Published in final edited form as:

Disabil Soc. 2016 ; 31(2): 240–251. doi:10.1080/09687599.2016.1158092.

Experiences of visually impaired students in higher education: Bodily perspectives on inclusive education

Heidi Lourens and

Department of Psychology, University of Johannesburg, South Africa

Department of Psychology, Stellenbosch University, South Africa

Leslie Swartz

Department of Psychology, Stellenbosch University, South Africa

Abstract

Although previous literature sheds light on the experiences of visually impaired students on tertiary grounds, these studies failed to provide an embodied understanding of their lives. In-depth interviews with 15 visually impaired students at one university demonstrated the ways in which they experienced their disability and the built environment in their bodies. At the same time, lost, fearful, shameful and aching bodies revealed prevailing gaps in provision for disabled students. Through this research it becomes clear how the environment is acutely felt within fleshly worlds, while bodies do not fail to tell of disabling societal structures. Based on the bodily stories, we thus make recommendations to improve the lives of visually impaired students on tertiary campuses.

Keywords

inclusive education; higher education; disability; visual impairment; phenomenology; embodiment; misfits

Introduction

In recent years there has been a growing international urgency to include disabled persons on university campuses. Ideally, this inclusion runs deeper than a mere increase of disabled students on tertiary grounds; it also involves the quality of the social and learning experiences of disabled students once they have gained access to higher education (Fuller et al. 2004; Jacklin et al. 2006). In essence, real inclusion therefore means feeling like a welcomed member of the tertiary environment; a member that truly belongs and whose contributions to the diversity of the university are valued and celebrated (Bantjes et al. 2015; Beauchamp-Pryor 2013; Swart and Greyling 2011).

What has been missing from previous research on disabled students is an embodied account of their lived experiences. So far we have heard their accounts of the learning and social environment, but we have not heard how they experience the tertiary environment viscerally,

in their flesh and bones. It is partly, and crucially, through the lens of their lived realities that the ability of universities to implement inclusive policies will be illuminated (Brandt 2011; Riddell, Tinklin, and Wilson 2005). What is more, a phenomenological account, where bodily experiences of disability are recognised and documented, may point us in the direction that is needed for change. As Overboe writes, 'our lived experience would be an integral part of the atmosphere and tone for any change within our lives and our interaction with others, whether they be disabled or non-disabled' (Overboe 2009, 81).

With this paper we therefore intend to look at the day-to-day experiences of visually impaired students through their embodied recollections.

Disability and the body

The recognition of bodies and personal lived experience are contentious issues within disability circles. Although the body was never quite absent from disability theory, the social and medical models cast it into the marginal shadows of meaningless biology. On the one hand the medical model, which has been the predominant way of thinking about disability until the late 1970s, simply depicted the disabled body as a passive, voiceless entity; as 'a body gone wrong' (Michalko 2002, 120). It defined disability as a tragic infliction that rests solely on biological deficits (Watermeyer 2013). On the other hand, early social model writers, who believe that disability primarily stems from societal barriers, severed the disabled body from its biological roots through its impairment-disability separation. In this sense, impairment refers to the physical or medical basis of a disability that encapsulates the limitations of physical, sensory or psychological function, while the term 'disability' was used to describe the social exclusion and barriers imposed on people with disabilities (Barnes and Mercer 2005; Shakespeare 2014; Watermeyer 2013). In essence, this distinction also left the 'impaired' body as nothing but its physiology. In both accounts, the body was therefore devoid of meaning, history, culture or agency; nothing but a 'corporeal mass' (Hughes and Paterson 1997, 329).

Recently, authors started arguing for a different understanding of the disabled body (Garland-Thomson 2011; Hughes and Paterson 1997; Loja et al. 2012; Scully 2008; Watermeyer 2013). This new understanding of the body moves away from the purely biologically created entity, to a body that is changing over time, that has personal and emotional facets, that is culturally created and influenced and that is the host of deeply meaningful experiences. In response, some social model writers warned that a focus on the personal lives and troubles of disabled persons may have a damaging effect on the collective lives of people with disabilities, as it steers attention away from wider social structures that lead to exclusion and shun impaired bodies to the margins of society (Barnes 2012; Thomas 2007). It is evident that these authors are deeply concerned that the gaze of disability scholars will turn inward, leaving the social model's political and social progress null and void. Of course, given the history of medicalisation and marginalisation, their caution that embodiment will leave the impaired body once again disempowered is not completely ungrounded and maybe even somewhat plausible. However, there also lies a personal danger in denying the reality of the body, with its joys, pain, laughter and tears (Paterson and Hughes 1999).

