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**EQUITY, DIFFERENCE AND THE NATURE OF THE  
ACADEMIC ENVIRONMENT:  
AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE RESPONSES OF SOUTH  
AFRICAN UNIVERSITIES TO THE ADMISSION AND  
PARTICIPATION OF DISABLED STUDENTS**

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of Sociology  
Graduate School of Humanities  
University of Cape Town**

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**September 2006**

## ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with how universities in South Africa are responding to the admission and participation of disabled students. It locates these responses within the framework of South Africa's first democratic government's imperative, as part of its framework for the creation of a more equitable and just higher education system, to increase access for disabled students. The institutional responses are investigated by triangulating data collected from an initial system wide survey questionnaire, with a sample of in-depth interviews and documentary analysis. The in-depth interviews were conducted with individuals from eleven public higher education institutions who are responsible for the provision of teaching and learning support to disabled students in their institution.

The study draws conceptually from three domains of knowledge. They speak to understandings of disability and disablement; inclusive education; and the worldwide trend to increase access to and widen participation in higher education systems. These domains capture lines of sociological enquiry argued to be central theoretical tools for understanding what equity for disabled students means in higher education and thus what factors undermine such a project. This framework is deepened through a consideration of the South African higher education context with its particular history of inequality.

The findings show how dominant attitudes around disability and the participation of disabled students in higher education come together, in complex ways, with organisational features and practices that characterise South African higher education institutions, to strongly shape existing institutional responses to disabled students. The thesis argues that a picture emerges across the system of institutional strategies that, by and large, fail sufficiently to address those factors that undermine the equity project, or, inadvertently, may serve to reinforce them. The conclusions reached in the thesis suggest that change

needs to take place at the discursive level and at the level of institutional organisation and practice. Central to such change is the need for a conceptual shift that locates the focus for change on the teaching and learning process within institutions and thus directs organisational strategies towards that level of the institution where the curriculum is most directly delivered and engaged with. This implies the prioritising and strengthening of strategies, including the provision of teaching and learning support, that develop institutional capacity at the classroom, department and faculty levels to respond in an integrated way to the differences that students bring to the teaching and learning process.

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## DECLARATION

I declare that: *Equity, Difference and the Nature of the Academic Environment: An investigation into the responses of South African universities to the admission and participation of disabled students* is my own work and that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university.

Signed:

Signed by candidate

Colléen Jane Powell

September 2006

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# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

This thesis is concerned with how eleven public universities in South Africa are responding to disabled students' entry into and participation within these higher education institutions. It locates these responses within the framework of the first democratic government's imperative, as part of its process of reconstruction and development within the country, to transform the higher education system "to serve a new social order...meet pressing national needs...and respond to new realities and opportunities" (Department of Education, 1997:3). Central to such a process of transformation are the goals of equity and justice<sup>1</sup>.

In the policy framework outlining the government's programme for the transformation of higher education, pursuing these goals is recognised to involve, among other things, redressing inequalities from the past, which restricted access to higher education for the majority of people (Department of Education, 1997:11). It is also recognised that disabled people are among those most severely affected by these inequalities and to this end the commitment to increase access to higher education for disabled people was made (Department of Education, 1997, 2001b). This latter imperative in turn correlates with other commitments made by the government towards addressing the discrimination experienced by disabled people in the past and creating opportunities for their equitable participation as active citizens in the country (Office of the Deputy President, 1997). At one level therefore, the research that is reported on in this thesis is situated at the nexus of a number

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<sup>1</sup> On the 27 April 1994 the first democratic government was elected through universal suffrage in South Africa. At a formal level this brought to an end years of struggle against the system of apartheid where a highly repressive white minority government had exercised and maintained political and economic power over the black majority. As is discussed in more detail later in this thesis, the public higher education system in South Africa was central to the maintenance and reproduction of this power.

of symbolic policy commitments made by the new government, which speak to both the rights of disabled people and to the transformation of the higher education system.

While this policy nexus positions this research study within the concerns of building democracy in South Africa and addressing the inequalities of the past, it also brings together the *central academic lines of enquiry and personal concerns that have driven and shaped this research project*. In this first introductory chapter of the thesis I explore these concerns and outline the process that led to the refining of my research questions and the development of the conceptual framework used to understand and interpret the research findings. This chapter also briefly explores the research design of the study and, in conclusion, outlines the rest of the chapters in this thesis.

## **1.2 Background to the study**

In May 1996 South Africa adopted a new constitution. It set out the tenets of the new democracy and entrenched a framework for the protection of fundamental human rights that had previously been denied to the majority of people in this country. While this milestone was important for all people in this country, it had particular significance for disabled people. The Constitution (Act No. 108 of 1996) recognised disability as a basis for unfair discrimination and thus made provision for protecting citizens from such forms of discrimination. Similarly, it recognised that disabled people had been discriminated against and marginalized from mainstream society in the past, and as such, should be recognised as the recipients of measures that would aim to redress these historical inequalities. These constitutional mechanisms reflected the new government's commitment to protecting and promoting the rights of disabled people. However, mostly importantly, they marked the culmination of disabled people's struggles as part of the broader liberation movement in the country to be legally recognised, protected and treated as equal citizens within the country. However, while these constitutional

provisions on one level marked an end point for the disability rights struggles in this country, it was also a beginning point:

From which new and often more complex struggles have been waged since 1994...[which] have been directed towards overcoming the social and economic barriers that have resulted in conditions of widespread poverty and marginalisation of the majority of disabled people in South Africa (Howell and Chalklen, 2003:xi).

These more recent struggles have therefore been focused on ensuring that disabled people have real, not just symbolic access to fundamental socio-economic rights in the country, such as education, employment and appropriate health care.

The origins of the research discussed in this thesis can be traced back to my own involvement in these processes. This involvement has primarily been in a number of the policy processes associated with these developments both before 1994 and after, either working for organisations within the Disability Rights Movement<sup>2</sup> or with them. Although much of this work has been about applying and translating the gains of the movement into actual policy, the central research questions that have shaped this doctoral research have largely emerged out of the struggles, compromises and “ad-hocery” of these policy processes (Ball, 1994:26).

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<sup>2</sup> I have used the term ‘disability rights movement’ here to refer to a movement started by disabled people in South Africa, which led the struggles described above. Central to this movement was the organisation; Disabled People South Africa (DPSA), the largest, and only cross-disability organisation in South Africa controlled by disabled people themselves. During the course of the struggles referred to, DPSA entered into a number of alliances with other non-government organisations providing services to disabled people, which collectively became known as the ‘disability rights movement’. See especially: the government’s White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy (Office of the Deputy President, 1997); and a more recent report, Disability Our Voices, Our Rights (Howell and Chalklen, 2003) compiled for the Office on the Status of Disabled Persons in the Presidency (OSDP), which documents the history of the movement between 1980 and 2001. See also William Rowland’s (2004) account of his experiences as a disabled activist and leader within this movement.

Despite the recognition that is given to the rights of disabled people in the new legislative and policy framework in South Africa, the area of disability has in the past received very little attention in mainstream academic research and teaching in this country. Most importantly, unlike concerns around race, gender and class, disability has largely been *ignored as a focus for sociological enquiry in South Africa*. Thus, while the nature and extent of the inequalities and oppression experienced by black people in South Africa under apartheid were richly explored and analysed within sociological research and writing, the particular experiences of disabled people, especially black disabled people, are prominently absent from this literature<sup>3</sup>. Similarly, the complexities of the apartheid system, as a particular form of a disabling society (Barnes and Mercer, 2004), were not interrogated in any kind of meaningful way. Moreover, where disability was taken up, it was usually addressed in the context of health, welfare and 'special education' research studies, most often underpinned by a strong medical discourse (Fulcher, 1989)<sup>4</sup>.

The post 1994 period has seen some important changes in this regard. Over the last ten years, in particular, valuable research has been undertaken which has contributed to an emerging focus on Disability Studies as an academic subject area in South Africa (see especially; Watermeyer, 2000; Lorenzo, 2005; and the contributions in Watermeyer, Swartz, Lorenzo,

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<sup>3</sup> Throughout this thesis where I have used the term 'black' it refers collectively to African, Coloured and Indian people. These classifications have their origin in the system of racial classification used under apartheid. However, they still feature prominently in existing legislation and policy mainly in relation to specific redress measures provided for (See, for example, the Employment Equity Act, No. 55 of 1998).

<sup>4</sup> It would be remiss here not to note some important exceptions to this assertion. In 1988 Jackie Cock, presented a paper at a sociology conference which she entitled "Hidden consequences of state violence: spinal chord injuries in Soweto". (Soweto is the large residential area outside Johannesburg, to which African people were restricted under apartheid). Her paper, based on research she had undertaken was, to my knowledge, the first of its kind in South Africa. Similarly, some of Vic Finkelstein's work may be regarded as important in contributing to this limited pool of writing. As a disabled activist who had been centrally involved in the struggle against apartheid before being imprisoned and then exiled in 1968, Finkelstein, in the context of his involvement in the Disability Rights Movement in the United Kingdom, has linked the oppression of disabled people with the oppression and inequalities of the apartheid system. See especially Finkelstein, 2005.

Schneider and Priestley (eds), 2006)<sup>5</sup>. The emergence of this fledgling area of academic study together with the policy gains that have been made have been important in contributing to changes in how disability issues are perceived at a public level and, most importantly, addressed by government.

However, while there has been a growth in Disability Studies as an area of academic study, the nature and form of the inequalities experienced by disabled people continues to be marginalized from mainstream sociological enquiry. Thus, as noted already, while significant sociological research and writing has addressed and continues to address the process of transformation in South Africa since 1994 from a race, gender or class perspective, disability remains distinctly absent from such research. Outside the realm of those few authors who would locate their work within the framework of Disability Studies, where disability is taken up it is addressed in a largely symbolic, and, therefore, limited way. The superficial way in which disability is mostly dealt with perpetuates a situation where disability remains *'under-theorised' and 'under-interrogated' within key debates on political, social and economic transformation in South Africa*. This in turn reinforces perceptions of disability as a "non-sociological" issue (Barton, 1996:6). While, as will be discussed in the body of this thesis, this omission is not unique to South Africa, it has, in my opinion, been profoundly important in influencing the way in which disability and the nature of the barriers experienced by disabled people are understood and interrogated in our country. This concern has been central to my reasons for pursuing this doctoral research.

One of the areas in which this weakness has been most evident is within sociological research and writing that has sought to theorise and understand, and thus influence, *the nature of higher education transformation in South Africa since 1994*. In key contributions to these debates, which, may be

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<sup>5</sup> I am using the terminology of Disability Studies as it is now referred to widely in the academic literature. For an overview of its historical development as an academic subject area, especially within the United Kingdom, see Barnes and Mercer (2004) and Priestley (2006)

argued also constitute a growing body of literature in South Africa around the sociology of higher education<sup>6</sup>, disability or the concerns of disabled students are conspicuously absent (see especially; Cooper and Subotzky, 2001; and the contributions in Cloete, N, Fehnel, R, Maasen, P, Moja, T, Perold, H, Gibbon, T (Eds.), 2002; and Cloete, N, Pillay, P, Badat, S and Moja, T (Eds.), 2006). Although once again, it is important to recognise that over the last five years a few researchers have attempted to begin to change this scenario, by and large, disability remains absent from mainstream sociological enquiry and analysis of higher education in South Africa<sup>7</sup>. As an academic researcher working in the area of higher education research, I have been acutely aware of this void in the debates and deliberations taking place.

While this omission reflects the broader marginalisation of disability from mainstream sociological enquiry, it also arises from a history where the perception that disabled learners did not have a place in higher education, dominated. Up until 1994 higher education largely remained out of reach for the majority of disabled people in South Africa (Office of the Deputy President, 1998). Central to these levels of exclusion were the substantial inequalities that existed for disabled children in primary and secondary education (Department of Education, 1998). These inequalities ranged from no schooling provision at all, to limited forms of specialised provision that did not always offer the students the appropriate subject choices or years of study needed to enter higher education. Although some disabled students were able to access more appropriate forms of education, these opportunities were extremely limited (Department of Education, 1998). In general, most disabled students were not able to access higher education because they had not received adequate secondary schooling, or within the education they had received, they were not prepared for entry into higher education.

Although there is some evidence to indicate that more disabled children are

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<sup>6</sup> This literature is often referred to as contributions in the academic focus area of 'higher education studies'

<sup>7</sup> Important exceptions to this are: Moodley, 2002; Crous, 2004; Howell and Lazarus, 2003; Matshediso, 2005 and Howell, 2006.

now able to enter the schooling system<sup>8</sup>, lack of reliable data from higher education institutions makes it difficult to confirm that these improvements are influencing the number of disabled students entering higher education (Council on Higher Education, 2005:10). From the most recent and system wide data available, there is still sufficient evidence to suggest that disabled students constitute a very small percentage of the population of higher education students in South Africa (Council on Higher Education, 2005:41).

With this background in mind, the following may be regarded as the central premises that have informed and shaped the research reported in this thesis.

- (i) The high levels of exclusion of disabled people from South African higher education in the past, together with the largely unquestioned acceptance of disability as a non-sociological concern (Barton, 1996), have rendered engagement with disability and the concerns of disabled students at the higher education level as weak and substantially under-theorised.
- (ii) One of the most important consequences of this weakness is that where access to higher education for disabled students is considered, the nature and functioning of the higher education environment itself receives little attention in these deliberations. My contention throughout this study is that the higher education terrain and its associated set of institutions perpetuate a distinctive set of structural and ideological barriers for disabled people that largely remain unexplored and thus unquestioned. This means that the creation of an equitable and just higher education system for disabled people, must involve a more careful and rigorous process of sociological enquiry into how these barriers emerge and are reproduced within institutions. In other words, what is happening *within institutions* is central to understanding what becomes critical

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<sup>8</sup> This trend is evident from the 2001 Census (StatsSA, 2003).

in pursuance of an equity agenda for disabled students in higher education.

Through the research reported in this study I have sought to undertake such a process of enquiry.

### **1.3 Refining the aims and objectives of the research**

In my initial thinking around this study, I regarded two areas of investigation as especially important to developing the understanding that I have argued is so important to the creation of equity for disabled students in higher education. I recognised that, firstly, to understand what is happening within institutions that is of importance to disabled students, it is necessary to capture and analyse the views of disabled students themselves. However, I also believed that exploring in some depth the structures and practices in place within institutions that are orientated to supporting and responding to disabled students, was equally critical to this understanding. I anticipated that such an exploration would provide valuable insights into how the participation of disabled students was perceived, what was regarded as important for their success as students and thus what was needed from the institution in this regard. While I recognised that both these areas of investigation were equally important to the 'sociological picture' I wanted to obtain, I was also cognisant of the fact that I needed to limit my research to what was possible within the parameters of a doctoral study. In making my decision to pursue the second area of investigation as the focus for this study, I was influenced by my involvement in a related research project at this time.

In early 2003, while working at the Centre for the Study of Higher Education (CSHE) at the University of the Western Cape (UWC), I was given the opportunity to lead a project commissioned by the Council on Higher

Education (CHE)<sup>9</sup>. The aim of the project was to investigate what was happening across the public higher education system in South Africa with regard to disabled students and the opportunities that were available to them. The CHE is an independent statutory body in South Africa that is tasked with undertaking a range of responsibilities towards the management and development of the higher education system in South Africa<sup>10</sup>. Central to its responsibilities are advising the Minister on key concerns within higher education and the assurance of quality across the system. The strategic importance of the CHE within the higher education system in South Africa provided us with an opportunity to investigate what was happening across the 35 public higher education institutions in place at this time with the agreement and support of their senior management<sup>11</sup>. The research design for the project consisted of a survey questionnaire that was sent to all 35 institutions. In the covering letter from the CHE to the vice-chancellors or principals of the institutions, it was requested that the person in the institution responsible for supporting disabled students complete the questionnaire.

I recognised that the findings that emerged from this investigation would provide valuable baseline data from which I could begin to start developing a picture of how institutions were responding to the participation of disabled students<sup>12</sup>. I therefore obtained permission from the CHE to use the data collected through this project as one component of the data for my doctoral

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<sup>9</sup> The study was undertaken as a collaborative project between the CHE, the CSHE, the Inclusive Education Directorate of the national Department of Education and the South African Federal Council on Disability (SAFCD), the umbrella body in South Africa of non-governmental organisations of disabled people (Disabled People's Organisations or DPOs) and those providing services to disabled people.

<sup>10</sup> Set up in accordance with the provisions of the Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997).

