reports of students with disabilities experiencing any institutional and attitudinal barriers?
- The policy statement concludes with a list of “examples of reasonable accommodation.” Herein included is ‘adapting existing facilities to make them accessible. To what extent have these goals been achieved in residences and academic project since 2005? What more needs to be done?
- Are you aware of the extent students with disabilities are involved in policy making and development?
- Understanding budget constraints of the University, which can easily provide a “get out clause”, are there other ways we can show commitment without committing budget in accommodating and providing an enriching student experience for Students with disabilities?

**B. Student support services**

- How would you describe the physical environment of Rhodes University in terms of accommodating or not accommodating students with disabilities to ensure their student success?
- How would you describe Rhodes University as a space for students with disabilities in terms of the academic, cultural, sporting project?
- How would you describe the efficiency of the support services available to students with disability at Rhodes University? In your opinion, what more can be done by the Institution to be more efficient in their support services to students with disabilities?
- Are you aware of any platforms available for articulating their daily lived experience at Rhodes University?
- The main task of the Disability Unit is to provide academic support to students with disabilities thereby making access to education fair and equitable. Rhodes University does not have a disability unit, what is your opinion on this?

### **C. Institutional Transformation**

- Transformation became the buzz word in higher education institutions, how would you describe a University who qualify as a transforming Institution?
- The Transformation Indicator document states that there should be an increasing focus on curriculum development initiatives, which examine new and alternative contents and pedagogies. What would this mean for Rhodes University in the context of disability?
- What is your opinion on including disability in teaching and learning as an issue of diversity and social justice?
- In terms of research, how can research data for disability be disaggregated (as with gender, race, class, etc.)?
- How would you describe Rhodes University's commitment to engage students with disabilities in its transformation processes?

### **D. Any additional comments you wish to make?**

Thank you for your participation

## ***Appendix 3.5 Interview with the Head of the Counselling Centre: Ms Sarah Green***

### **A. The Student Disability Policy**

- Are you aware that Rhodes University has a student disability policy?
- What should be in the policy?
- In the policy the Rhodes University Objective states : 'In as far as resources reasonably permit; the needs of people with impairments are met in a way which will allow them to maximize potential professionally, academically and socially' In your opinion, to what extent is this objective being practically realised with regards to students with disabilities at Rhodes University?
- The policy declaration states that: 'University may require an evaluation of the student's ability to continue studying and reserves the right the exclude her/him on the basis thereof'. In your position as Head of the Counselling Centre, to what extent did the Counselling Centre implement this?
- Are you aware of the extent students with disabilities are involved in policy making and development?

### **B. Student support services**

- What kind of support does the Counselling Centre offer to students with disabilities?
- In your opinion, what more can be done by the Institution to be more efficient in their support services to students with disabilities?
- In your experience did students with disabilities reported that feel they are unfairly treated or discriminated against because of their disability?

### **C. Institutional Transformation**

- Transformation became the buzz word in higher education institutions, how would you describe a University who qualify as a transforming Institution?

- In 2001, the Rhodes University Council adopted a vision and mission statement that reflected the institution's aspiration to transform into a university different from the one that it had been in the period of apartheid. It has inter alia undertaken to:
  - Provide a nurturing student support system as well as diverse array of residential, sporting, cultural and leadership opportunities. In terms of the counselling section, what are the tangible outcomes up to date?
  - Provide an attractive, safe and well-equipped environment that is conducive to good scholarship and collegiality. In your opinion, how does Rhodes University fair in realising this vision for students with disabilities?
- Understanding budget constraints of the University which can easily provide a “get out clause”, are there other ways we can show commitment without committing budget in accommodating and providing an enriching student experience for students with disabilities?
- How would you describe Rhodes University's commitment to engage students with disabilities in its transformation processes?

**D. Any additional comments you wish to make?**

Thank you for your participation

***Appendix 3.6 Interview with the Director of the Office of Equity and Institutional Culture and Chairperson of the Disability Committee: Ms Noluxolo Nhlapo***

**A. The Student Disability Policy**

- Do you feel that Rhodes University 2005 student disability policy and its implementation is satisfactory?
- In your opinion, what more can be done in terms of the policies and protocols of the policy?
- In the policy the Rhodes University Objective states : ‘In as far as resources reasonably permit; the needs of people with impairments are met in a way which will allow them to maximize potential professionally, academically and socially’ In your opinion, to what extent is this objective being practically realised with regards to students with disabilities at Rhodes University?
- ‘Positive and unprejudiced attitudes towards people with impairments are fostered and encouraged’. Are there any tangible protocols in place to attain this objective?
- To what extent does students with disabilities have in the review process and re-drafting of the policy?
- Understanding budget constraints of the University which can easily provide a “get out clause”, are there other ways we can show commitment without committing budget in accommodating and providing an enriching student experience for students with disabilities?
- How does Rhodes University policy statement compare to that of other universities in South Africa?

**B. Student support services**

- Are you aware of any platforms available for students with disabilities to articulate their daily lived experience at Rhodes University?
- In your opinion, what more can be done by the Institution to be more efficient in their support services to students with disabilities?
- How would you describe the physical environment of Rhodes University in terms of accommodating or not accommodating students with disabilities to ensure their student success?
- In 2015, the SRC said no to the move of the DSA to the Union Building because of the absence of a lift. What was the message that this send to the Rhodes University community at the time?
- What is the latest update on the installation of the lift?
- The main task of the Disability Unit is to provide academic support to students with disabilities thereby making access to education fair and equitable. Rhodes University does not have a Disability Unit, what is your opinion on this?

**C. Institutional Transformation**

- Please describe the work of the office of Equity & Institutional Culture
- Transformation became the buzz word in higher education institutions, how would you describe a University who qualify as a transforming Institution?
- The Rhodes University Council has the task of providing strategic leadership on transformation. How effective are the university’s governance structure and processes in advancing the transformation of the institution?

- In 2001, the Council adopted a vision and mission statement that reflected the institution's aspiration to transform into a university different from the one that it had been in the period of apartheid. It has inter alia undertaken to: Provide a nurturing student support system. In terms of the transformation project, what are the tangible outcomes up to date?
- Disability is largely ignored in discussions about institutional culture. In your opinion, what are the reasons for this?
- How would you describe Rhodes University's commitment to engage students with disabilities in its transformation processes?
- The Transformation Indicator document states that: Students from all demographic groups are afforded an equitable opportunity to participate in Higher Education. What is some of the tangible outcomes at Rhodes University with regards to students with disabilities?
- The Transformation Indicator document further states that there should be an increasing focus on curriculum development initiatives, which examine new and alternative contents and pedagogies. What would this mean for Rhodes University in the context of disability?
- What is your opinion on including disability in teaching and learning as an issue of diversity and social justice?
- In terms of research, how can research data for disability be disaggregated (as with gender, race, class, etc.)?

**D. Any additional comments you wish to make?**

Thank you for your participation