Connolly (2013), citing Merleau-Ponty, points out that it is our subjective bodily experiences that connect us to the world and make it meaningful and real. For Winnicott (1988) this unity of body and psyche is a fortunate achievement. He writes, 'How easy it is to take for granted the lodgement of the psyche in the body and to forget that this again is an achievement. It is an achievement which by no means falls to the lot of all' (Winnicott 1988, 122). In 'dislodging' the impaired body from disabled social reality, we face the risk of dissociating people from their very real emotional struggles (Watermeyer 2013) in a collective push to deny these experiences. And this dissociation, in its reduction of the body to a purely objective entity, threatens to leave the world we live in empty and devoid of all meaning (Jung, cited in Connolly 2013).

Fortunately, an investigation into bodily experience does not have to provide a purely medicalised perspective. Paterson and Hughes (1999) argue that phenomenology can expose oppressive societal structures, while simultaneously capturing lived experience. This possibility is fleshed out in the illness- and disability-related formulations by Rose-Marie Garland-Thomson (2011) and Havi Carel (2013a, 2013b). These authors sensitively attempt to explain the relationship and interactions between a body that is disabled and a world that is not.

These interactions do not happen seamlessly, since the contours of disabled bodies often do not fit snugly within the shape of the world. Garland-Thomson (2011) refers to this incongruity between flesh and the world as 'misfits'. She goes on to explain that disabled bodies fluctuate between 'fitting' and 'misfitting' in conjuncture with a welcoming or rejecting world. Ramps for wheelchairs, for example, signify a welcoming environment; an environment that allows for 'fit' with a body that is mobility impaired. Yet, despite efforts to align the world with disabled bodies, physical environments and social encounters still largely fail to create a 'fitting' space for them (Garland-Thomson 2011).

Although Havi Carel (2013a, 2013b) does not directly refer to the concept of 'misfits', her phenomenological formulation of illness also address the somewhat awkward relationship between a disabled or ill body and its surroundings. Her writings about nondisabled possibilities and limiting bodies elegantly shows the rift between a body that fits the world and one that does not. Typically, she explains, we have the option of choosing between a range of possibilities; accepting some and rejecting others. When walking past a library, for example, I (the first author who is visually impaired) may choose to enter or walk past it. If I decide to enter, I have the choice of searching for a book, going directly to the librarian, working on the computer, and so on. If I choose searching for a book on my own, I can go to the shelf, search for the book and start reading through it. Now, I am presented with the option of taking it out or putting it back on the shelf. However, when I cannot see – when I am blind – my horizon of possibilities shrinks. Walking past the library, I may not even be aware of the existence of the library – thus leaving me with no option of entering it. However, let us say I am deliberately walking to the library. Upon entering the library, I may not be able to search for the book directly, since I would be unable to see and find the book. If the computer does not have a screen reader, this option might also be closed to me. So, I will have to ask the librarian or someone else for assistance in finding the book. When, finally, I have the book, I cannot simply open the book and read it. I will have to take it out,

ask someone to scan it into an accessible format for me, read through it and then decide whether I want it or not. In this example, we can see how not only possibilities are limited, but time is also altered. It therefore comes as no surprise that Hass (2008) argues that a limited horizon of options changes one's entire existence. In other words, being unable to see does not mean only the loss of physical sight, but also entails a narrowing of possibilities that changes one's being-in-the-world.