<sup>11</sup> The apartheid higher education landscape prior to 1994 was made up of 36 institutions. At the time when the field work for this study was undertaken two institutions had recently merged in line with the new government's imperatives towards 're-sizing and re-shaping' the sector. The official number of institutions at this time was therefore 35. An overview of this landscape is provided in Table 4.1. The public higher education landscape now, in 2006, after the most substantial restructuring has taken place, is made up of 23 institutions.

<sup>12</sup> Some tentative baseline data around the number of disabled students in higher education had also emerged from a regional study completed by the Foundation of Tertiary Institutions of the Northern Metropolis (FOTIM) in 2002. The CHE study, however, was the first system wide research of its kind.

research and to undertake follow-up interviews with selected personnel from some of the participating institutions. My intention was to pursue two overarching research questions. These were:

- (i) How are public higher education institutions responding to the admission of disabled students and their participation once they are part of the student body?
- (ii) Are these responses appropriate and adequate for ensuring that disabled students have equitable access to higher education and its benefits?

My intention therefore was to introduce into my research a strong evaluative component by exploring what was happening within institutions from a particular, pre-defined perspective. This was:

To consider whether the strategies and practices employed by the institutions, to support disabled students' entry into and participation within them, and therefore the attitudes and understandings shaping these, do create, or are likely to create, the opportunities for disabled students to be able to enjoy equitable access to the core business of the institution and thus to the benefits of higher education. I took such practices and associated attitudes as collectively constituting the essence of the institution's response to disabled students.

I therefore recognised that I needed to develop a conceptual framework that would enable me to analyse the institutional responses from this perspective.

#### **1.4 Developing a conceptual framework**

In developing the conceptual or analytical framework for the study, I recognised the importance of bringing together those areas of sociological enquiry, which, as I have already argued, had not, at least in the South

African context, 'spoken' to each other in the past. I was intent therefore on, firstly, drawing from sociological considerations of disability, including those international writers who have explored and analysed how disabled learners are constructed and positioned within education systems. I also, however, recognised that it would be necessary to link these understandings with lines of enquiry into the phenomenon of higher education. In particular, I believed it was important to draw from writers who have sought to understand, at the level of institutional organisation and practice, the implications of political imperatives that seek to increase access to and widen participation in higher education systems. I recognised that in each of these areas a broad range of literature existed, each with its own areas of debate and contestation. I therefore had to find a way to focus my exploration of the literature.

In undertaking this process of refinement I was strongly influenced in the literature I explored and the arguments I interrogated by, once again, my previous involvement in the policy and research processes I have already mentioned. Each of these processes of deliberation and research had exposed me to particular literature and provided me with insights into areas of concern I regarded as important to this study. I drew strongly from these insights in the development of the conceptual framework for this study.

The first of these largely emerged from my policy work with the Disability Rights Movement and my exposure through this to debates and critical questions around dominant ways of understanding disability. Of particular importance were those writings and the theories developed which challenged the historically hegemonic ways of understanding disability and argued for its recognition as a form of oppression imposed on people with impairments by an unequal society (UPIAS, 1976; Finkelstein, 1980; Oliver, 1990; Barnes, 1996; Barton, 1996; Abberley, 1997). I used these writings to understand more clearly the nature and form of this oppression and how it is manifested in dominant attitudes and practices towards disabled people.

The second aspect of this policy work that influenced my thinking, was my participation in 1997 in the deliberations of two ministerial commissions set up by the Minister of Education in South Africa to “investigate and make recommendations on all aspects of ‘special needs and support services’ in education and training in South Africa” (Department of Education, 1997:i)<sup>13</sup>. The deliberations of these bodies and the conclusions they reached were substantially important in introducing into the debates around education in South Africa a significant paradigm shift. Through their investigations into the experiences of those learners categorised as having ‘special needs’, and the associated learning breakdown of so many of these learners, they reached the following overarching conclusion:

The central challenge facing education was seen to be that of recognising and addressing the diverse needs of the entire learner population and minimising, removing or preventing barriers to learning and development – thereby promoting effective learning of all learners (Department of Education, 1997:i).

Central to their arguments, therefore, was the assertion that where learning breakdown occurs within education systems, the ‘problem’ lies with the system and not with the learner. My involvement in these deliberations also exposed me to a number of writers who have, in the context of other countries, as the NCSNET/NCESS did in South Africa, sought to challenge the notion of ‘special needs’. In doing this, they have used methods of sociological enquiry to re-examine issues of inequality in education, particularly those that impact on disabled learners. In turn they have argued for the “radical reconstruction” of education systems throughout the world to address and overcome the inequalities that exist (Slee, 2001b:174; see also

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<sup>13</sup> These were called the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Committee on Education Support Services (NCESS). They produced a joint report entitled; “Quality Education For All: Overcoming barriers to learning and development” (Department of Education, 1997).

Tomlinson, 1982, Barton, 1986, 1996; Fulcher, 1989; Barton and Oliver, 1992; Slee, 1997; 1999; 2001).

I was also influenced in the development of a conceptual framework for this study by some of the writings that emerged out of a particular initiative or educational project within South African higher education (Baijnath, 1997). This project, which is now referred to as Academic Development (AD), began in the early eighties. Essentially, the AD project was about specific teaching and learning support initiatives that began as attempts to redress the inequalities of the apartheid education system as it manifested itself in the perceived 'under-preparedness' of the majority of black students for higher education study. These debates and initiatives have been very important in linking issues of teaching and learning within institutions to student participation and success.

One of the most important arguments emanating from this time, which I regarded as critical to the concerns of my study, was the distinction made by Morrow (1993:3) between formal access and actual access for students to higher education. He argued that, while the former involved getting into higher education institutions, the latter involved having access to the "essential good" distributed by a university – that is, access to the knowledge that is taught, shared and produced within the university – what he called "epistemological access". Moreover, gaining formal access does not automatically translate into gaining epistemological access and it is to the latter that attention needs to be given within the institutional environment. I regarded this argument as central to a conceptualisation of what equity for disabled students meant in the context of higher education.

While I regarded these arguments and others that addressed the AD initiatives as so important to my study, my perusal of this literature thus far had alerted me to the fact that disability and the concerns of disabled students were not, to my knowledge, taken up within these AD initiatives at

all. Moreover, disability appeared, often through its absence from the discussion, to be seen as something 'different' and unrelated to AD concerns. I started this research from the premise that this omission was also important to interpreting the findings of my exploration into what was happening within the institutions.

## **1.5 Research methodology**

The research design I used to pursue the empirical inquiry of this research involved the collection and analysis of two sources of data. The first was data that had been collected through a system wide survey questionnaire sent to the 35 public higher education institutions in place in South Africa when it was administered in June 2003. This survey questionnaire was the primary research method used in the CHE project that I discussed earlier. Following an initial analysis of this survey questionnaire data, I embarked upon the collection of the second, and primary, source of data analysed in this thesis. This data was collected through a process of follow-up in-depth interviews with 11 of the institutions who had returned their survey questionnaires in the CHE project. In selecting the 11 institutions for the in-depth interviews I stratified the sample using a range of criteria, which I regarded as important in capturing institutional differences across the public higher education system. The in-depth interviews were undertaken with those individuals at the 11 institutions who had been identified through the survey questionnaire as being responsible for the provision of teaching and learning support for disabled students at their institution. My intention in the in-depth interviews was to explore more fully with the interviewees various issues that had emerged from the initial survey questionnaire, and which I regarded as important to answering my central research questions. After an initial analysis of the in-depth interview findings, I used the conceptual and contextual frameworks I had begun to develop to analyse the findings further and consider their meaning in relation to the research questions. As the analysis progressed I reflected back on the initial survey questionnaire data

at times, triangulating this with the findings from the in-depth interviews to deepen my insights into what was happening within the 11 institutions.

## **1.6 Outline of the thesis**

Chapters Two and Three, which follow this introduction, provide the conceptual and contextual framework for this study. Chapter Two links sociological considerations of disability with the construction and positioning of disabled learners in the education sphere. It brings together understandings of disability and inequalities in education, which is then used as a basis for developing conceptual clarity around what equity for disabled students means within higher education. The final section of Chapter Two argues strongly for the necessity of recognising the equal importance of two central threads in the creation of an equitable and just higher education system for disabled students. These are: ensuring that disabled students are able to gain entry into higher education institutions and programmes of their choice without discrimination; and the development of an institutional environment where they are able to participate equitably in the process of teaching and learning and thus have fair chances for success. These components of the equity agenda are referred to and used in the study as the 'access' imperative and the 'participation and success' imperative.

Chapter Three explores the South African higher education context and in this way positions the research within a specific set of historically bound social and material relations. It discusses those historical and contemporary forces that are regarded as important in shaping the South African higher education system and the inequalities that are still so important to the organisation and functioning of institutions at present. It also considers those historical forces that have been most important to disabled learners in South Africa and their educational experiences. The chapter then explores the post 1994 policy framework governing the higher education system and considers its implications for disabled students and the equity concerns focused on in

this study. In conclusion the chapter discusses the AD initiatives referred to earlier. It considers the relevance of these for disabled students and the historical exclusion of disability from the concerns of this project, linking up therefore with some of the AD issues already noted in Chapter Two.

Chapter Four provides an overview of the research design that was used in the study. It discusses the background to the setting up of the in-depth interviews from which the empirical findings of this research are primarily drawn. It explains how the data from the initial survey questionnaire was used to identify areas of focus within the in-depth interviews and as a basis for triangulation in my analysis of the interview findings. The methodological challenges, ethical considerations and limitations of the research are also discussed.

Chapters Five to Seven present and discuss the main empirical findings of the research. Chapters Five and Six are concerned with the 'participation and success' imperatives noted above. They therefore focus on how disabled students are being supported in their academic studies within the institutions. The findings primarily refer to: the nature of the services that are or are not in place, the strategies and practices that are used and the perceptions of the individuals interviewed around the challenges they face in undertaking their responsibilities.

The presentation and discussion of the findings in Chapters Five and Six are done in a way that also draws attention to a further and important aspect of the equity framework developed in Chapter Two. This has to do with conceiving of the teaching and learning environment within institutions as being constituted by two levels and the importance of what is happening at both these levels for disabled students' participation and success. Drawing from Simpson's (1996) conceptualisation of a learning development framework for higher education, I argue that the teaching and learning environment has a 'macro' and 'micro' level to it. The 'macro' level is

recognised to be the broad institutional level where institutional mechanisms and processes are in place to organise, support and monitor the process of teaching and learning. The 'micro' level is the classroom, department or faculty level, where the curriculum is directly delivered and engaged with. Chapter Five explores the findings of what is happening at the 'macro' level and Chapter Six extends the discussion into the 'micro' level. It is the latter and what is happening at this level, especially in relation to the attitudes and behaviour of the academic staff, which emerges as central to the overall conclusions reached in this study and thus to the equity concerns it seeks to address.

Chapter Seven then returns to the 'access' imperative. It discusses what I found to be the key factors influencing and shaping the decisions that are made regarding the admission of disabled students into the institutions explored and to programmes of their choice. This chapter draws conclusions around how disabled students' right to access higher education without discrimination is given meaning and interpreted within the higher education context and the implications of such interpretations for the creation of equity. The final chapter of the thesis, Chapter Eight, concludes the analysis of the research reported in this thesis and draws together the various threads of the study. It provides an overview of the thesis and summarises the central conclusions reached. It considers the implications of these conclusions for the strategies and practices of higher education institutions and government policy in responding to disabled students within a broader process of transformation in South African higher education. In conclusion it reconsiders the limitations of the research and identifies areas for further research.

## CHAPTER TWO

### DEVELOPING A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

#### 2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I am concerned with developing a conceptual framework that informs the central research task of this thesis – to explore and analyse how eleven public universities in South Africa are responding to disabled students' entry into and participation within them. The responses investigated are considered in the light of the first South African democratic government's equity imperative to increase access to higher education for disabled students as part of a broader process of transformation within the sector. These commitments, their origins as well as the manner in which they are addressed in the policy framework governing the public higher education system are discussed in the next chapter. Together, this chapter and the next provide the necessary background and conceptual tools needed to analyse the empirical findings of the research process.

To develop the conceptual framework for this thesis, I have drawn selectively, and to differing degrees, from what can be described as three domains of knowledge. I have regarded these as illuminating in collectively providing insights into the responses of the different institutions, or the nature of the problem being explored. In short, and recognising the limitations of categorising and naming particular theoretical interpretations in this way, these areas of focus speak to: (i) the construction of the phenomenon of 'disability'; (ii) the development of what has become known as the building of 'inclusive' education and training systems; and (iii) the intention of governments in South Africa and in many countries throughout the world to increase access to and widen participation within higher education.

For the purposes of my research these three domains of knowledge serve to link sociological considerations of the phenomenon of disability with the construction and positioning of disabled learners in the education sphere and, most importantly, within the realm of higher education. They also bring together understandings of disability and inequalities in education which, in my opinion, have been historically under utilised or largely ignored in theorising access to higher education for disabled students, especially in the South African context. Insufficient attention has been paid to conceptually bringing together these different areas of sociological enquiry, to investigate and make meaning of an area of concern in higher education in South Africa that is recognised to have been under researched (Council on Higher Education, 2005).

However, while I have regarded the bringing together of these three domains of knowledge as so important to my research, each of them is constituted by a vast array of literature. Similarly, much of the literature I have drawn from is dominated by 'voices' from the more industrialised countries of the North rather than the less industrialised countries of the South such as South Africa. Moreover, each has its own areas of debate informed by different theoretical and ideological standpoints. I have recognised, therefore, that within the parameters of this thesis, I run the risk of not doing justice to much of the literature and issues of debate within the different domains, including the value of the arguments for the South African context. Nonetheless, while acknowledging these limitations, my overriding concern has been to bring together what I regarded as those *theoretical tools* that are essential to understanding and making meaning of the findings of this research. I have therefore only raised those areas of debate that I regarded as relevant to the focus of my research and considered their value for less industrialised countries, and South Africa in particular, where these are relevant to the issues under discussion.

Of particular importance for my thesis has been the recognition that, while at one level the literature dealing with the phenomenon of disability may be extensive, it is in fact, as Barnes and Oliver (1993) correctly emphasise, a sociological phenomenon that has largely been ignored by sociologists. (See also Finkelstein, 1980; Oliver, 1990,1996; Abberley, 1993, 1997<sup>14</sup>; Barnes, 1996; and Barton, 1996 where this argument is consistently made). Moreover, as Shakespeare and Watson (1997) argue, where it is taken up in some of the sociological literature it is done in a way that largely misconstrues the reality of disabled people's lives. Most importantly, as Barton (1996:6) emphasises:

Sociologists have tended to accept the dominant hegemony with regard to viewing disability in medical and psychological terms. Thus the issue is perceived as pre- or non-sociological.

Thus many sociologists have not only failed to interrogate notions of disability through sociological enquiry, but have also justified this omission through a conceptual acceptance of the status quo, which in turn helps to maintain it.

With this concern in mind and recognising the deeply political and contested nature of disability in South Africa (Office of the Deputy President, 1997), as it is in any country, I have attempted in my thesis to make use of that literature which I believe provides me with appropriate tools to undertake what Barton (1996:3) calls a particular sociological task. That is, to make the connection between "the structural conditions and the lived reality of people in particular social settings". I have relied on the literature that I believe is most useful in assisting me to understand the nature of South Africa as a "disabling society" (Barnes and Mercer, 2004:1) Most importantly, however, I have drawn from these theoretical tools to gain insight into what has in the

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<sup>14</sup> Abberley's work referenced here is his important contribution on disability oppression first published in 1987. I have made use of a copy of the paper published in 1997 to which the page references in the thesis refer.

past and continues to inform policy and associated institutional approaches to disabled students in higher education.

In the first section of this chapter this task is applied to the phenomenon of disability itself and how it is understood and made meaning of in society. Much of the literature that I have used in this section has been written by sociologists and educationists based in the United Kingdom, a number of whom are disabled and/or have been centrally involved in the disability rights movement in the United Kingdom. In contextualising the use of these writers and the discussion that follows in this chapter, it is important to emphasise here that many of the ideas and critiques that are discussed originated out of this struggle by disability activists. This struggle was, and remains, one that has sought to challenge the inequalities that people with impairments experience and what perpetuates and legitimates such practices. Barnes and Mercer (2004:1) argue that the ideas emerging from this struggle provided the basis for an alternative framework of understanding disability and the nature of a disabling society. They argue further that:

These ideas provided the foundations for the 'social model of disability' (Oliver, 1981,1990) that has exercised such a powerful influence on organisations of disabled people and disability politics and also underpinned the growth of academic teaching and research on disability in Britain<sup>15</sup>.

Moreover, as Thomas (2004:33) asserts, the social model of disability, "lifted disability free from its traditional association with matters biomedical and

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<sup>15</sup> Barnes and Mercer (2004:2) explain that the notion of a 'social model of disability' was captured by Mike Oliver as a re-presentation of the ideas put forward by the Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) in 1976 in the United Kingdom. These ideas and further theoretical developments which take forward these arguments, especially those by Oliver himself (1990) are discussed later in this chapter. Although, like many writers, I have used the concept of 'social model' to collectively discuss these arguments, the notion of a 'social model of disability' is acknowledged as originally having been articulated by Mike Oliver.

placed it on a new social terrain". In this way it put forward a social model of disability in opposition to the dominant medical model.

While recognising the inherent and critical value of the notion of a social model of disability in my attempts to critically discuss the phenomenon of disability, I have also been cognisant of the assertions made by the activists who developed and popularised the concept. They argue that there is a need to exercise caution in seeing the social model as equivalent to a theory of disability. It should not therefore be engaged with (or criticised) as "something that it has never claimed to be" (Oliver, 2004:24). Rather it should be seen as a tool or 'heuristic device' to help to understand the different ways and forms in which 'disablement' is constructed and legitimised in a society (Finkelstein, 2002; Oliver, 1996, cited in Barnes and Mercer, 2004). My intention then in this section is not to debate in any depth the pros and cons of the social model of disability or to consider those critiques that through "extended debate and academic scrutiny" have "placed it under strain" (Watson, 2004:103). Rather I have used the basic tools that "social model theorising" (Watson, 2004:104) have provided to make sense of the phenomenon of disability in a way that provides a conceptual 'map' for considering disability in the education context, especially the higher education context. While this obviously creates some limitations for the scope of my interrogation of the issues, from my experience and my reading of the relevant literature, these writers, to date, still provide the most important theoretical contributions to the field and remain central to the growing body of disability studies literature.

It is also important at this stage to emphasise that the context of a highly industrialised country such as the United Kingdom, from where the social model thinking originates, clearly provides a very different social, political and economic context to South Africa. I am aware that a number of people have argued that transferring particular interpretations of disability (such as the social model) from "the west" to the "majority world" as it is called (and of

which South Africa would be regarded as being part) “would be more like imperialism than empowerment” (Stone, 1999:3)<sup>16</sup>. While acknowledging the important point that is being made I feel that this assertion may miss the point regarding the value of this work in our context. Its value lies in the *tools* which it gives us to analyse the lived experience of disabled people within a particular set of social, political and economic relations and in this way gain insights into those forces which shape the inequalities and marginalisation they experience. It is about looking at disability differently – as a relationship of oppression experienced by people with impairments because of the unequal nature of society (Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS), 1976). As will be discussed in the next chapter, the South African government’s White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy (Office of the Deputy President, 1997), which is itself the product of the struggles of disabled people in this country, argues strongly for understanding and addressing disability in this way. In fact, as Thomas (2004:37) argues, it is the experience of “the global masses in the developing world” and the deep-set inequalities they are confronted with in the “transnational capitalist economy” that “set[s] the agenda for a new political economy of disability”. The social model then becomes an important tool in the development of such a political economy of disability in South Africa.

My primary objective then in Section 2.2 of the chapter is to inform the more central discussions of this research thesis which relate to the sphere of education. In other words, I am most concerned with considering how the way in which disability is understood, made meaning of and responded to, within a historically specific set of social, political and economic relations, impacts on or informs the nature and provision of educational opportunities for disabled learners. This latter concern thus forms the focus for Section 2.3 of this chapter.

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<sup>16</sup> A recent study by Matshediso (2005) about disabled students and higher education in South Africa also raises some concerns with social model thinking in the South African context. One of his main arguments is given more attention later on in this thesis.

This discussion on the education sphere sets the parameters for Section 2.4 of the chapter where the focus shifts to higher education as the particular social setting focused on in this study (Barton, 1996). On the one hand higher education is recognised as being a final level or phase in the trajectory of education provision – it is the highest level of education attainment. However, throughout the world what constitutes the actual system of higher education is more difficult to define and, moreover, varies somewhat depending on the national context.

Davies, Williams and Webb (1997) argue that institutionally and intellectually higher education is a contested terrain in any country and thus the subject of ongoing debates and shifts in understanding around its specific parameters. While acknowledging this fluidity in meaning, there are two characteristics of higher education in modern capitalist societies that seem especially important to mention within the context of this study. Firstly, higher education systems are generally constituted by institutions, which, through the production, transference, dissemination and handling of knowledge, play a key role as “socio-economic organizations” in that country (Gornitzka and Maassen, 2000:84). They produce the highest levels of knowledge and skill which countries regard as central to their social and economic development, especially within an increasingly globalised world order. However, in pursuit of this goal they are by their very nature elitist. As Wolfendale (1996:1) argues, higher education is associated with selection and elitism which, through the application of “rigid selection criteria, filters out the eligible few from the ineligible many”. My contention throughout this study is that the higher education terrain and its associated set of institutions perpetuate a distinctive set of structural and ideological barriers for disabled people. As such it may be regarded, and needs to be interrogated, as a particular ‘social setting’ (Barton, 1996) within a broader ‘disabling society’ (Barnes and Mercer, 2004).

In Section 2.4 of the chapter my intention is therefore to make use of the insights developed in the previous two sections to understand more clearly the sphere of higher education. However, this task is one that also needs to situate this discussion within the context of South Africa and, in particular, the transformation of the higher education system since 1994. Chapter Three considers these issues in the context of South African higher education. It also draws out those issues in the development of South Africa's higher education system that I have regarded as especially important to the experience of disabled students and to what may be informing the responses of institutions to their participation. In this way, the next chapter also aims to provide a background to the context in which the research has been undertaken.

While this context and the dynamics of change in the South African higher education system are central to this thesis, I have also drawn at times from some of the international literature that addresses broader concerns around increasing access to higher education. Much of this literature has arisen out of attempts to reflect on the worldwide trend towards the massification of higher education systems. In particular, I have been concerned with those arguments that explore the notion emphasised by Christopher Ball (1990) in the context of the United Kingdom that 'more means different'. Where "massification implies more than an increase in numbers; it involves *inter alia* more open access and a more heterogeneous student body" (Trow, 1974, cited in Davies, Williams and Webb, 1997). For the purposes of my thesis it is the latter concern, that is, the implications of a more diverse student body with the associated implications for teaching and learning within institutions, which is most important. If these issues are addressed within the context of an equity agenda, including equity for disabled students, then increasing access involves responding to a more diverse student body in a way that ensures that the opportunity exists for all students to participate equitably within the process of teaching and learning and thus have fair chances for success. This in turn draws attention to the process of teaching and learning

within institutions and, as Scott (1995:6) asserts, its primacy in determining “what categories of student can enter and succeed in HE”. These arguments are explored in the final section of this chapter. Here my intention is to provide a framework for considering what equity for disabled students means in higher education and thus what is critical to the achievement of such goals.

## **2.2 Theorising disability**

The writers whose work I have relied most heavily on in discussing the phenomenon of disability can be described as those who have sought to critique a dominant view of disability as “a personal medical tragedy” (Shakespeare and Watson, 1997:263) or what Fulcher (1989:26) refers to as the dominant “medical discourse” of disability. Oliver (1996:32) argues that this dominant view is one that interprets disability as:

a tragic happening that occurs to unfortunate, isolated individuals on a random basis. It further influences compensatory policy responses and therapeutic interventions designed to help individuals come to terms with tragedy. At the level of individual experience, many disabled people come to see their lives as blighted by tragedy.

In developing a deepened understanding of this dominant view of disability, Oliver, a sociologist and a disabled person who has been central to developing alternative theoretical frameworks, draws from Gramsci’s concept of hegemony<sup>17</sup> to unpack what he calls the “hegemony of disability” (Oliver,

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<sup>17</sup> McLellan (1979) argues that Gramsci’s work on the concept of hegemony “modified and enriched the Marxist tradition by extending a concept that had previously had rather a narrow application” (McLellan, 1979:184). Gramsci’s work on hegemony largely emphasised the way in which a particular class maintained its position of domination not only within the economic sphere (Oliver, 1990), but also by establishing consent within the society as a whole (especially the state and civil society). Such consent was established through maintaining ideological hegemony where “certain modes of thought, and certain ways of resolving questions” became part of the common sense way of understanding the world (Gramsci, 1971). In other words economic and political domination needed to be preserved through a “justifying ideology” (McLellan, 1979:184). For Gramsci intellectuals were

1990; 1996). In a piece, which he calls “A sociology of disability or a disablist sociology?” (1996), he suggests that the hegemony of disability is created through the interaction and interconnection of different levels of engagement with the issue, which come together to form a whole ‘picture’. These are at the level of ontology, epistemology and experience. That is, what is the nature of disability, what causes disability and what is the experience of disability? He argues that in capitalist society ontological assumptions are made about the “pathological and problem-orientated nature of disability” (Oliver, 1996:30). At the epistemological level, since the causes of disability are about ‘perceived pathologies’ of the individual, society’s response is orientated towards prevention, treatment or cure. Oliver (1996:30) thus asserts that:

these assumptions and concerns exert a considerable influence on the way disability is experienced by both able-bodied and disabled people alike – to have a disability is to have a problem, to have a disability is to have ‘something wrong with you’.

Drawing from this analysis and from further critiques on this dominant view of disability (see especially Finkelstein, 1980; Oliver, 1986; 1990; Fulcher, 1989; Abberley, 1993, 1997; Barnes, 1996), three important concerns stand out that require particular emphasis for my research. Firstly, the ‘problem’ of disability is located with the individual (not with the society or social setting) who is seen to be an unfortunate victim of circumstance (French, 1994). Secondly, and following on from this, the response to this ‘problem’ is orientated towards addressing what are regarded as deficiencies or functional limitations within the individual (a deficit paradigm) and which need to be compensated for in order for the individual to cope better in an existing, unchanged environment. Since the cause is seen to be pathological in nature the compensatory response, in most instances, is also informed,

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especially important in developing and maintaining the legitimacy of this ideology. It is this notion of a justifying ideology around disability that is especially important for my thesis.

whatever the context, by the dominance of psycho-medical knowledge and expertise (Slee, 2001b)<sup>18</sup> as well as welfare interventions that are perceived to be neutral or merely technical in nature. The perceived neutrality or technical nature of the response serves to depoliticize disability and the practices (including educational) that stem from such a response (Fulcher, 1989; Barton and Oliver, 1992).

The third aspect of this dominant approach to disability is the underlying assumptions regarding notions of normality that it makes. As Abberley (1997) starkly puts it, such understandings of disability are based on the notion that disabled people are not normal. This is emphasised in relation to both the nature of a person's impairment, which is seen to cause deviations from physiological functions perceived to be normal, and an inability to perform particular social roles that are regarded as normal. As Oliver (1990) points out, such assumptions fail to recognise the situational and cultural relativity of normality. Moreover, as long as society makes assumptions and judgements about what is normal, individuals who are not able to "live up to the requirements of these roles" are always put at a disadvantage and "changes must be brought to bear on the individual rather than the environment" (Soder, quoted in OECD, 1987 and cited by Oliver, 1990:4). Shakespeare (1994) takes the issue of categorisation further by suggesting that through cultural representations of disabled people they are always constructed as 'the other' and thus, going back to Abberley (1997), that they are not part of the norm<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> Throughout this thesis I have chosen to make use of Slee's terminology of 'psycho-medical' to capture the dominance of knowledge and expertise associated with professionals traditionally involved in 'disability issues'. Drawing from the literature used in this thesis this would broadly include health care professionals (who are recognised to include professionals such as doctors, nurses, physiotherapists, occupational therapists, psychiatrists), psychologists, social workers, speech therapists, and as will be discussed in the next section on education, those professionals which Slee refers to as special educators.

<sup>19</sup> In his arguments around the cultural representation of disabled people Shakespeare (1994) draws strongly from some feminist writers, especially that of Simone de Beauvoir in her well-known book "The Second Sex", to explore the notion of 'othering' and the social construction of 'the other'.

In summary then this dominant or hegemonic understanding of disability; sets disability up as an individual problem; it pathologises disability, which locates responses to the needs of disabled people within a deficit paradigm, addressed through health and welfare interventions informed by 'expert' knowledge and perceived to be neutral or merely technical in nature; and it categorises disabled people as individuals who are not normal both in terms of their physiological makeup and their social functioning, and thus part of the 'other'.

Many of the critiques of this 'model' of disability have in fact sought to theorise and take forward an alternative approach to understanding disability largely pioneered by the organised disability movement in the United Kingdom. The latter argued that disability was in fact a form of social oppression imposed on people with impairments, which served to isolate and exclude them from participating in society (UPIAS, 1976). In their "Fundamental Principles of Disability" they state:

We define impairment as lacking part of or all of a limb, or having a defective limb, organ or mechanism of the body; and disability as the disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes no or little account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities. Physical disability is therefore a particular form of social oppression<sup>20</sup>.

This understanding was further developed by a number of sociologists (see especially Finkelstein, 1980; Oliver 1983; 1990; 1996; Fulcher, 1989;

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<sup>20</sup> Taken from the summary of discussions held between UPIAS and the Disability Alliance (UK), 22 November 1975. Version used here is an unabridged one of the discussions, reformatted by Mark Priestly in consultation with Vic Finkelstein and Ken Davis, October 1997.

Abberley, 1993, 1997; Barnes, 1996; Barton, 1996) into what is now referred to as a social model of disability (Oliver, 1990)<sup>21</sup>.

In essence these theorists<sup>22</sup> have drawn attention to the deeply political nature of disability as a phenomenon which develops out of the relationship between people with impairments and the unequal economic, social and political relations of the societies of which they are part (Finkelstein, 1980; Oliver, 1990; Abberley, 1997). Disability then becomes a 'political construct' arising out of the relationship between people with impairments, or perceived impairments as Fulcher (1989) notes, and the broader society. In this way as Corker and French (1999:2) emphasise "social model theory rests on the distinction between disability, which is socially created, and impairment, which is referred to as a physical attribute of the body".

Such an analysis of disability then forces us to turn our attention to the nature of this relationship, which for the social model theorists is a deeply oppressive relationship. Both Abberley (1997) and Oliver's (1990) work is especially useful in unpacking the nature of disability oppression. Most importantly, they emphasise its material basis with the associated "ideologies which propagate and reproduce" the economic, social and psychological disadvantages that constitute disability oppression (Abberley, 1997:176). Similarly, they emphasise the historical specificity of understanding disability. In other words, the phenomenon of disability needs to be contextualised within a specific set of historically bound social and material relations, "as opposed to decontextualised individual pathology, of impairment" (Slee discussing Abberley's arguments, 1996b:109).

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<sup>21</sup> Although Oliver's capturing of the arguments as a social model of disability is referenced earlier in the quote by Barnes and Mercer (2004:1) as 1981 and 1990 to denote his articulation of this concept as early as 1981, I have used 1990 here as the reference as it is this text that I have mainly drawn from in this thesis.

<sup>22</sup> It is important to recognise here that there are a number of other writers who have written about and developed further the arguments made by UPIAS. I have only referred to those that I have regarded as most valuable to the concerns of this thesis and from whom I have drawn from most extensively in developing this conceptual framework.

Oliver (1990) explains the nature of this oppressive relationship by discussing the 'politics of disablement' under the rise of capitalism in modern Western society. One of the central questions that he addresses is "why the view of disability as an individual, medical problem and a personal tragedy has been the dominant one in modern capitalist society" (Oliver, 1990:25). Referring back to his use of the concept of hegemony, as already discussed, he uses Gramsci's distinction between 'organic' and 'arbitrary' ideologies to put forward the notion of 'core' and 'peripheral' ideologies that inform understandings of disability under modern capitalist society. He traces, through a description of the rise of capitalism, how the core ideology of individualism and peripheral ideologies of what he calls 'medicalisation' and 'personal tragedy theory' that constitute "the hegemony that defines disability", are inextricably linked to capitalist social relations (Oliver, 1990:44)<sup>23</sup>.

It is important to note here that Abberley (1997) emphasises what he regards as a weakness in Oliver's early work (1986). He argues that Oliver tends to use oppression interchangeably with exploitation. Abberley (1997:162) argues that disability oppression involves a more careful interrogation of the concept of oppression. For him a crucial feature is:

its specificity of form, content and location; so to analyse the oppression of disabled people in part involves pointing to the essential

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<sup>23</sup> Gramsci's (1971) arguments stem from what he regarded as a "bad sense" of the concept of ideology, which failed to capture these two kinds of ideologies. In this regard Gramsci argues "One must therefore distinguish between historically organic ideologies, those, that is, which are necessary to a given structure, and ideologies that are arbitrary, rationalistic, or 'willed'" – the latter is about how people understand and make sense of the world and their position in it (including in relation to others) – such ideologies thus "create the terrain on which men move" (Gramsci, 1971:376). Thus, notions of personal tragedy and "medical intervention" shape the 'errain of what disability is perceived to be all about' (Oliver, 1990:44). Moreover, they become part of what Gramsci called the "common sense", or the largely "uncritical and unconscious way of perceiving and understanding the world that has become 'common' in any given epoch" (Hoare and Nowell Smith describing Gramsci's arguments, 1971:322).

differences between their lives and those of other sections of society, including those who are, in other ways, oppressed.