Carel goes even further by stating that disability, like somatic illness, shrinks the innate possibilities of typically useful objects (Carel 2013a, 2013b). A practical tool, like a pen, loses its usefulness as a ready-to-hand-entity and morphs into a present-at-hand entity, which confronts us with its empty meaning and uselessness. For example, the typical purpose of a pen is writing (ready-to-hand-entity). However, in my sightlessness, I have no mainstream use for it. I cannot write with it, I cannot see what someone else wrote with it; in my hands it becomes a useless object without meaning. Of course I can retain some meaning by using the pen as a hairpin; but in this, the main purpose of the pen in its everyday usage is lost. Once again, one's entire being-in-the-world is altered, for the loss of meaning does not pertain to a single object; it changes one's entire interaction with objects in the environment. It is not just that book, that library or that pen that become useless and unattainable, but the entire environment becomes hostile and uninviting.

These theoretical formulations of disabled bodies within the world clearly allow the space for accounts of hurt and suffering, while removing these narratives from charitable discourse by illuminating oppressive practises. Suffering now becomes balanced between pain and oppression and it 'helps one think more clearly about disability (as oppression) becoming embodied as suffering' (Hughes and Paterson 1997, 336). We remain aware of our own feelings of pain, and yes, personal tragedy, while remaining ever mindful of how the bodily experiences are drenched with oppression and societal structures that may exclude us. It thus remains a balancing act, knowing that societal structures are embodied and the body becomes social. Tying all loose ends together, Paterson and Hughes (1999, 606) remark, 'The disadvantaged corporeal status of impaired bodies cannot be understood without the wider material and social position of disabled people, but neither can it be divorced from the painful intimacies of the lebenswelt'.

We would argue that, through listening to the embodied experiences of visually impaired students, important role-players like policy planners will begin to understand what is needed for a true inclusive environment for all. Narratives of the day-to-day lives of these students will not only tell of their personal lives, but will also unveil practices that might keep them at the periphery of higher educational terrains.

Methodology

Since phenomenology is concerned with the sensitive task of examining the qualitatively rich phenomena of human experience (Carel 2011), this study explored the day-to-day lives of 15 visually impaired students in the search for a meaningful account of their lifeworlds. All students attended a South African university at the time of the research. Individual and

focus group interviews were conducted with open-ended questions in order to delve deeper into the meaningful amalgamation of their emotions, thoughts and bodily experiences.

We analysed the interviews according to the principles of interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), because it leaves room for accounts of lived experience (Smith, Flowers, and Larkin 2009). This meant that we analysed the interviews of each participant individually, in order that the findings would reflect the detailed, deep layers of their experiences (Smith 2011; Smith et al. 2009). In other words, the idea was to discover and reveal the heart of the lifeworlds as experienced by the individuals who are living it. After the individual case analysis we looked for patterns across the analysed cases. This involved the grouping of similarities and differences across the cases, restructuring and relabelling the original individual themes, so that patterns of meaning became clear in a final account of their shared experience (Smith et al. 2009).

Results

The narratives of the students addressed three themes that centred around their embodied experiences within the tertiary environment. These were: (1) disabled bodies and the physical environment; (2) the embodied experience of reading; and (3) shameful and confusing bodies and the social world.

Disabled bodies and the physical environment

The students experienced the wide-open spaces of an unfamiliar university campus as foreign and not designed with their bodies in mind. Some students made an attempt to prepare themselves for the physical challenges of walking alone. They visited the campus beforehand and paid for an orientation and mobility instructor to teach them the routes to class. Even though these preparations were somewhat helpful, it did not prepare them sufficiently for the day-to-day challenges of walking the campus. For example, Mia recalled that, even though she knew the way to class beforehand, she was not prepared for the last-minute changes to class venues,

And in the end we didn't have classes in most of those classrooms, because everything was changed and then I sort of had to teach myself the way all over again. And it was difficult for me, because I didn't know exactly where my classes were. And then they write on the board, 'classes are there and there', and then during the first class they decide, we are not here anymore, now we are going to be in that class on that floor. And it was difficult and I felt uncertain, because I couldn't memorise where all my classes were, because the passages was so confusing. (Mia)

For Sue, visiting the university beforehand did not prepare her for walking amongst large crowds,

I came here to see what it looked like, not on an open day, but just on a usual day. But still, it isn't the same like being surrounded by thousands of students. It's kind of a different experience. (Sue)

Mia recalled that she initially avoided going back to the hostel for lunch, for fear of walking independently amongst hundreds of students,

It was terribly difficult for me to ... later I simply didn't go to the residence for lunch, because, you know, it was terribly difficult with my cane ... I didn't know my way properly, then I had to try and find my way back to the residence amongst countless students. (Mia)

Simply getting around campus was therefore a very challenging task for the students. Disturbingly, some of the students also found the physical environment to be potentially dangerous. For example, they spoke about the threat of motor vehicles and obstructions in the environment,

The other day I was at a pedestrian crossing, then I saw a car that seemed rather far away, but he clearly drove fast. And he just came. He didn't stop. He was, I think if he drove a centimetre further he would've driven over my foot. (Ashley)

Obstructions in the environment included holes in sidewalks, low-hanging branches and road works,

I hate it when I walk on the sidewalks and a branch hits me through the face. And I think people don't consider things like this when they trim the trees. ... Or I fall in, uhm potholes in the road. (John)

It is therefore no surprise that the students, especially initially, experienced strong emotions when thinking about or facing walking independently. These students felt uncertain, scared and extremely worried (sometimes the worry inhibited sleep). They often experienced these emotions when even just anticipating walking alone. In the morning, some students had to gather themselves and find enough courage before walking to class,

It takes a bit of my energy to find my way to places. Each time it's like, okay, okay, I pluck up the courage, here I go. Uhm, so I, so I get by, but each time it's a bit of an emotional experience. (Ilse-Marie)

It sounds very very lame and probably childish, but for the first two weeks of my academic year it was my greatest concern. Not how I would manage in class, but how I am going to get where I want to be and how am I going to find my way between classes. (Mia)

You have this worry; you have this fear: how on earth am I going to get to the Willcocks (university building). When you get there it's like, okay, I'm here; it's over! Now we start worrying how we are going to get back. There's always a worry. (Petro)

When they were not worrying about finding their way, they were free to think about other, more important things,

It's just better if the worry of how to get to where you need to be is off your shoulders; then you can actually start to focus on things that are really important. (Mia)

The previous quote by Mia suggests that the emotions attached to their struggle with the physical environment are sometimes so overwhelming that it takes up a lot of their 'head space'; leaving little room for anything else. However, these difficulties negotiating the physical environment was mostly only evident during the first few weeks of tertiary life. As they became more confident in mastering their routes, their worries mostly dissipated,

It was difficult, but later ... one morning you get up and you realise, but listen here, I'm doing it without thinking about it. (Mia)

However, this eventual comfort with the physical environment did not seem to have been fixed. Changes to the environment once again disrupted their lives. Sue, for example, recalled the way road constructions influenced her daily routine. Typically, it took her ten minutes to get to class, but with road works she had to leave time to negotiate the changed environment,

That time when they worked on the sidewalks; that was a nightmare! I walked 30 minutes before class started to be able to manoeuvre around it. (Sue)

It was clearly difficult for the visually impaired students of this study to familiarise themselves with a new environment. They often experienced emotional distress as they walked through large crowds of students, tried to keep out of harm's way and find their classrooms. The relief of getting to know the university campus was also sometimes disrupted when the environment became unfamiliar once again through factors such as road constructions.

These often emotive accounts also point to the failure of some universities to make the physical environment accessible for visually impaired students. It seems like the students mostly took it upon themselves to negotiate the environment (for example, Sue who visited the university beforehand). None of the students reported any help from university staff in finding their way around university campuses.