He argues therefore for the recognition of exploitation as economic exploitation in the classical Marxist analysis of class and oppression as “complementary to exploitation, extending the range of Marxist analysis to cover areas the latter concept cannot reach” (Abberley, 1997:164). This he argues is especially important in understanding disability oppression.

Abberley (1997:164) also deepens this analysis of disability oppression by looking at it comparatively with notions of racial and sexual oppression. He argues that in the case of racial and sexual oppression “biological difference serves only as a qualificatory condition of a wholly ideological oppression”. He argues that for disabled people the existence of a form of impairment is:

part of the oppression.... because it forms a bedrock upon which justificatory oppressive theories are based and, psychologically, an immense impediment to the development of political consciousness amongst disabled people (Abberley, 1997:164).

In other words, the existence of a real impairment provides for a ‘natural’ justification of oppressive social practices<sup>24</sup>. Tomlinson (1982:9), in her development of a sociology of special education, argues that the treatment of certain groups in society is regarded as so ‘natural’ that sociologists accept the “prevailing ideologies” and the resultant inequalities without question, and therefore regard these issues as “unworthy of study”.

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<sup>24</sup> It is important to note here that Abberley (1997) also argues that impairment itself is in fact a ‘social product’ and not the normal wear and tear on the human body. He correctly argues that this line of argument is especially important in less industrialised context where issues such as poverty and lack of access to essential health services are critical factors in the prevalence of impairments among a population.

While it is not possible within the scope of this thesis to discuss in more detail the various theoretical underpinnings of a social model of disability, the arguments of Abberley (1997) and Oliver (1990) in particular, have an important function within the development of a conceptual framework for my own research. In essence, as Slee (1996b:109) suggests “they turn the gaze away from the individual towards the conditions of the world they inhabit”. This has two important implications. Firstly, these arguments turn the attention of the researcher away from the individual disabled student to the functioning of the higher education institutional environment and its location within a particular historically defined social, political and economic context. Secondly, by arguing that a social theory of disability must involve an interrogation of the material and ideological conditions that shape how society makes meaning of disability and the nature of the inequalities experienced by disabled people, the researcher is forced to grapple with both the structural and ideological forces involved (and their interconnectedness) in defining the nature of the problem.

For Barton (1996), of particular importance in such an analysis of disability is the way in which these forces establish and legitimate barriers, albeit often in complex and contradictory ways, to the equitable participation of disabled people. In this research I am concerned with considering the structural and ideological forces within South African higher education institutions that create barriers to the equitable participation of disabled students.

Within the broad framework of writers who have sought to challenge dominant understandings of disability a number have deepened the debates by, as Corker and French (1999) assert, reclaiming discourse in disability studies. Drawing from those writers who have sought to interpret the phenomenon of disability using the concept of discourse, and, in some cases deepening understandings of the relationship between impairment and disability oppression from a social model perspective (Corker and French, 1999), three aspects of the discussion are regarded as especially important

for this research. The discussion that follows also draws strongly from the work of Gillian Fulcher (1989) who uses key aspects of Foucault's work on discourse to discuss educational policy and disability in Australia. She asserts that, "Discourses articulate the world in certain ways: they 'identify' problems', perspectives on those problems and thus 'solutions'" (Fulcher, 1989:8). In this way discourses around impairment and disability are especially important in defining the 'problem' of disability, including where it is located, how it is articulated and legitimised, who is regarded as having the authority to respond to it and in what way.

With this in mind, the concept of discourse is important, firstly, because it focuses attention on the role of language in constructing meanings around disability and informing social policy and practices that create and maintain particular relations of power within society (or within institutions). The latter assertion draws attention to the second important aspect of the literature, which emphasises the extent to which dominant discourses on disability serve to privilege the knowledge and expertise of psycho-medical professionals above other forms of knowledge, including the experiential knowledge of disabled people themselves as well as parents of disabled children. As Ball (1990:2), in discussing Foucault's work, emphasises:

Discourses are about what can be said and thought, but also about who can speak, when, and with what authority. Discourses embody meaning and social relationships, they constitute both subjectivity and power relations.

In other words, as Davies, Williams and Webb (1997:15) assert, in discussing Foucault's analytical framework in relation to access to higher education, we need to consider the social and political position of those who speak about the issue and thus the way in which "power and position interconnect with knowledge construction". As will be discussed in the next section, the privileging of medically orientated knowledge and thus the associated power

of these professionals in 'speaking' about disabled people, is especially important in the education sphere. It is important in relation to what issues it directs attention to, whose knowledge and expertise are regarded as most important (Fulcher, 1989), and, of particular concern to this study, its implications for change and the creation of equity.

Most importantly, however, is the way in which such knowledge is validated and legitimised and becomes 'naturalized' and thus 'normalized' and part of the "ideological common sense" (Fairclough, 1989:92). For Fairclough (1989:92), "Naturalization is the royal road to common sense. Ideologies come to be ideological common sense to the extent that the discourse types which embody them become naturalized". The discourse types that become part of the ideological common sense are those articulated by social groupings with the most power. He therefore asserts that, "What comes to be common sense is thus in large measure determined by who exercises power and domination in a society or a social institution". In this way, dominant discourses of disability, deployed through professionals with particular kinds of knowledge, and the 'legitimate' power to speak about the issues, serves to normalise a medical model of disability in all its manifestations and, most importantly, places disabled people "outside the social construction of normality" (Slee, 1996b:110).

Once again, while it is not possible within the scope of this thesis to discuss in more detail the literature on discourse and disability, it is important to note the extent to which these contributions reinforce the key arguments already emphasised around disability hegemony (Oliver, 1990,1996). Moreover, as will become evident in the next sections of this chapter, it is the extent to which dominant discourses of disability insinuate themselves into the institutional arrangements of a social order and in this way the dominant discourse "realizes itself as a practical system of power and a system of social control" (Chua, 1981, cited in Fulcher, 1989:25). In this thesis I am most concerned with the extent to which dominant discourses of disability

inform practices of higher education institutions in responding to the participation of disabled students.<sup>25</sup>

## **2.3 The sphere of education**

### **2.3.1 The challenge to special education and 'special needs'**

In the previous section my intention was to explore the phenomenon of disability from the perspective of a number of sociologists who have sought to critically interrogate the dominant medical discourse of disability (Fulcher, 1989) and in so doing develop a socio-political theory of disability which challenges these 'accepted truths'. In Section 2.3 here my objective is to turn my intention more fully on the sphere of education as a particular institutional setting in which such understandings of disability inform and shape the nature of provision and the associated educational practices. More specifically, I am concerned with developing a more informed understanding of how this dominant view of disability has translated itself into a common sense (Gramsci, 1971) about the nature of educational provision for disabled learners. Most importantly, however, for the purposes of my research project, I am concerned with the impact of how this common sense (Gramsci, 1971) shapes policy and practice towards the participation of disabled students in higher education.

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<sup>25</sup> In the light of the arguments discussed in this chapter so far, I have made a deliberate decision to refer throughout my research to disabled students rather than students with disabilities. A number of writers who would locate themselves within a social theory of disability framework use the terminology of people with disabilities. Such terminology is also recognised and used internationally (see especially the United Nation's Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities) and within South Africa (see the White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy (Office of the Deputy President, 1997) in policies which take forward the rights of disabled people. However, if it is recognised as UPIAS emphasised in 1976 that disability was a disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by inequalities within the society, then 'disabled' must be used as an adjective to describe the position or relationship of persons with impairments to that society. It also becomes a verb to describe the nature of this oppressive relationship as it manifests in people's lives.

In taking forward this discussion I am starting from the premise that any attempt to understand the relationship between understandings of disability and the nature of the education services that have existed historically for disabled learners in South Africa and throughout the world, can only be done by focussing attention on what has historically been called special education or education for learners with 'special education needs'.<sup>26</sup> In other words, where education provision has existed for disabled learners it has largely been through special education services separated from mainstream provision and specifically designed to provide for learners categorised as those with 'special needs'. It is into this category that historically the majority of disabled learners have been placed. Thus it is a critical interrogation of the phenomenon of special education and 'special needs', and the challenges to these concepts and associated forms of provision, which becomes a central concern for my thesis.

At one level, like the literature on disability, it may be argued that the literature dealing with the field of special education or 'special needs' is vast. For many years much of the literature consisted of discussions and debates about what was best in "responding to children who experience difficulties in school, including those who have disabilities" (Sebba and Ainscow, 1996:5). Similarly, a number of writers attempted to analyse the development of provision, primarily in Western countries, which collectively showed certain patterns (Reynolds and Ainscow, 1994 cited in Sebba and Ainscow, 1996). The following was evident as the dominant trajectory followed in most of these countries:

Initial provision frequently takes the form of separate special schools set up by religious or philanthropic organisations. This is then, eventually, adopted and extended as part of national educational

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<sup>26</sup> I have deliberately chosen to place the concept of 'special needs' in inverted commas to denote its contested nature. This contestation forms a central focus of the discussion in this section.

provision, often leading to a separate, parallel school system for those pupils seen as being in need of special arrangements (Sebba and Ainscow, 1996:5).<sup>27</sup>

However, as they pointedly assert, more recently the debate has shifted to a more substantial interrogation of the appropriateness of such separate provision, which, they argue, has been challenged from a “human rights perspective and, indeed, from the point of view of effectiveness” (Sebba and Ainscow, 1996:5). The result has been a focus on notions of integration and more recently on notions of inclusive education.

While Sebba and Ainscow (1996) correctly assert that challenges to separate systems of special education have come from considerations of its effectiveness and from a rights perspective, I would argue that the most important challenges have come through, once again, an attempt by a few individuals to bring considerations of special education and special needs into the realm of sociological inquiry (see especially Tomlinson, 1982; Barton, 1986; Fulcher, 1989; Barton and Oliver, 1992; Riddell, 1996; Booth, 1996, 2000; Slee, 1996, 1997, 1999, 2001). However, like the phenomenon of disability, it has been an aspect of the sociology of education that has largely been ignored by sociologists. As Barton and Oliver (1992:67) argue: “Historically therefore, the nature and functions of the special educational system, has been an essentially invisible entity as far as sociological analysis is concerned”.

Once again much of this sociological line of enquiry has taken the form of a critical interrogation of dominant understandings around ‘special needs’ and thus the supposed necessity for forms of special education provision. As can

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<sup>27</sup> Drawing from the work of Mittler et al (1993), Sebba and Ainscow (1996:5) comment that there is also some evidence of similar trends in “so-called developing countries”. As will be discussed later this is certainly the case in South Africa and, I would argue, reflects, as in many ex-colonies, the impact of a particular aspect of the legacy of colonialism, including the setting up of special schools by religious bodies (Naicker, 1997).

be expected these analyses have turned attention away from seeing special education as a form of “benevolent humanitarianism” which takes forward the obligation of “civilised society to care for its weaker members” (Tomlinson, 1982:5). Rather special education and the underlying concept of ‘special needs’ is argued to be a deeply political issue that reflects the power of medical and psychological perspectives on “shaping the definitions, policies and practices of special education” with the associated “stigmatising labels (that) have been applied to those individuals deemed in need of such provision” (Barton and Oliver, 1992:67). As can be expected these critical engagements with special education and ‘special needs’ have been strongly influenced by the socio-political understandings of disability discussed earlier. In applying Abberley’s (1997) assertions discussed in the previous section, the value of applying this framework within the sphere of special education allows us to connect the common features of educational disadvantage experienced by disabled learners with the material and ideological forces that produce, propagate and reproduce them.

There are three key areas of concern addressed within the literature which are important for the purposes of this study and which, I believe, provide important insights for investigating the participation of disabled students in the South African higher education system. While these three issues are discussed as distinctive aspects of the debate, they are inherently interconnected. It is this interconnectedness that is important in understanding how the common sense (Gramsci, 1971) of ‘special needs’ and special education has been generally accepted and, in many circles, remains unquestioned. While the issues raised in the discussion have arisen largely out of criticisms of the nature of provision at the schooling level, their relevance is evident in the higher education terrain as well. These latter considerations form the focus of the discussion in Section 2.4 of this chapter.

The first area of concern that I wish to address relates to the construction of the category of ‘special needs’ learner (Barton, 1986) and related to this (and

arising from it) the separation, noted earlier, of special education services from those regarded as ordinary or 'normal'. Historically, in many countries in the world, including South Africa, education planners, policy makers and practitioners have tended to identify, classify and categorise learners through notions of 'normality'. In the same way that disabled people have been regarded as individuals who are 'not normal' (Abberley, 1997) learners have effectively been divided into those who were 'normal' and those who had 'special needs' (that is, those who were therefore 'not normal'). In general, 'normal' learners were seen as those who coped effectively in the existing mainstream education system, while 'special needs' learners were those who had problems of some kind and thus experienced difficulties or were likely to experience difficulties within the existing mainstream system. This included learners categorised as disabled or those with disabilities<sup>28</sup> (Sebba and Ainscow, 1996). It followed then that this scenario warranted the provision of educational services, separated from the mainstream where such difficulties could be addressed and the learning needs of these learners met through specialised interventions.

In my opinion, one of the most important aspects of the sociological inquiry into special education noted above has been the way in which a number of writers have sought to challenge the categorisation of learners into those with and without 'special needs'. More specifically, they have sought to reconceptualise who in fact 'special needs' learners are. In this way they have followed a line of enquiry that sets 'special needs' up as a relational category that has become a collective phrase for those learners who have "been categorised out of 'normal' education" (Tomlinson, 1982:6).

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<sup>28</sup> It is important to note here that Fulcher (1989) in discussing the construction of the category of disability and thus disabled learner, argues that disability has become a category within the education arena which exists whether or not an impairment actually exists or not. In other words she emphasises the shifting and essentially bureaucratic nature of this category of learner.

In her seminal work on developing a sociology of special education Tomlinson (1982) emphasises two important concerns in this regard. Firstly, through her research in the United Kingdom she argued that learners placed in special education provision were mainly those who were “the unwanted, objectionable and difficult pupils” and moreover, they were “largely from lower socio-economic backgrounds and black children (were) over-represented among them” (Barton and Oliver, 1992:69 on Tomlinson’s research). Barton (1986:273) has taken these assertions further to argue that ‘children with special education needs’ has become a “euphemism for failure”. Secondly, in emphasising the role of medically orientated professionals Tomlinson points to ongoing contestations around who in fact does or does not legitimately fit into the category of ‘special needs’ learners and thus contestations around the definition of special education. She argues strongly that the history of special education in the United Kingdom has largely been about power struggles between medical, psychological and educational personnel, “who all have an interest in dominating definitions of special education” (Tomlinson, 1982:27).

Thus both Tomlinson (1982) and Barton (1986) suggest that the category of ‘special needs’ is in fact one that captures those learners who are either unwanted by the system or who “are deemed unable to meet the standards by which the system measures success” (Barton and Oliver, 1992:74). The concept of ‘special needs’ is therefore a highly relative concept and in fact provides little insight into the nature of the particular learning needs of those learners categorised in this way. In the next section I have given some attention to interpreting the notion of ‘learning needs’ within the context of this study. It is a term whose meaning contains its own issues of contestation and therefore has to be used with caution. Without pre-empting this discussion, it is important to state upfront that for the purposes of this study, the notion of learning needs refers to what each learner requires from the education system and thus the teaching and learning process to access the curriculum and participate effectively in the teaching and learning process. This

interpretation, including what is meant by access to the curriculum is discussed in depth in the next section.

Among learners categorised as 'special needs' learners a diverse range of learning needs may exist. They may use a range of styles and methods to engage with the curriculum and thus require different things from the teaching and learning process to ensure such access. Their 'special' nature relates more to their relationship to the mainstream education system rather than what is required to enable them to participate effectively and equitably in the teaching and learning process. Tomlinson (1982) and Barton's (1986) work further points to the presence of race and class inequalities in influencing those who make up this category. In this way 'special needs' serves to mask the ways in which education systems reproduce existing inequalities within the society. Barton and Oliver (1992:68) develop this argument further by suggesting that any attempts to interrogate these questions are "seen as unnecessary and unhelpful" as the "'special' quality of such provision is justified on the grounds that all children are treated equally". In other words as these children are all 'special' the assumption is that they will be treated equally. However, what is important to stress is that while the actual definition of who actually constitutes 'special needs' learners may be different within different contexts, it always includes those learners most vulnerable to exclusion within that education system. This argument is taken forward with regard to the South African situation in Chapter Three.