The embodied experience of reading

The students sometimes experienced difficulties with reading. For the blind students who used Braille, reading was often time-consuming, since they were unable to visually scan through an article or book,

We have to read the entire article that is 60 pages, whereas sighted people they use highlighters, they use rulers, they use pencils and they underline the most important things. ... And when they study they study the highlighted work. ... We have to concentrate more than sighted people and we cannot scan through our work; we have to read everything. (Petro)

Subsequently, most of these students needed extra time to complete assessments. While extra time for examinations was usually granted quite easily, it seemed like extensions for assignments were given on an ad-hoc basis,

They [lecturers] would tell you, for example, 'just see to it that you hand it in. Don't worry about the date, just see to it that you hand it in'. ... Because they know it takes longer. (Carla)

Sometimes they [lecturers] allow extensions. Sometimes they are a bit mean and they don't. (Ilse-Marie)

What is more, is the reality that requesting extensions for assignments was not always beneficial for the emotional well-being of the students,

I usually handed my assignments in late and that wasn't good for my morale. [Laughs shyly] Because it's humiliating asking for extensions all the time and you're scared that the lecturers might think you are lazy. (Liza)

Reading also held negative consequences for partially sighted students who typically read enlarged normal print. For many of them, reading was a marked embodied experience. After long sessions of reading, they commonly experienced strain on their eyes,

We have these four hour lectures and my eyes get terribly tired so that I start seeing spots when I concentrate for too long. (Ashley)

At times, this physical strain was not restricted to their eyes. For example, Emma commonly experienced migraines after long hours of reading,

Then you have to lie in a dark room for a few hours and you've got a migraine. It's eye drops, cortisone drops, infections and so forth. (Emma)

John experienced back pain from the way he had to sit while reading,

Not only the stress on my eyes, but the stress on my body that I experienced due to my eye problem. How I had to sit or learn in school with my head almost on top of the desk and my back arched. And the back problems I developed from that; the bad posture. And then I had to go and write exams for three hours with my nose against the paper. (John)

These bodily manifestations of reading often had real consequences for the students. It generally meant that they could not concentrate and focus on their reading for too long,

I avoid reading, because my eyes get tired and then I get sleepy and then I am unable to concentrate. (John)

Later on your eyes get so tired that they cannot focus any longer. (Emma)

Consequently, it was often difficult for the students to set their own pace and, exactly for this reason, John appreciated the flexible nature of his current dissertation-based post-graduate programme, which was in direct contrast to the frequent deadlines of an undergraduate course,

For example, the product I was able to deliver with my research was good. And if I had only a short period of time to squash everything in and if I had to read a lot within a short period of time, well, then I don't think it would've been this easy doing it. (John)

It is thus evident that reading was often difficult for the partially sighted students in particular. Their eyes quickly grew tired, their bodies ached and therefore they were unable to concentrate and focus for long periods of time.

Shameful and confusing bodies and the social world

Some students did not feel easily accepted by their peers. It was the differentness of their disabled bodies, they believed, that made it difficult for others to welcome them into a friendship group,

People just find it easier to accept you if you are like them. (Mia)

But, given the undeniable and inescapable differentness of their bodies, achieving some level of sameness was often very hard work,

It was kind of difficult showing people that, even though I have a cane, even though I can't see, even though I sometimes don't know where I am, I am still just like them. (Mia)

I had to work hard to get their acceptance and to earn their trust and to, you know, to sort of get their interest. (Liza)

Partially sighted students also spoke about the hard work involved in gaining acceptance. Often, their disability was invisible, difficult to define and thus lead to misunderstandings in social interactions. For example, John said that people sometimes mistakenly thought he was rude when he didn't greet them, while in actual fact he didn't recognise them,

Socially it can also be difficult, because I walk past people without recognising them. Uhm, so people simply think that I am rude because I didn't greet them. (John)

Compensating for this, John attempted various creative ways of recognising others,

But luckily now, with time, I start getting to know people and I learn to recognise them through other ways than their faces and so on. ... Uhm, I can sometimes actually see through the way someone walks or you get to know their voices a bit better or you see what clothes they wear in the morning and for the rest of the day you remember it. But I think it happens unconsciously. (John)

Perhaps as a direct result of this differentness and the consequent difficulty in accessing friendship groups, some students seemed to have the perception that their disability was shameful; that it was an attribute that made them inferior to their peers,

So I don't even have a doubt that people will think that you fall short, if you are friends with them that you fall short or that you will always be the ugly duckling or something like that. (Vicky)

Ashley movingly recounted that her shameful, unworthy difference was sharply illuminated by being placed in a hostel room with a beautiful, seemingly 'perfect' student,

Because in my first year Miss Popular was my room-mate. She was Miss Varsity Cup that year and she was Miss Varsity and she was a fashion model. So she was really popular and very pretty. So when I arrived, there were always people in our room, but it was for Este. People became friends with me to get to Este. (Ashley)

Discussion

The embodied recollections of students confirmed the close ties between bodies and the world they live in. The unfamiliar, crowded and even dangerous physical environment erupted in their bodies as they experienced emotions like worry and fear. Aching bodies told of the strain to read, while shame and exclusion pointed to social alienation and the intolerance of difference. Clearly, as illustrated by this physiological and psychological pain, the world was often not a comfortable home for disabled persons. Instead, there was often a misfit between the design of the world and the shape of disabled bodies (Garland-Thomson 2011).

Misfitting rippled their being-in-the-world in some significant ways. Vicky, for example, acutely felt the residues of being different – of being a misfit – when she was around nondisabled persons. She experienced that they saw her as the ‘ugly duckling’; someone that was inferior to able-bodiedness. We can safely assume that being the ‘ugly duckling’ created feelings of shame and inferiority for her. From her words it thus seems that the difference between her body and those of her peers reverberated in her very core; in her sense of self.

For some students the misfit between their bodies and the world restricted their freedom and spontaneity. Mia avoided large crowds of students by staying on campus during lunch times. Even if she wanted to have lunch, this option had to be weighed up against the emotional and physical effort it would have required of her. In this way, her freedom to choose from a broad horizon of possibilities was limited (Carel 2013a, 2013b). This lack of possibilities inadvertently turn the critical gaze to university policy and practices. It is worrying that institutions that are supportive of diversity on policy level still fail to make their environments accessible to disabled students.

Efforts to keep up with the demands of university life, in other words efforts to fit, were often time-consuming. Recall, for example, Sue who took 30 minutes to get to her class on a route that typically required only 10 minutes. For some partially sighted students, the physical pain and discomfort caused by reading also slowed them down as they could not set their own pace. Not only did they have to request extra time to complete assignments, these requests also affected their emotional well-being and sense of self (Carel 2013b). While it is true that a disability can extend the typical time of routine activities such as reading (Carel 2013b), it can often be ameliorated through accessible environments. In the following section, we make suggestions that can help to overcome this disabling barrier.

The story that permeated all the above-mentioned life examples was the various ways in which a disability and its misfit with the environment can influence a person’s being-in-the-world (Carel 2013a, 2013b). It shaped the way they looked at themselves (as an ugly duckling), it placed a lid on their freedom and it altered time. These examples might create the impression that the requirements of the tertiary environment was always out of sync with the abilities of the students. Such an impression would not be accurate. The results showed, for example, that the students gradually became more comfortable with the physical environment as they became familiar with their routes on campus. Sadly, this seamless mode of living, this casual being-in-the-world, did not mark the end of a process. Instead, students

fluctuated between fitting and not fitting in tandem with the ebb-and-flow of a rejecting and inviting world (Garland-Thomson 2011). This was evident in recollections of lecturers who allowed extensions for assignments and others who refused such accommodations. Another example could be found in the disruption of the students' growing ease with the physical environment when roads were reconstructed.

Conclusion and recommendations

From the results it is clear how bodily experiences can tell the story of personal struggle, while still revealing disabling societal structures. Emotive accounts of worry and uncertainty, for example, unveiled some gaps in adequate provision for visually impaired students on tertiary grounds. Recognising these gaps now makes it possible to think about practical ways to address these incongruencies between disabled bodies and the world. It highlights what is needed for change and reveals what accommodations are reasonable. After listening to the stories of the students, we make three practical suggestions.

Getting around the campus and learning the routes to their classrooms were clearly an immediate and sometimes ongoing concern for the students. An orientation programme, specifically directed to teaching visually impaired students the physical lay-out of the campus, may be very useful and might help to alleviate the emotional distress associated with those first few weeks on campus. Yet, an initial, once-off orientation programme will probably not be sufficient to address all their mobility needs such as unexpected changes to the physical environment. We therefore suggest that universities consider employing mobility instructors as part of their disability support team.