The second important aspect Tomlinson (1982) and Barton (1986) emphasise in their work are the roles played by so-called 'experts' in dominating this arena. This dominance arises from the pathologising of 'special needs'. That is, where a learner's 'special need' is seen to arise from a physiological deficit within the learner which impacts on or restricts their ability to learn in a way which is regarded as normal. This orientation in turn makes way for compensatory, technical interventions aimed at overcoming the learner's 'handicap' or 'learning difficulty' so that they can cope better

within the existing environment. Such interventions become the domain of those who are seen to have specialised knowledge and expertise in 'special needs' or special education. Because the 'deficit' is seen to be of a physiological nature, psycho-medical knowledge is needed to address the 'problem' or the kind of expertise that is required. For Slee (2001a:392) the result of this is that "professional knowledge is privileged over that of parents, classroom teachers and student advocates".

For Fulcher (1989:35) the most important consequence of this, which she argues is translated into practice through "clinical individualistic and allegedly technical discourses", is that individual deficit becomes the focus of attention rather than considerations of teaching practices. The extent to which attention is focused on addressing individual deficit rather than pedagogical issues is highlighted by both Fulcher (1989) and Slee (2001a) who both argue strongly that it is these latter issues which are at the heart of placing different students at risk of exclusion within an education system. Slee (2001a:388) argues that, in fact, the reductionism that results from this focus serves to "undermine our capacity to deconstruct exclusionary educational practices and the oppressive social relations in schools". While these arguments focus on schooling they are equally critical to the higher education terrain. They become central to considering what knowledge and expertise are privileged and influence the responses of institutions to the participation of disabled students.

These latter concerns flag the two further areas addressed in the literature on 'special needs' and special education that are of particular importance for my research. For all the writers cited above, one of the most important consequences of these trends within the area of 'special needs' and thus education provision for disabled learners is the extent to which the issues become 'depoliticised'. That is, they are set up as technical issues that are above political interrogation or unrelated to key areas of contestation in education. I have already emphasised the race and class distinctions noted

by Tomlinson (1982), Barton (1986) and Barton and Oliver (1992) and the extent to which notions of 'special' mask these inequalities.

Barton and Oliver (1992) characterise this depoliticisation by asking the question "Special Needs: personal trouble or public issue?". Slee (1996a:25) goes so far as to call it a "pathologising of political economy". What is especially important is that this process of depoliticisation has a myriad of consequences that are often unrecognised and unchallenged. Most importantly, it serves to remove the issue of 'special needs' and education provision for disabled learners from mainstream, political debates that characterise education provision in any country. Moreover, even where issues of rights and equity are raised in relation to education for disabled learners "in the absence of a rigorous socio-political critique of 'exclusion' we are left with an ethical or a technical polemic that does nothing to challenge the social power upon which exclusion is based" (Armstrong, Armstrong and Barton, 2000:9). I will be arguing in the next chapter that this process of 'depoliticisation' has had a significant impact on influencing how access and participation of disabled students in the South African higher education system has been historically understood and addressed. In an education context where concerns about rights, equity and redressing the inequalities of the past have dominated government policy and practices over the last 12 years, I have regarded this tendency as a critical issue to be aware of in my study.

The final issue addressed in the literature that is important for this research and which has already been alluded to, is the extent to which these critiques bring into focus the imperatives towards 'normalisation' which happen through the functioning of the dominant mainstream education system (Tomlinson, 1982; Barton, 1986; Fulcher, 1989; Slee, 2001b). The point is consistently made that creating a category of 'special needs' learner and, historically, the associated forms of separate provision, acts as a "safety valve for the central educational apparatus" (Tomlinson (1982) cited in

Fulcher, 1989:39). For Slee (2001b:173) this is about the “normalization of difference”. In other words, by categorising those who are different in some way as having ‘special needs’ with the associated assumption of a personal problem or deficit there is no imperative or obligation on the part of the mainstream system to change in any way to accommodate or respond to this difference. In fact, technical, psycho-medical criteria can be legitimately put forward to justify the lack of change and the effective exclusion of some learners (Fulcher, 1989).

### **2.3.2 The political project of inclusive education**

At the beginning of the previous section I argued that the value of applying a ‘sociological lens’ to traditional, ‘common sense’ conceptualisations of education for disabled learners, lay in its ability to provide greater insight into the nature of this educational experience. More specifically, it allows us to make the connections between the educational inequalities experienced by disabled learners and the material and ideological forces that produce, propagate and reproduce them (Abberley, 1997). While much of the discussion in the previous section deals with critiques of special education and the concept of ‘special needs’ and therefore focuses mainly on key concerns in schooling, the value of this discussion for my research is twofold. Firstly, it suggests that the nature of the inequalities experienced by disabled learners in accessing and participating within the South African higher education system has a material and ideological basis. Moreover, this experience cannot be reduced to one arising purely from the effects of an apartheid higher education system designed to perpetuate the political and economic power of the white minority. Rather, it suggests that the inequalities experienced by disabled learners in higher education arise out of the complex interaction between apartheid inequalities and the overall experience of disability within our society. The discussion in the previous section provides important insights for understanding the nature of these latter forces, both material and ideological, in shaping the educational

experience of disabled learners. Secondly, in challenging accepted truths about educational provision and disabled learners, it also provides some conceptual tools for 'rethinking' these issues and, in particular, the kinds of changes that are needed to create an equitable and just higher education system for disabled learners in South Africa.

This sets up an alternative frame of reference for answering three central questions within my research. Put simply, these are: "Where does the problem lie?"; "What is the nature of the problem?"; and "What is required to address the problem?". In providing new or different answers to these questions, my objective is to construct a set of criteria against which I can evaluate the institutional responses explored in this study. My central objective is to evaluate the institutional responses by reflecting on how the educational inequalities experienced by disabled learners are understood, conceptualised and articulated through the practices of institutions towards disabled students. From this analysis follows a consideration of the extent to which such practices are appropriate for bringing about the equity considerations noted above or, in fact, may perpetuate or deepen existing inequalities.

I have started this task from the premise that these alternative criteria arise out of what I will call the political project of inclusive education. For Slee (2001b:174) it is a "project of educational reconceptualization and radical reconstruction", which seeks to overcome the exclusionary practices and oppressive social relations of education systems that "reconstruct difference as disadvantage" (Armstrong, Armstrong and Barton, 2000:2). In other words, it is a project that is intent on addressing the failure on the part of education systems to respond to the differences that learners bring to the teaching and learning process and challenging the ways in which such failure is justified and legitimised.

My intention in this section of the chapter is to capture those arguments, which, in building on the sociological critiques of the phenomenon of disability and 'special needs' in education, develop an alternative framework for responding to differences within a learner population. In my research I am especially concerned with notions of difference as it pertains to differences in learning needs. I argued in the previous section that, for the purposes of this study, the notion of learning needs refers to what each learner requires from the education system and thus the teaching and learning process to access the curriculum and participate effectively in the teaching and learning process. Thus for many disabled learners their learning needs may include various different ways of accessing the curriculum and participating in the process of teaching and learning – what Corbett (2000) refers to as the diverse learning styles of students. For example, some learners who have a visual impairment may make use of Braille to read and record information while others may make use of recording equipment and word processing equipment towards the same objective.

The notion of learning needs as understood and referred to in this way is central to the concerns addressed in this thesis. However, such a conceptualisation also brings to the fore two interrelated issues that require further discussion before such a conceptualisation can be used and applied to the research findings. The first has to do with some of the concerns that exist regarding the use of the concept of 'need' as in the 'learning needs' of disabled students. The second concerns the notion of curriculum access and what this is taken to mean. My intention throughout this thesis is to demonstrate how important these concerns are to the equitable participation of disabled students in higher education and the opportunities that exist for them to have fair chances for success.

To introduce the discussion on learning needs it is necessary to briefly return to the earlier critiques of dominant ways of understanding and responding to disability. Within the framework of these debates, Oliver and Barnes

(1996:269)<sup>29</sup> argue that, central to this hegemony and thus to the discrimination which disabled people experience, is the privileging of the notion of need above that of rights. In this way, the 'needs' of disabled people become the perceived deficits, which the system, in particular the welfare system, seeks to compensate for. In this way, need is associated with deficit and perpetuates the perception of disabled people as passive individuals in need of care and thus dependent on the state or caring individuals. They are not seen as active citizens with the right to the full benefits of their society, including having the opportunity to participate equitably within their communities.

Armstrong, Armstrong and Barton (2000:10) link these concerns to the ways in which the educational or learning needs of different learners are conceived. In engaging critically with the concept of inclusive education, they argue that the notion of 'educational needs' can, in the absence of a more careful engagement with the issues already discussed in relation to disability and 'special needs', become a way of perpetuating particular relations of power and control. More specifically, they argue that an assessment of 'educational (or learning) need' can be used as a way of emphasising or legitimising the degree to which a learner differs from "some assumed norm". In this way learning needs become seen as deficits or functional limitations that must be addressed through "the allocation of compensatory resources or alternative forms of provision" (Armstrong, Armstrong and Barton, 2000:10) to enable that learner to learn in the 'normal' way. Not only does such a conceptualisation return to an individualistic, deficit paradigm but it also "inadequately problematises the relations of power and control that underpin the construction of the interests of some as the 'needs' of others." (Armstrong, Armstrong and Barton, 2000:9).

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<sup>29</sup> These arguments derive from a careful interrogation of the rise of the welfare state in the United Kingdom and its impact on disabled people.

If understood in this way, the concept of 'learning needs' is no different to the notion of 'special needs'. Some learners have 'ordinary' learning needs – defined by what is regarded as normal and some learners have 'special' learning needs – defined as being different from what is regarded as normal. In this way, Beauchamp-Pryor (2004:108), in discussing the higher education context, argues that a “needs-led” approach in policy and provision, which is underpinned by a 'medical model', will always reinforce the stigmatisation of disabled students. The notion of need therefore reinforces a deficit paradigm where the 'problem' is located with the learner and the nature of the 'problem' requires compensations so that they can be able to learn like other 'normal' learners.

While these concerns are extremely important to recognise, Armstrong, Armstrong and Barton (2000:10) argue that the notion of needs can be reconsidered and interpreted differently. They argue that:

the concept of 'needs' can be understood in the context of the power relationships which underpin it; a context that comprises both cultural and historical aspects as well as interpersonal and institutional aspects.

In this way an alternative way of understanding learning needs is introduced. The notion of need is transferred from the individual to the system. Thus the need becomes one of considering what the system 'needs' to do (or the changes that 'need' to take place), including challenging the barriers and associated inequalities that exist, so that each learner is able to participate effectively within the process of teaching and learning and thus have fair chances for success<sup>30</sup>. If such participation is dependent on a

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<sup>30</sup> Some of my initial thinking around and exploration into the notion of learning needs as I am using it in this study, took place during the policy deliberations which I was involved in towards the development of the joint report of the National Commission on Special Needs in Education and Training (NCSNET) and the National Commission on Education Support Services (NCESS) (1998). Much of the conceptual thinking here draws from discussions that

responsiveness to and accommodation of different styles and methods of engagement with the curriculum, then learning needs become about this relationship between differences in style and forms of engagement and the systems capacity to respond to such differences. This implies that the notion of learning need is dynamic and can only be understood by considering what the learner requires from the teaching and learning process, their specific learning requirements (Riddell, 1998) and the system's capacity to meet these requirements. Similarly, it also implies that learning needs may change as the context of teaching and learning changes or, as Brown and Simpson (2004:71) argue, what is being accessed changes. They emphasise in relation to disabled students in higher education:

Students that have impairments do not have requirements in a vacuum, but only in relation to what it is that they are trying to access, and knowledge of that is at least as important as knowledge about the circumstances of any particular impairment.

If learning needs are looked at in this relational way then it is necessary to move away from categorisations of perceived needs based on the nature of an impairment, to a consideration of individual styles of engagement and appropriate processes and mechanisms to respond to this. Such styles arise from a range of factors, of which impairment is one, and may change as the learner and context of teaching and learning changes. Thus a student with a visual impairment's learning needs may change as they acquire new skills (such as moving from the use of Braille to electronic forms of communication) or move into a different teaching and learning context (such as moving from school into higher education). Responding to such learning needs can never therefore be something that is merely determined by considering the learner's impairment or the physiological category into which it is seen to fit.

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took place around the importance of moving from the notion of 'special needs' to barriers to learning and development. The essence of this paradigm shift is discussed in Chapters One and Two of the NCSNET/NCESS report (Department of Education, 1998) I am therefore indebted to my colleagues on the NCSNET/NCESS for their work around these concerns.

In the light of these arguments I have also been deliberate in my use of 'learning needs' as opposed to 'learner needs'. The former encapsulates the notion of a process of engagement with the curriculum while 'learner' implies that the need is part of the learner, divorced from the particular learning context where the need may change. However, in arguing this, I am not suggesting that all learners do not have personal needs that impact on their participation as learners. My concern here, however, is with their style and method of engagement with the curriculum and what is required to ensure that such engagement is able to happen effectively.

It is easy to assume that the most important condition that needs to be in place, for each learner to be able to participate in the teaching and learning process and thus have a fair chance to succeed, is for them to have physical access to the educational provision that exists. If such access is denied, for example, where a wheel-chair user is confronted with steps into a classroom, or, a learner cannot afford to pay the minimum fees that are required for such provision, a learner may be excluded from that provision that exists. While such forms of exclusion are very important, some writers have argued for the need to deepen this understanding of access and thus exclusion. Morrow (1993:3), in considering access to higher education in South Africa, argues for the need to distinguish between formal and actual access. In the university context the latter, he argues, means having "access to the goods which the university distributes. As the essential good distributed by a university is knowledge, we can call the latter 'epistemological access'". He argues further, "formal access does not guarantee epistemological access, although formal access is a necessary condition for epistemological access".

So access involves much more than physical presence in the classroom. It also means; being able to have access to all the information shared in the lessons; being able to participate as an active learner in the classroom, including sharing ones own knowledge and experience with the teacher and the other learners; being able to demonstrate ones acquisition and

understanding of the knowledge that has been gained; and having the opportunity to translate and reproduce such knowledge and understanding within one's life situation. If the notion of curriculum is taken to incorporate all these facets, it implies that there are two central elements to curriculum access. Firstly, it involves the learner's active participation in a "social relationship 'lived out' within the process of education and which carries over into the wider social context" (Nunan, George and McCausland, 2000:66). For such a relationship to be just and thus create access for all learners it must be one that includes "all participants and provide(s) opportunities for the expression of the capacities of all individuals or of any group" so that a situation is created "in which oppression, exploitation and domination are minimized or rejected" (Nunan, George and McCausland, 2000:66). In the higher education context, in particular, such a relationship must include an element of knowledge sharing and acquisition that forms part of the process of knowledge transference and production within the academy. For the purposes of this study curriculum access is therefore recognised to include both a participatory and acquisition element, which must both be met if epistemological access is to be met. If either of these aspects is compromised for the student, curriculum access is restricted. As Nunan, George and McCausland (2000:70) argue:

The curriculum presents, through its content and processes, varied opportunities for students to engage with it. Its selection of content and assessment, its use of particular learning styles, its assumptions about what students already know and bring to their studies, its use of language, its covert assumptions about the nature of academic argument and its silences all impact upon how individuals participate in educational experiences.

It has already been argued that learners may have different styles and methods of engaging in the processes described above and thus in accessing the curriculum. Thus if all learners, including those who are

disabled, are to have access to the curriculum, the system has to be able to respond and accommodate all these different ways and capacities to learn. This places a responsibility on the education system to develop and sustain such capacity. If such a responsibility is considered from a social justice perspective, then the fulfilment of such responsibilities on the part of the education system at the teaching and learning level is central to the realisation of the right to education and, as part of this, having equitable access to its opportunities, entitlements and benefits.

Similarly, where the system fails to exercise and meet these responsibilities at the teaching and learning level, some learners become effectively excluded from it, and thus from its opportunities, entitlements and benefits. It is those learners, such as many disabled learners, whose learning styles require the greatest degrees of flexibility in the teaching and learning process, and at times, higher levels of pedagogical support, that are most vulnerable to such forms of exclusion. For writers such as Armstrong, Armstrong and Barton (2000:6) it is such curriculum exclusion or effective exclusion from the teaching and learning process that is most “insidious” as it operates in unofficial and invisible ways to exclude learners. Moreover, as I have already argued in the previous section, such exclusion is sanctioned through policies and practices that justify and legitimise it. Fulcher (1989:38) emphasises that such exclusion constitutes a form of oppression for disabled learners where they are stigmatised and marginalized through a complexity of educational practices that “construct exclusion rather than inclusion”. One of the most important ways in which such failure on the part of the education system and thus effective exclusion of some learners is legitimised, is by locating the ‘problem’ with the individual learner. As discussed in the previous section the response to the problem becomes a compensatory one aimed at addressing the individual, ‘natural’, ‘physiological deficits or functional limitations’ of the learner, which are responsible for the difficulties they experience in participating in the ‘normal’ teaching and learning process. Moreover, the response, informed by a psycho-medical

discourse, is seen as a neutral, technical process, most often associated with addressing a “problem of resource allocation” and deploying “appropriate professional expertise” (Slee, 1996a: 19). In this way the response becomes a depoliticised process focused on technical solutions (Riddell, 1998) removed from any interrogation of existing pedagogical processes (Fulcher, 1989) and the extent to which the teaching and learning process may be responsible for the ‘problems’ experienced by these learners.

Learners who are seen to experience such ‘problems’ are categorised in a way that distinguishes them from those who are regarded as normal, and in this way they become constructed as ‘the other’ (Shakespeare, 1994). Not only does such categorisation fail to recognise the diversity of learning needs which exist among these ‘other’ learners, it also disguises other inequalities, such as those arising from race, class and gender, and the extent to which these impact on the lives of these learners and their learning experiences. For disabled students the process of categorisation is dominated by the construction of the ‘special needs student’, which, as a legitimate “scholastic identity”, provides a framework for “managing the problem of the disabled student.” (Slee, 1996b: 113).

It is this tendency towards categorization and the associated process of normalization that is especially important in contributing to the common sense (Gramsci, 1971) of disability and educational provision for disabled learners. It informs, reproduces and strengthens the hegemony of disability discussed earlier. This hegemony then as Williams (1977:110) argues is:

in effect a saturation of the whole process of living – not only of political and economic activity, nor only of manifest social activity, but of the whole substance of lived identities and relationships, to such a depth that the pressures and limits of what can ultimately be seen as a specific economic, political, and cultural system seem to most of us the pressures and limits of simple experience and common sense...it

is a lived system of meanings and values – constitutive and constituting – which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming.

While such a process of categorization may become part of this common sense (Gramsci, 1971) about disabled people and be argued to be in the best interests of the learner (they are identified as requiring 'special' treatment), it does in the many ways already discussed, lead to their effective marginalization and exclusion from mainstream society. Within the education sphere it effectively constitutes, albeit in complex and contradictory ways, a form of discrimination, which becomes part of the experience of disability oppression (Oliver, 1990; Abberley, 1997). As MacLaren (1997:570) argues in the context of race:

People don't discriminate against groups because they are different but rather the act of discrimination constructs categories of difference that hierarchically locate people as 'superior' or 'inferior' and then universalises and naturalizes such differences.

If, as the discussion above suggests, the unequal and oppressive educational experience for disabled learners arises out of a failure on the part of education systems to respond to differences in what learners require to access the curriculum, then the 'problem' rests with the system rather than the learner. Thus the political project of inclusive education as articulated here provides a fundamental challenge to the way in which we think and make meaning of difference within the teaching and learning process. Unlike the individualistic, deficit paradigm of 'special needs', it suggests a systemic paradigm in which the structure and functioning of the education system, particularly the nature of the dominant teaching and learning process, is called into question. It follows then that the response is orientated towards systemic change in which issues of difference, including diversity in the learning needs of the learner population, is recognised, acknowledged

and responded to from a social justice and equity perspective. In other words the different learning needs of learners are equally valued and met within the mainstream teaching and learning process. Barton and Oliver (1992:80) argue that in this regard “difference must not be merely tolerated and accepted but positively valued and celebrated”. Slee (1996a:27) extends this argument to assert that it is about the “valuing of differences in a new set of social relations”. In this way he draws attention to inclusive education as a process involving ideological or discursive changes to the way in which we conceptualise and respond to difference, *and* material or structural changes to the organisation and practices of education. Once again, as already emphasised in the arguments around a socio-political understanding of disability and disability oppression, including the forms of educational oppression experienced by disabled learners, it has a material and ideological basis. Addressing such inequalities therefore involves a “political critique of social values and practices and the structures and institutions which they support” (Armstrong, Armstrong and Barton, 2000:11).

I have argued thus far around the notion of inclusive education as an inherently political project that seeks to address educational inequalities arising from the failure on the part of education systems to respond to differences that learners bring to the teaching and learning process. I have argued that such a project is especially important in understanding the nature of the inequalities experienced by disabled learners and offers an alternative framework for identifying the ideological and structural changes that are necessary in the creation of equity. Such conceptualisations of inclusive education, and the social justice concerns underpinning it, are important for my research and set the parameters for how I intend to take forward these considerations within the context of higher education.

While I have chosen to explore the concept of inclusive education through the eyes of those writers who argue for its importance as a political project, like any concept it changes its meaning and its effect as it is “deployed within

different discourses” (Ball, 1990:2). It would therefore be remiss within the framework of this thesis not to recognise some of the concerns that have been raised around notions of inclusive education. Central to these are the use of the concepts of inclusion and exclusion in describing the nature of educational inequalities.

Sayed (2003:84) argues that, while notions of educational inclusion and exclusion are prominently used in social policy research, their use is problematic because “they are difficult to define and agree upon”. In this way they assume different meanings depending on who is using them and in what way, and thus may reflect very different discourses. Armstrong, Armstrong and Barton (2000:1) suggest that the different understandings of the concepts and thus their analysis are “shaped by historical, cultural, global and contextual influences. This provides both the complexity and challenge to all who venture into this particular area of research”. Of importance in the context of the discussion of inclusive education as it relates to disabled learners, is the extent to which new discourses on inclusion and exclusion mask and perpetuate a number of the issues already identified through the critical interrogation of the dominant discourses on disability and ‘special needs’. In other words they serve to perpetuate the same inequalities, just through a new language that has been appropriated from the very critiques of these inequalities and their underlying practices. Fairclough (1995:83) suggests that what is being recognised here is inherently part of the “matrix of hegemonic struggle”. He argues that such challenges:

are liable not only to be resisted but also to be incorporated. A critical discourse analysis must aim for constant vigilance about who is using its results for what, and about whether its critique of certain practices is not helping to naturalize other equally but differently ideological practices.

Three of the concerns raised by Sayed (2002; 2003) around the concepts of inclusion and exclusion are especially important in highlighting this paradox. Firstly, Sayed (2003:84) argues that:

The notion of inclusion operates on the principle of 'normalization', in which certain groups, communities and individuals are perceived as lacking access or entitlement to certain services. Hence, such groups, communities and individuals need to be targeted for *special inclusive measures* that would overcome their exclusion<sup>31</sup>.

Thus, within the parameters of the underlying imperative towards normalisation, particular learners are now categorized into those requiring special treatment. They are therefore still categorized as 'not normal' or 'the other' with an associated compensatory response aimed at overcoming the 'problems' that constitute them as 'the other'. It is important to emphasise here that although such problems may be seen to arise from social and economic inequalities and thus external to the learner, in relation to what is regarded as normal, they are still seen to lack something that has to be compensated for in order for them to be included. The dominant discourse is therefore still a deficit one and the imperative is still one of normalization. One of the reasons that I have chosen to emphasise this aspect of the debate here, is because it points to an important argument that has been made regarding 'historically disadvantaged' students in South African higher education. I will be discussing in the next chapter that a number of writers have emphasised how notions of the 'disadvantaged student', that is, students disadvantaged through the inequities of apartheid schooling and its legacy, can reinforce a deficit discourse. The learner's 'deficits', albeit the product of the apartheid system, need to be compensated for so that the learner can participate in a 'normal', unchanged and unquestioned higher education system- itself still bearing the legacies of the apartheid system.

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<sup>31</sup> My emphasis.

As already discussed, what is regarded as 'normal' is removed from critical scrutiny and in this way inclusion becomes as Slee (2001b:174) argues, a "synonym for assimilation or normalization". Rather than a project which seeks to change the 'normal' system to accommodate a greater diversity of learning needs, the discourse of inclusive education and the strategies and practices it informs may serve to maintain the status quo or in fact reinforce the very inequities that are supposedly being challenged. In facilitating access to those services or entitlements from which they have been excluded, the excluded may be included into an unchanged environment, which is still constituted by the very social relations that have given rise to and perpetuated those inequities (Sayed, 2003).

In the higher education terrain it would seem that the problem of assimilation is most evident when inclusion is linked purely with the notion of formal access (Morrow, 1993)<sup>32</sup>. That is, it becomes a process towards breaking down those barriers that have kept disabled learners out of the system. While this aspect is obviously important, it does not take on board the more subtle forms of 'exclusion' discussed earlier, especially as regards curriculum access. In this way the access imperative is equated with equity, and the inclusion project fails to incorporate the key aspects of equity highlighted at the end of the previous section. Skelton (1999:247) emphasises how this plays itself out in imperatives towards increasing access to higher education. He argues:

There seems little point in talking about 'access' to higher education when the experience of higher education is exclusionary. And the view that access by itself will lead to a more inclusive higher education and hence a more inclusive society is fundamentally flawed.

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<sup>32</sup> I am using Morrow's notion of formal access (as opposed to epistemological access) discussed earlier.

A third argument raised by Sayed (2002,2003) points to concerns around 'exclusion' as a "short hand for inequities of class, race, gender, ethnicity and poverty" (Sayed, 2003:84). In this way, the concept becomes another 'catch all' phrase in the same way as 'special needs'. Sayed (2003:85) argues similarly that the concepts hide "differences between and within groups, communities and individuals". In particular, they "fail[s] to specify the relationships between race, class and gender as dominant forms of inequity in society" and the complex inter-relationship between these different forms of stratification on the unequal positioning of individuals, groups and communities. The dominant discourse is one that "assumes a pathology of individual failure" (Sayed, 2003:85) in the same way as those who are categorized as having 'special needs' are all 'special' by virtue of their individual pathologies. It is also underpinned by a similar notion of 'sameness' – learners can either be described as those with 'special needs' or those who are 'excluded', with limited attention being paid to the effect of other inequities such as those associated with race, class, gender, or disability on these learners and, moreover, the relationship of these forms of stratification to their 'excluded' status.

## **2.4 Developing an equity framework for higher education**

At the beginning of this chapter I argued that my intention was to investigate the responses of eleven public higher education institutions in South Africa to disabled students' entry into and participation within them. However, I argued that this research task was aimed at analysing these responses from a particular perspective. My concern in this thesis is to consider the responses in the light of the government's stated imperative to increase access to higher education for disabled students as part of a broader equity and transformation agenda in higher education. It is the latter imperative that is of most concern to this thesis. My intention, therefore, is to analyse the extent to which existing institutional responses do at present, or are likely to in the future, create equitable opportunities for disabled students to; gain entry into

existing higher education provision; participate equitably in the process of teaching and learning, and thus have fair chances to access the benefits of higher education and to achieve equitable outcomes (Wolpe, Quinlan and Martinez, 1997). It is these concerns that are at the heart of an equitable and just higher education system for disabled students. In this way they may be regarded as central to what should drive strategic thinking and institutional practices towards disabled students.

The discussion in the previous section of this chapter on the political project of inclusive education was especially important to such considerations of equity. Firstly, it is important in the critiques that it raises about dominant conceptualisations of education provision for disabled learners. In this way, it provides important insights into the ideological and structural forces that shape the educational inequalities experienced by the majority of disabled people and how these are perpetuated and legitimised within the educational context. Secondly, through such a critique these arguments also outline alternative ways of looking at the issues and thus provide a new set of tools for understanding how such inequalities can be addressed. Throughout this discussion, I constantly drew conclusions around the implications of these arguments for higher education and thus the creation of equity for disabled students in this particular domain of education. Without repeating the key arguments already made, my intention in this final section of the chapter is to deepen this analysis of inclusive education as an equity project within higher education. My aim is to discuss what specific elements of this framework, both ideological and structural, may mean for the higher education context and thus what is required at an institutional level to create the conditions noted above. The objective of this exercise is to describe these elements and to set them up as criteria for 'judging' the institutional responses explored in later chapters of this study.

However, before moving on to discuss these elements it is important to note at the outset an important observation that I have made during the course of

my research for this thesis. Despite the importance of the inclusive education project to issues of equity for disabled students in higher education, I have come across little within the literature on higher education, or what is now more often referred to as higher education studies, where these connections are made<sup>33</sup>. It is, as Hurst (1996:123) suggests, a “neglected social setting in which disabled people continue to encounter oppression” and “under-researched...in relation to the experiences of disabled students” (Riddell, 1998:203). Where the sphere of higher education has been discussed in relation to disabled students’ access to and participation within it, it emerges mainly over the last ten years through the contributions of writers more strongly associated with the disability studies literature (see especially, Hurst, 1993, 1996, 1998, 1999; Riddell, 1998; Borland and James, 1999; Poussu-Olli, 1999; Konur, 2000, 2002; Fuller, Bradley and Healey, 2004; Riddell, Tinklin and Wilson, 2004; Shevlin, Kenny and McNeela, 2004; Tinklin and Watson, 2004). There is little therefore in the mainstream literature on higher education that grapples within the experiences of disabled students or the responses of institutions to their participation. This observation is especially evident in the literature on higher education in South Africa in the post 1994 period<sup>34</sup>. Despite the growing body of literature that has sought to describe and analyse South African higher education transformation in this period, especially from a social justice perspective, the disability concern is almost completely absent from these debates. These issues are discussed more fully in the next chapter.

Having noted this weakness, I have also been influenced by writers who have sought to critically discuss initiatives within higher education systems in different parts of the world that are aimed at what is generally referred to as widening participation and/or increasing access to higher education (see especially, Fulton and Ellwood, 1989; Wright, 1989; Scott, 1995, 2003;

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<sup>33</sup> Where I have come across exceptions to this, these have either been included in the discussion up to now or are drawn from at other points in this thesis.

<sup>34</sup> See Crous (2004), Moodley (2004) and Matshedisho (2005), who have all recently made important contributions in this regard.

Davies, Williams and Webb, 1997; Williams, 1997). A number of the writers that I have consulted have attempted to discuss these imperatives by focusing more carefully on the challenges that such initiatives pose for higher education institutions, in particular, in relation to their capacity to respond to a more diverse student body. A number of the arguments that are made within the parameters of these debates are relevant and insightful in directing attention to the higher education system itself as a focus for change. A strong case is often made, albeit from a different perspective, for the kinds of changes in higher education, which speak to the political project of inclusive education already discussed.

The first element to an equity framework for disabled students in higher education brings to the fore an argument that has already been made. In the previous section I discussed notions of access, arguing that access to higher education, in particular, was not just about gaining entry into institutions, but also having access to the process of knowledge transference, dissemination and production. What Morrow (1993) termed epistemological access as a necessary addition to formally gaining entry into the system. However, as Morrow (1993) also correctly emphasised, epistemological access is not possible without formal access. Thus for disabled students access to higher education has to include both the ability to formally gain entry into higher education programmes without discrimination, and to have access to the process of teaching and learning within the academy.

Riddell (1998:203) argues that this emphasis is of particular importance where concerns around disabled students' access to higher education are dominated and driven by equal opportunities policies that derive "from a liberal rather than a radical agenda". She argues that the impact of such an agenda is an inappropriate focus on "equality of access rather than outcome" which in turn directs attention away from the kind of institutional change that is necessary. Within the context of South African higher education Scott (1995:2) similarly captures this important argument. He says:

Providing access to the benefits of HE entails much more than admission. Access without success is largely valueless to the individuals concerned and undermines the goals of both equity and national development. Access, in the sense of entry, can therefore not be an end in itself; and providing for equitable access must include providing fair opportunities for success.

In the next chapter it will be argued that the overall policy agenda driving student equity concerns in South African higher education has important elements to it that extend beyond such liberal, equal opportunities thinking. However, when it comes to disabled students, the underlying discourse is of a similar nature to what Riddell (1998) describes in relation to higher education in the United Kingdom.

In the context of this discussion then, it is important that equity for disabled students in higher education is recognised to include this deepened, transformative understanding of access. For clarity of purpose in this study, I have chosen to speak about the imperatives of 'access, participation and success'. In such an understanding, 'access' is taken to refer to the ability of disabled students to gain entry into higher education institutions and to programmes of their choice. The 'participation and success' imperatives emphasise what happens within institutions so that disabled students are able to participate equitably in the process of teaching and learning and thus have fair chances of success. In considering how institutions are responding to disabled students, my concern is to evaluate the strategies and practices that are in response to disabled students coming into the institutions and those that are aimed at supporting their participation once they are part of the student body.