The differentness of their bodies and the concomitant experience of shame and rejection was a reality for many of the visually impaired students. From early on, disability support staff can make active efforts to combat possible social isolation. For example, they can (1) launch campaigns to raise awareness around disability for nondisabled students (Moswela and Mukhopadhyay 2011), and (2) inform visually impaired students of accessible social activities on campus, such as chess, choir and so on. Of course it would be naïve to assume that such efforts will eliminate shame and rejection altogether, but it might create a platform to build friendships and gain the invaluable feeling of acceptance. In fact, in some studies, disabled students pointed to their nondisabled friends as an invaluable source of emotional and practical support (Beauchamp-Pryer 2012, 2013; Dowrick et al. 2005; Swart and Greyling 2011).

Lastly, in the light of the physical pain caused by reading, we recommend personal readers and/or audio books for partially sighted students. Another issue that needs to be taken into account with regards to reading is that it is mostly not possible for visually impaired individuals to skim through text – listening to audio recordings will make this impossible (Watermeyer 2014). It might therefore be useful to consider formalised extra time for assignments (Roberts 2009).

Listening to the voices of disabled students therefore seems to be essential in ensuring that they are fully included on university campuses (Mullins and Preyde 2013). When their daily

experiences are understood and documented, it will be possible to begin to design a world in which their bodies will find a better fit.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank the National Research Foundation (NRF) (Grant number 85423 and SFH20100726000013345), Cannon Collins Trust, Stellenbosch University and the Ginger Hilde Spiegel trust for their financial support. The Grantees acknowledge that opinions, findings and conclusions or recommendations expressed in any publication generated by this research are those of the authors, and that the NRF, the Cannon Collins Trust, Stellenbosch University and Blind SA accept no liability whatsoever in this regard.

References

- Bantjes J, Swartz L, Conchar L, Derman W. 'There is soccer but we have to watch': The Embodied Consequences of Rhetorics of Inclusion for South African Children with Cerebral Palsy. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*. 2015; doi: 10.1002/casp.2225
- Barnes, C. Understanding the Social Model of Disability: Past, Present and Future. In: Watson, N.; Roulstone, A.; Thomas, C., editors. *Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies*. London, UK: Routledge; 2012. p. 12-30.
- Barnes, C.; Mercer, G. *The Social Model of Disability: Europe and the Majority World*. Leeds, UK: Disability Press; 2005.
- Beauchamp-Pryer, K. Visual impairment and disability: A dual approach towards equality and inclusion in UK policy and provision. In: Watson, N.; Roulstone, A.; Thomas, C., editors. *Routledge Handbook of Disability Studies*. London, UK: Routledge; 2012. p. 177-192.
- Beauchamp-Pryor, K. *Disabled Students in Welsh Higher Education: A Framework for Equality and Inclusion*. Rotterdam, The Netherlands: Sense Publishers; 2013.
- Brandt S. From Policy to Practice in Higher Education: The Experiences of Disabled Students in Norway. *International Journal of Disability, Development and Education*. 2011; 58(2):107-120. DOI: 10.1080/1034912x.2011.570494
- Carel HH. Phenomenology and its Application in Medicine. *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics*. 2011; 32(1):33-46. DOI: 10.1007/s11017-010-9161-x [PubMed: 21103940]
- Carel, HH., editor. *Illness: The Cry of the Flesh*. Durham, UK: Acumen; 2013a.
- Carel HH. Illness, Phenomenology, and Philosophical Method. *Theoretical Medicine and Bioethics*. 2013b; 34(4):345-357. DOI: 10.1007/s11017-013-9265-1 [PubMed: 23836135]
- Connolly A. Out of the Body: Embodiment and its Vicissitudes. *The Society of Analytical Psychology*. 2013; 58(5):636-656. DOI: 10.1111/1468-5922.12042
- Dowrick PW, Anderson J, Heyer K, Acosta J. Postsecondary education across the USA: Experiences of adults with disabilities. *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*. 2005; 22(1):41-47. Accessed <http://iospress.metapress.com/content/tv5m77d2u1k5ufba/>.
- Fuller M, Healey M, Bradley A, Hall T. Barriers to Learning: A Systematic Study of the Experience of Disabled Students in One University. *Studies in Higher Education*. 2004; 29(3):304-318. DOI: 10.1080/03075070410001682592
- Garland-Thomson R. Misfits: A Feminist Disability Concept. *Materialist Hypatia*. 2011; 26(3):591-609. DOI: 10.1111/j.1527-2001.2011.01206.x
- Hass, L. *Merleau-Ponty's Philosophy*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press; 2008.
- Hughes B, Paterson K. The Social Model of Disability and the Disappearing Body: Towards a Sociology of Impairment. *Disability and Society*. 1997; 12(3):325-340. DOI: 10.1080/09687599727209
- Jacklin, A.; Robinson, C.; O'Meara, L.; Harris, A. *Improving the Experiences of Disabled Students in Higher Education*. University of Sussex; Brighton, UK: 2006. Accessed <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/wphegt/resources/bibliographies/disability>
- Loja E, Costa ME, Hughes B, Menezes I. Disability, Embodiment and Ableism: Stories of Resistance. *Disability and Society*. 2012; 28(2):190-203. DOI: 10.1080/09687599.2012.705057
- Michalko, R. *The Difference Disability Makes*. Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press; 2002.