If the equity project in higher education is taken to include these two central threads, then each must be interrogated to identify, understand and address the barriers that are particular to those aspects of the equity agenda. So with

regard to the first or 'access' component, equity in higher education for disabled students must involve removing those barriers, which restrict and limit their ability to *gain entry into higher education institutions and to the programmes offered*. This means a higher education system where the existence of an impairment, and associated perceptions around it, is not used as a criteria to refuse a student access to the institution or to a programme of their choice. I will be discussing in the next chapter how the South African legislative and policy framework governing higher education formally protects disabled people from such discrimination. However, as becomes clear from the findings of this thesis, weaknesses in the policy framework undermine the application of such protection in the institutional context, as do attitudes and practices that dominate access to higher education for disabled students.

The 'participation and success' components of the above conceptualisation of access essentially point to what is *happening within institutions* as central to the creation of equity for disabled students. Once again the arguments around the political project of inclusive education, already described, provide guidance as to what is critical to concerns of equitable participation and fair chances of success. This earlier analysis emphasised the argument that the educational inequalities experienced by disabled students arise because the system is unable to respond to the differences that learners bring to the teaching and learning process. This includes different styles and methods of engagement with the curriculum that may be related to the existence of an impairment. I referred to these as different learning needs within the learner population. Thus the inequalities experienced by disabled learners are largely about the inability of the system to meet their learning needs. Or put another way, it is about the inability of the system to respond to such diversity within the learner population. Thus, as already emphasised, there is a 'deficit' within the system rather than the learner, which must to be addressed or transformed through strategies that are aimed at responding to the full range of learning needs that exist within the learner population at any point in time (Department of Education, 1998).

These arguments emphasise what has been argued consistently throughout this chapter. That any processes which seek to address the educational inequalities experienced by disabled learners and create greater equity, have to be directed primarily at the system, not the learner. Drawing from the arguments already made around the political project of inclusive education as I have described it, my intention now is to consider more carefully the elements of such *systemic change* in the higher education context. The earlier discussions have emphasised that there is an ideological or discursive element to such change and a structural or organisational element. While I have chosen to discuss them in this way, as already argued, these two elements are inextricably linked and central to considerations of equity.

The ideological element draws from the arguments already emphasised. This is, that the notion of difference, including difference in learning needs has to be valued within the educational setting rather than merely tolerated (Slee, 1996a; Barton and Oliver, 1992). This implies, as Woodrow (1998:7) points out, a “shift from an institutional ethos of selective ‘normality’ to one of diversity and inclusion”. Although this assertion is made in relation to equity for students from lower-socio-economic groups, it emphasises the importance of how diversity is conceived of within the culture of the institution. Woodrow’s (1998) assertion emphasises how important it is for institutions to move away from perceiving students as those who are ‘normal’ and those who are ‘not normal’ and directing institutional practices, especially teaching and learning, towards these categories. The inequalities that are inherent to such categorisation are strongly emphasised in the arguments around inclusive education, including the associated imperatives towards normalisation. For the purposes of this discussion what needs to be re-emphasised, however, is the importance of recognising and developing the institution’s capacity to respond to a diversity of learning needs. The capacity of institutions to respond to a diversity of learning needs starts with how such diversity is perceived and its strategic importance to the running of the institution.

However, this is only the start to what is critical in the creation of equity for disabled students. If the arguments already made around access, participation and success are noted then there has to be a specific focus on the process of teaching and learning within institutions, and its ability to respond to the different styles or methods students may use to access the curriculum. I will call such capacity a responsive teaching and learning environment. Thus at the level of institutional organisation and practice, the teaching and learning process within institutions becomes the primary focus for ensuring that disabled students are able to access the curriculum – ensuring the epistemological access (Morrow, 1993) already argued for. It is this recognition of the primacy of the education process in the creation of equity in higher education (Scott, 1995) that becomes so important to an equity project for disabled students. Thus, if disabled students are able to enjoy equitable opportunities in higher education and have fair chances for success, institutional strategies aimed at supporting their participation have to be primarily directed at the teaching and learning process as the key interface for transformation. In analysing the institutional responses explored in this study a central concern for me has been the extent to which the importance of this interface is reflected in institutional strategies and practices towards disabled students' participation.

However, in developing these conceptualisations further I have started from the premise that, if recognition is given to the dominant ways in which teaching and learning is organised and delivered in higher education institutions, then it is possible to distinguish what I will call two 'levels' to the teaching and learning environment – that is, a '*macro*' and '*micro*' level. I have conceived of the 'macro' level of the teaching and learning environment as the broad institutional level where various institutional mechanisms and processes are in place to effectively *organise, support and monitor the process of teaching and learning* within institutions. It follows then that the 'micro' level of the teaching and learning environment is where the *curriculum is delivered and engaged with* and, thus, where the essential and critical

elements of the teaching and learning process take place. As will be shown a little later in this discussion these distinctions in the teaching and learning environment correlate strongly with Simpson's (1998) conceptualisations around teaching and learning support in higher education. I have drawn from his arguments in developing this understanding of the teaching and learning environment. Moreover, as will be argued in Chapter Four, I have used these distinctions to analyse and present the findings that emerged (Chapters Five and Six) around how disabled students are supported in their academics studies in the institutions investigated.

While these arguments emphasise the primacy of the education process in the creation of equity (Scott, 1995), there are two areas of institutional practice that are especially important to a responsive teaching and learning environment. The first has to do with the curriculum itself and the extent to which flexibility is exercised in its organisation and delivery. In other words, a flexible curriculum is central to a responsive teaching and learning process<sup>35</sup>.

The second concerns what some writers refer to as 'learning support' (Wolfendale and Corbett, 1996) and what I will refer to as teaching and learning support. In essence this aspect of the equity framework refers to institutional mechanisms and processes that are designed to enable students to "fulfil their learning goals and improve their life chances...through a range of learning opportunities" (Wolfendale, 1996:3). What is especially important in the context of this discussion is that such mechanisms and processes include what may be regarded as specific forms of additional support that any student may require at any time to achieve the above (Wolfendale, 1996; Simpson, 1996). Thus, such teaching and learning support may include specific forms of support that individual students may require, including some disabled students, to access the curriculum. It may also include strategies

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<sup>35</sup> I am using the holistic notion of curriculum defined earlier in the discussion.

aimed at improving staff expertise to enhance the learning of all students and thus their opportunities for success (Wolfendale, 1996:2).

While the provision of teaching and learning support is central to an equity framework for disabled students in higher education, the provision of such support in institutions does not automatically translate into equitable opportunities and fair chances of success for disabled students. There are two features to such support that become critical to an equity agenda. Thus it is the nature and organisation of such support that also becomes equally important to consider. In exploring these issues more carefully, I have found Simpson's (1996) arguments around learning support in higher education to be especially useful to this thesis. The first important argument he makes is his call for a "developmental model" of support. Such a model, he argues, moves away from a deficit model of student performance, where the difficulties they may encounter are the result of "perceived deficiencies in a student's previous education, ability or sustainability for a programme". Mechanisms aimed at addressing such difficulties are remedial in nature and turn the attention away from the responsibilities of the institution to respond "to the overall learning needs of its students" (Simpson, 1996:22). In the context of the overall concerns of this thesis, this argument is especially important. It suggests that if the teaching and learning support that is provided to disabled students is underpinned by a deficit discourse its value in ensuring equitable opportunities and fair chances for success is extremely limited. In fact, it may serve to reinforce the existing inequalities they experience. I have regarded this distinction as central to how I evaluate the responses of the institutions explored in this study.

The second aspect of Simpson's (1996) work that is valuable to this discussion is his conceptualisation of an appropriate learning support framework for higher education. He argues that in the provision of learning support in higher education a clear institutional distinction needs to be made between what he calls "learner services" and "learning development". These

two components together with learning resources made up such a framework. However, for the purposes of this thesis it is the distinction he makes between support mechanisms directed at the learner specifically – that is, learner services and those directed at the teaching and learning process – that is, learning development. The former is aimed at meeting particular psycho-social needs of the student that may impinge directly or indirectly on their learning experience. These would include services such as financial assistance, accommodation and counselling. The latter form of support, which is most important to the arguments around curriculum access already made, is made up of a range of interventions aimed specifically at teaching and learning, including elements such as staff development and assessment practices. Such support is about recognising and respecting the student as a customer, or as a ‘learner’ as Wolfendale (1996:2) argues, and is thus specifically aimed at supporting their participation in the teaching and learning process. He emphasises that learning development should be delivered “at the course and programme levels” and must include “mechanisms for providing the additional support some students will need” (Simpson, 1996:24). In the terms I have already argued for this would be the ‘micro’ level of the teaching and learning environment. His arguments therefore suggest that the kind of additional support that some disabled learners may require should form part of a holistic support process directed and operates at the ‘micro’ level or course and programme level (Simpson, 1996:24). Moreover, it should not be seen as remedial provision (Simpson, 1996:21) aimed at compensating for perceived deficits associated with a particular impairment.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

This chapter presents the conceptual framework for the study. Its central concern has been to link sociological considerations of disability with the construction and positioning of disabled learners in the education sphere. In drawing together these lines of enquiry my intention has been to show how

important these theoretical contributions are for developing conceptual clarity around what equity for disabled students means within higher education and thus what forces may undermine such a project. The final section of this chapter draws out and discusses what are argued to be the two central concerns in the creation of an equitable and just higher education system for disabled students. These are; ensuring that disabled students are able to gain entry into higher education institutions and programmes of their choice, what I have called the access imperative; and ensuring that within institutions they are able to participate equitably in the process of teaching and learning and thus have fair chances for success – the participation and success imperative. In considering what is important at the institutional level for ensuring that such conditions exist, I have drawn strongly from Simpson's (1996) arguments around learning support in higher education. His arguments emphasise that what underpins the conceptualisation of such support and, therefore, where and how it is directed within the institution, are critical concerns for effective student participation and success.

The next chapter shifts the focus of the thesis on to the South African higher education context. It discusses those historical and contemporary forces that I have regarded as important in providing a background to the empirical findings of this research.

## CHAPTER THREE

### THE SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION CONTEXT

#### 3.1 Introduction

In Chapter Two my intention was to apply a sociological lens to the phenomenon of disability and to those practices that have dominated and shaped the provision of educational opportunities for disabled learners throughout the world. This line of enquiry consistently pointed to the importance of the social, political and economic context in shaping the experience of disability and the educational inequalities that dominate the majority of disabled people's lives. Thus, any research process that aims to explore such concerns must grapple with a specific set of historically bound social and material relations that constitute such a context. This chapter therefore, starts from the premise that an appropriate conceptual framework for interpreting the findings of this research must focus on the context that has shaped and given meaning to the issues this thesis seeks to address.

In essence this context is about two things. Firstly, it is about the complexities and challenges of a higher education system undergoing fundamental transformation in South Africa since the mid 1990s. While many of the challenges it now faces are not unique to higher education in South Africa, they have all been profoundly shaped by the country's colonial history and the policies and state practices of the apartheid period. This legacy is one of endemic social, political and economic inequalities and their paradoxical impact on a higher education system designed to maintain and perpetuate them. The higher education system in focus within this study is one that reflects the daily workings of universities that have been shaped by this history but are now central to a process of transformation and reconstruction towards institutionalising a new social order in South Africa (Badat, 2003:1). These goals are being pursued and constrained in the higher education sector by a broader social, economic and political context strongly shaped by

other competing national priorities with similar goals; the pressures and demands of globalisation (Department of Education, 1997, 2001b); and the associated influence of international neo-liberal thinking taken forward in the government's new macro-economic policy framework (Kraak, 2004:245)<sup>36</sup>. This context, therefore, is one that is characterised by the “paradoxes, ambiguities, contradictions, possibilities and constraints” that such forces create for the state and for the organisation and functioning of higher education institutions (Badat, 2003:1).

Secondly, it is about disabled learners in South Africa and their location in this history and associated process of transformation. Central to this are the deep and pervasive educational inequalities they have experienced in the past, which reflect the complex interaction of the disability hegemony (Oliver, 1990) discussed in Chapter Two, and the policy and practices of the apartheid education system. This context, therefore, is about the nature of the inequalities experienced by disabled people and the transformation of the higher education system. As can be expected there are many different facets to the transformation of the South African higher education system over the past twelve years with its inherent tensions and complexities, that have a bearing on disabled learners. If the arguments made in the previous chapter with regard to the inherently political nature of disability and the educational inequalities experienced by disabled learners are recognised, then there is no single aspect of this transformation process that is not relevant to the concerns of this study. Or put another way, the creation of an equitable and just higher education system for disabled students is fundamentally linked to the direction and form of the transformation process as a whole, with its inherent contradictions and unintended consequences.

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<sup>36</sup> This policy framework was published by the Department of Finance in 1996 as the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy.

In Chapter Two I argued for the need to draw selectively from three domains of knowledge that collectively brought together insights important to the development of a conceptual framework for this study. My intention in this chapter is to explore the above context from a similar starting point, to consider those aspects of this context that are especially important in providing a background to the terrain in which the research was conducted and to deepen my insights into the research findings. There are three areas of focus within this context that are important to this study and around which this chapter is structured. In each of these areas the issues are explored and conclusions reached about their importance to informing how institutions are responding to the participation of disabled students and thus to the findings of the research. It is this latter concern, which therefore provides the lens that I have used to analyse these three aspects of the context.

The first area of focus is about the *past and its impact* on what is happening today (Section 3.2). This chapter therefore, begins by exploring those historical forces that have shaped the educational experiences of the majority of disabled people in South Africa, as well as those that have shaped the higher education system. At one level this analysis is therefore about the inequalities of the past. A past engineered by the dictates of the policy of apartheid, which, often in complex ways, impacted on educational provision for disabled learners and defined the organisation and functioning of higher education institutions. At another level, this analysis is also about the impact of this past on two present day concerns. These are, firstly, the opportunities that now exist (or not) for disabled students to access higher education, and secondly, its impact on the capacity of institutions to respond to greater levels of participation by disabled students following government calls to increase access to higher education for disabled students (Department of Education, 1997; 2001b). My intention in Section 3.2 therefore, is to illustrate the depth of the levels of educational exclusion faced by disabled learners in the past and its ongoing effects; and the inequalities that still exist across the higher

education system, substantially affecting institutional capacity to respond to specific policy goals.

The second area of focus in this chapter (covered in Section 3.3) is the *new policy framework* that has been put in place to steer, regulate and govern the post-apartheid higher education system. Of particular importance for this study are the commitments made and associated change strategies outlined that are aimed at increasing access and widening participation as part of a broader equity and redress agenda for the public higher education system. My intention here is to describe and analyse how disabled students are specifically addressed in this framework. In doing this, my objective is to consider the implications of what is said in the policy for the equity concerns I discussed in Chapter Two. Although this discussion focuses on the higher education policy framework, Sayed (2001) correctly argues that a range of policies, which may not be specifically directed at this sector, always affect the provision of education in any country. I have therefore, integrated into the discussion two further policies that may be regarded as important for disabled students in the higher education terrain. These are: the White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy (Office of the Deputy President, 1997) and White Paper 6: Special Needs Education, Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (Department of Education, 2001a).

The third and final area of focus in this chapter (Section 3.4) addresses a *specific initiative or educational project within South African higher education* (Bajjnath, 1997) that began in the early eighties and which has been central to debates around student equity and redress, especially in the nineties. These initiatives are now referred to as Academic Development (AD). Essentially, they are about specific teaching and learning support initiatives that began as attempts to redress the inequalities of the apartheid education system as it manifested itself in the perceived 'under-preparedness' of the majority of black students for tertiary education. As AD initiatives are now conceived and put into practice within institutions they come closest, in my

opinion, to addressing the “learning development” components that Simpson (1996) refers to in his learning support framework outlined in Chapter Two. They thus focus on the process and outcomes of teaching and learning within institutions, particularly at the faculty and department level. Despite the importance of AD to issues of redress and equity in South African higher education over the last twenty years, the concerns of disabled students have, until very recently through some isolated initiatives (Moodley, 2003), been excluded from the debates that have shaped it and thus to the institutional initiatives it has generated. These debates and initiatives have been very important to linking issues of teaching and learning to student participation and success. In considering the findings of this research, I have started from the premise that this omission is important to understanding what is presently happening within institutions towards the participation of disabled students.