- Moswela E, Mukhopadhyay S. Asking for too Much? The Voices of Students with Disabilities in Botswana. *Disability and Society*. 2011; 26(3):307–319. DOI: 10.1080/09687599.2011.560414
- Mullins L, Preyde M. The Lived Experiences of Students with an Invisible Disability at a Canadian University. *Disability and Society*. 2013; 28(2):147–160. DOI: 10.1080/09687599.2012.752127
- Overboe, J. Difference in itself: Validating disabled people's lived experience. In: Titchkosky, T.; Michalko, R., editors. *Rethinking Normalcy: A Disability Studies Reader*. Toronto, Ontario: Canadian Scholars Press; 2009. p. 75-89.
- Paterson K, Hughes B. Disability Studies and Phenomenology: The Carnal Politics of Everyday Life. *Disability and Society*. 1999; 14(5):597–610. DOI: 10.1080/09687599925966
- Riddell, S.; Tinklin, T.; Wilson, A. *Disabled Students in Higher Education: Perspectives on Widening Access and Changing Policy*. London, UK: Routledge; 2005.
- Roberts, H. Listening to disabled students on teaching, learning and reasonable adjustments. In: Fuller, M.; Georgeson, J.; Healey, M.; Hurst, A.; Kelly, K.; Riddell, S.; Roberts, H.; Weedon, E., editors. *Improving Disabled Students' Learning*. London: Routledge; 2009. p. 38-60.
- Scully, JL. *Disability Bioethics: Moral Bodies, Moral Difference*. New York: Rowman and Littlefield; 2008.
- Shakespeare, T. *Disability Rights and Wrongs Revisited*. London, UK: Routledge; 2014.
- Smith JA. Evaluating the Contribution of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. *Health Psychology Review*. 2011; 5(1):9–27. DOI: 10.1080/17437199.2010.510659
- Smith, JA.; Flowers, P.; Larkin, M. *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis: Theory, Method and Research*. London, UK: Sage Publications; 2009.
- Swart E, Greyling E. Participation in Higher Education: Experiences of Students with Disabilities. *Acta Academica*. 2011; 43(4):81–110. Accessed http://www.sabinet.co.za/abstracts/academ/academ_v43_n4_a4.html.
- Thomas, C. *Sociologies of Disability and Illness: Contested Ideas in Disability Studies and Medical Sociology*. Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan; 2007.
- Watermeyer, B. *Towards a Contextual Psychology of Disablism*. London: Routledge; 2013.
- Watermeyer B. Freedom to Read: A Personal Account of the 'Book Famine'. *African Journal of Disability*. 2014; 3(1)doi: 10.4102/ajod.v3i1.144
- Winnicott, DW. *Human Nature*. London, UK: Free Association Books; 1988.