## **3.2 The historical legacy**

### **3.2.1 The higher education landscape**

In the next Chapter of this thesis I outline the various components of the research process that have been followed to arrive at the findings that are presented and discussed. Without pre-empting this discussion it is important in the context of this discussion to note a deliberate strategy that was employed throughout the collection of the empirical data for this thesis. I argue in the next chapter that such a purposeful process is critical to any research that seeks to explore any aspect of higher education transformation in South Africa. In all of the various research tasks involved, care has been taken to disaggregate and analyse the data collected from the institutions according to what I will refer to as their historical categorisation. That is, according to the particular forms of categorisation that developed among higher education institutions under the apartheid system. Such a strategy was adopted in disaggregating the data from the original survey-questionnaire. A similar process was adopted in the stratification of the

interview sample. I deliberately selected the interviewees so as to provide for a mix of the different 'types' of higher education institutions that have historically characterised higher education in South Africa. This section is aimed at presenting the background to this categorisation and, in so doing, builds an argument for why undertaking the research and engaging with the data, in a way which recognises their apartheid classification, is important for this study. This section also shows the nature and depth of the structural inequalities and thus the complexities of the challenges for higher education transformation that confronted the new democratic government in 1994. The issues discussed here, considered together with the specific inequalities experienced by disabled learners (discussed in Section 3.2.2 that follows), were central to the "context of practice" (Bowe and Ball with Gold, 1992)<sup>37</sup> into which the post-1994 policy imperatives focused on in this study, were implemented.

The historical overview presented here reflects the "size and shape" (Council on Higher Education, 2000)<sup>38</sup> of the South African higher education landscape as it existed at the time the fieldwork was completed for this thesis, that is, between May and October 2003. At this time there were 35 higher education institutions making up the public higher education system in South Africa, each one of which could be categorised according to the

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<sup>37</sup> This characterisation of the context is drawn from the work of Bowe and Ball with Gold (1992) as part of their sociological analysis of the meanings of policy and the policy process. They argue that the policy process can be characterised by the dynamic interaction between what they call three primary policy contexts. These are the context of influence, the context of text production and the context of practice. In his later work Ball (1994) extended this analysis by arguing for an additional two contexts. These he called the context of outcomes and the context of political strategy. The context of practice essentially pertains to the social, political and economic context into which particular policies are implemented. The forces that shape the context of practice serve to impact on the process of policy implementation and in this way set the parameters for what becomes possible in meeting the policy's goals (Ball, 1994).

<sup>38</sup> The terminology of "size and shape" draws from the report of the Council on Higher Education submitted to the Minister of Education in June 2000 on the restructuring of the higher education system in South Africa. The report was entitled, "Towards a New Higher Education Landscape: Meeting the Equity, Quality and Social Development Imperatives of South Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century" (Council on Higher Education, 2000). However, it became popularly known as the "size and shape report".

framework presented in this chapter<sup>39</sup>. However, at the present time, that is, in 2006, 23 institutions now constitute the public higher education landscape in South Africa. These institutions reflect the outcome of a process of restructuring which has taken place since 2001 central to which has been the merging of a number of institutions. Similarly, all institutions are now categorised as either Universities or Universities of Technology (and Science)<sup>40</sup>. Thus, at a formal level, the categorisations discussed below would not now apply. However, as the discussion emphasises, these historical forms of categorisation remain fundamental to any understanding of the changes taking place within the sector and are likely to do so for a long time to come.

Cooper and Subotzky (2001:3) argue that an appropriate analysis of the higher education terrain has to capture the particular balance of historical forces arising from our colonial history, the rise of industrial capitalism and apartheid social forces that impacted on the system over the last hundred years. It is not possible within the scope of this study to delve too deeply into this history with all its implications for higher education. However, it is important to note this important point and thus to recognise how the broad ideological imperatives and associated state engineering of the apartheid system, so central to the legacy described here, deepened the country's colonial legacy and formalised white minority rule in South Africa until 1994.

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<sup>39</sup> An overview of the landscape is provided in Table 4.1 in Chapter Four. It is important to note here that the table lists 36 institutions not 35 as I have indicated here. In 2003 two institutions had already merged in line with the 're-sizing and re-shaping' of the sector. However, this merger had just taken place and therefore the official number of institutions at the time of the fieldwork was 3, with the sector as a whole still largely reflective of the outline provided in the table, that is, the apartheid higher education landscape. The implementation of the central recommendations with regard to the restructuring of the apartheid higher education landscape, including the merging of some institutions, mainly took place between 2004 and 2005.

<sup>40</sup> In line with these new institutional designations, I have referred throughout this thesis to the institutions as universities or higher education institutions.

Thus while white privilege and power was evident in and reproduced through the higher education system in South Africa prior to 1948 (Cooper and Subotzky, 2001:4), when the apartheid government came to power, it was the latter's policies and practices that engineered the form and substance of the system the new government inherited in 1994. Under the apartheid system higher education institutions, extending the divisions of the schooling system, were divided along racial lines<sup>41</sup>. Each one was designated as an institution for the exclusive use of one of the four race groups into which the government classified the entire population, that is, African, Coloured, Indian and White (Bunting, 2002:61). However, the higher education terrain not only reflected the racial divisions of apartheid ideology, it had also been purposefully designed to reproduce the inequalities required to keep such a system in place. Thus these institutions, according to the designated race of their students (and staff) were designed to either ensure the subordinate position of black people in the country's racial division of labour or to maintain white privilege. These divisions and associated 'roles' in the apartheid system were maintained and reproduced through various political and academic measures, central to which were the "financial resources that were made available and the social and academic roles that were allocated to each" (Badat, 2004:2). The result of such measures was a highly unequal higher education system constituted by what are now known as the 'historically advantaged institutions' (HAIs) (those historically designated for white students) and the 'historically disadvantaged institutions' (HDIs) (those historically designated for black students i.e. African, Coloured and Indian students)<sup>42</sup>.

While these two broad categories of institutions capture the most important divisions of the apartheid higher education system, it is also important to note the different types of higher education institutions within these two

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<sup>41</sup> This principle was formally applied to the higher education sector through the Extension of the University Education Act of 1959.

<sup>42</sup> As Table 4.1 shows the HAIs are often referred to as the historically white institutions (HWIs) and the HDIs as the historically black institutions (HBIs).

categories, which further stratified the system in line with the dictates of apartheid ideology (Cooper and Subotzky, 2001:3). Bunting (2002:74) argues that across the system (among the HAIs and HDIs), higher education institutions were divided into two types of institutions based on conceptualisations of knowledge acquisition and application. These two institutional types were called universities or technikons.<sup>43</sup>

Over and above this 'academic' divide, the HDIs and HAIs were further subdivided once again by key forms of stratification within the apartheid system. Firstly, among the HDIs there were 6 universities 'for Africans'. While some of these were initially controlled by the white apartheid government's, Department of Education and Training (DET), the education department responsible for the education of African learners at all levels of the system, by the 1980s they were all situated within, and formed part of, the different 'independent homelands' and 'self-governing states'. These institutions also, therefore, corresponded to the further ethnic divisions of the apartheid system<sup>44</sup>. Secondly, there were 2 universities designated for 'Coloured' and 'Indian' learners, and similarly controlled by the appropriate, racially divided department. Thirdly, among the HAIs there were those where the medium of communication and instruction was Afrikaans and those where it was English (Bunting, 2002:65). While these institutions, that is, those designated for whites, were comparatively privileged, the language issue was reflective of

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<sup>43</sup> Bunting (2002:62) explains this philosophy of knowledge acquisition and application of the apartheid government in the following way: "The National Party government believed that it had been able to identify the essence of each of the two types of institutions into which it divided the South African higher education system: the essence of a university was *science* and the essence of a technikon was *technology*".

<sup>44</sup> These areas of South Africa had been demarcated and set up in accordance with the apartheid government's policy of 'separate development' as a mechanism for maintaining white domination and cheap African labour. This policy said that every African person in South Africa belonged to a separate ethnic or 'national' group and should therefore have its own 'homeland'. A range of coercive and oppressive measures were put in place to govern and control these territories, which became either self-governing territories (but not independent) or so-called independent states, recognised by the South African government but no one else (Bottaro and Visser, 1999).

much deeper differences between these two sub-types<sup>45</sup>. Bunting (2002:65) argues that:

The key element in making the distinction between the two sub-groupings is that some universities in the group supported the National Party government, including its apartheid higher education policies, and others did not.

In essence the Afrikaans institutions supported the ruling party and the English institutions did not. Rather they:

referred to themselves as the 'liberal universities' and did so partly as a way of signalling their refusal to adopt the apartheid government's view that universities were simply 'creatures of the state' (Bunting, 2002:70).

It is important to recognise here that, although the English 'liberal universities' articulated a strong anti-apartheid stance, they were also very much part of a higher education system, which served to reproduce the racially stratified system of capitalism in South Africa.

The technikon types of institutions already mentioned were similarly divided. Thus, by 1994 South Africa had 36 higher education institutions stratified in this way. While my concern in this discussion is to emphasise the inequalities across the system, it is also important to recognise that such stratification also created a highly fragmented system that was inefficient and ineffective and "suffered badly through a lack of co-ordination, common goals and systematic planning" (Department of Education, 1996:42).

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<sup>45</sup> These additional forms of stratification can be seen from the third column of Table 4.1 (sub-type).

In understanding the depth of the inequalities that existed between these institutions it is important to note, as Barnes (2005:211) argues, that the problems that were evident by 1994 were not just the result of an unequal allocation of state resources. As she says, “the apartheid system was more sophisticated than a simple dispatch of smaller checks [cheques] to the HDIs”. Looking at the scenario from the perspective of the historically disadvantaged institutions, she captures very succinctly the characteristics these institutions displayed in 1994 at the formal end of the apartheid era, in terms of what she refers to as the “dismal results of multi-faceted apartheid-era discrimination”. She says:

They were located in isolated geographical locations (either rural or on the urban peripheries), ...were forced to function under highly repressive internal and external governance and management measures which severely restricted academic freedom and institutional autonomy. Operationally, they exhibited poorly developed educational facilities and stunted infrastructural and administrative capacity. Academically, they offered a narrow range of academic programs, clustered in non-science and teaching-related fields at lower qualification levels. Finally, the vast majority of their students came from disadvantaged backgrounds (Barnes, 2005:211).

It is important to recognise, as Badat (2004:2) emphasises, that while such characteristics capture the structural disadvantage of the historically black institutions, all higher education institutions were, albeit in different ways and to different degrees, “deeply implicated” in reproducing the apartheid system. Thus, in contrast, the historically white institutions were financially well provided for (Barnes, 2005:213) and offered a full range of academic programmes (Sayed, 2003:86).

The racial skewing of the system in this way had a profound effect on restricting higher education opportunities for black students. In 1984, 18% of

the student population were African while 69% were White (Cooper and Subotzky, 2001:12). These figures need to be understood in the context of a country where, in 1985, Africans made up 74% of the population and Whites only 16% (South African Institute of Race Relations, 2001:48). Although by 1993 the number of African enrolments had increased to 41%, White students still constituted 47% even though as a group they made up less than 10% of the students who were eligible for tertiary education at this time (Department of Education, 1999 cited in Sayed, 2003:86). Moreover, as has already been emphasised, the inequalities in access experienced by black students were deepened by what institutions they could attend and thus the “forms of knowledge learners had access to”(Sayed, 2003:87). Thus in 1994 the government was confronted with a range of challenges. It involved not only increasing access to the system for the excluded majority, but also redressing the inequalities that the institutional differentiation under apartheid had created.

Badat's (2004) argument about the importance of this legacy in the present context is pertinent here. In commenting on the nature of the disadvantage of the historically disadvantaged institutions, he argues that it is not just about the histories of institutions. Rather, we need to understand and make meaning of such disadvantage and advantage by considering what it means for the capacity of institutions to now contribute to the process of economic and social reconstruction and development of the country (Badat, 2004:3). If, as the next section shows, increasing access to higher education for historically disadvantaged students, including disabled students, forms part of this transformation project, then institutional capacity as it is understood here is very important to the findings of this study. In essence the stark realities of this legacy mean that towards the realisation of these goals, “institutions started from fundamentally unequal positions” (Barnes, 2005:216).

It is possible therefore to surmise that this legacy, and its impact on institutional capacity, would significantly affect the ability of institutions to

respond to the increased participation of disabled students as part of this transformation agenda. These sentiments influenced the analysis of the survey-questionnaire and the selection of the interview sample in this study. However, as the research progressed it became clear that when it comes to disability the issues are complicated by other variables that either deepen the impact of this legacy for disabled students or create opportunities for important changes that are not solely resource dependent. The findings of this research show, as will be argued later, that when it comes to disability issues, greater resource levels and associated institutional capacity, do not necessarily translate into a more equitable teaching and learning environment for disabled students. The issues are far more complex than this. Rather, they are inherently influenced by how disability and the learning needs of disabled students are understood and responded to within the institution, especially at the classroom, department and faculty levels of the teaching and learning environment.

Before moving on to discuss how disabled students fit into this legacy, it is important to emphasise that substantial changes have taken place in South African higher education over the last ten years of democracy. An analysis of the changes that have taken place in the sector over this period constitutes a large body of literature, including substantial critiques and policy shifts. What is important in the context of this study is to recognise that the legacy described above has presented huge challenges for the state and for institutions themselves. These challenges have been exacerbated and reshaped through the effects of globalisation and its impact on higher education reform throughout the world. For South Africa, as Maasen and Cloete (2002:15) argue, these “international ‘best’ practices...would overrun the national reform agenda for higher education like a flood through a hole in the wall”. Thus, not unexpectedly, the last eight years in particular, have been about managing the inherent tensions that emerge from what Badat (2005:4) describes as “the triple challenge”. This involves, firstly, the “unprecedented” challenge of pursuing the imperatives of growth and

development in South Africa, within a global economy “increasingly dependent on knowledge and information”. Secondly, it involves redressing the deep inequalities and inefficiencies of the past. However, there is a third challenge, because “growth and equity must not only be pursued simultaneously; they must also be advanced within a democratic framework and the consolidation of a fledgling democracy” (Badat, 2005:4).

It is not possible within the scope of this thesis to document in any meaningful way these challenges and their impact on the functioning of institutions. However, what is important to emphasise is that, from an institutional capacity perspective, these macro challenges ultimately intensify the challenges at the institutional level. In such a context, I would argue, historically inherited inequalities, while they may have shifted somewhat in form, still influence the differences apparent across the institutions explored in this study. Moreover, as Jansen (2005) and Cooper and Subotzky (2001) argue, the inequalities remain evident – not in terms of the racial profile of the whole system, but in the class-based forms of stratification that remain largely unchanged, even though “this has been partially deracialised along with the institutions of state and civil society” (Cooper and Subotzky, 2001:231). In 2002, of the students enrolled in public higher education institutions in South Africa, 60% were African and 27% were white, a substantial shift in the 1984 figures quoted above (South African Institute of Race Relations, 2004:62)<sup>46</sup>. However, at the institutional level, where the inequalities in South Africa’s history have been so stark, and as Barnes (2005) suggested, there has been no meaningful redistribution of resources across the system, the poorest students, who are black, are still concentrated in those institutions with the least resources. Moreover, it is these students and their families who struggle most to generate, access and sustain the funding that is required for them to pay for their studies at institutions beset by the challenges which Badat (2005) emphasises.

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<sup>46</sup> These figures are derived from the ‘head-count enrolment’ figures for this year. This refers to the actual number of students enrolled at the different public higher education institutions.

Jansen (2005:301) captures what he sees as the challenges facing the higher education sector, now and in the future. Within the context of this thesis, what is important from his overview are the institutional differences that are still apparent across the system and which, therefore, provide the backdrop for the research findings. He argues:

Against this backdrop, the problem for South African higher education will not be race – at least not in a black majority state. The new problems will be the background class and regional character of students as urban institutions are strengthened and deracialised while rural universities remain marginalized in terms of institutional capacity, racial character and class status. The problem for urban institutions, on the other hand, will be the complex task of transforming institutional cultures in ways that are more inclusive and accommodating of the statistical diversity of their student populations<sup>47</sup>.

### **3.2.2 The historical inequalities experienced by disabled learners**

Like most countries in the world it is not possible to consider the educational inequalities that disabled people have experienced in the past in South Africa without going down the 'special needs' road. Moreover, it is not possible to begin to discuss the extent of these inequalities at the higher education level, without primarily discussing what has happened at the schooling level. What has happened, or perhaps what has not happened at this level, has been profoundly important to the opportunities that have existed for disabled students to access higher education provision in the past. For this reason,

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<sup>47</sup> It is not possible within the scope of this thesis to consider in any depth the possible (and perceived) implications of the recent restructuring process and the merging of institutions for issues of redistribution across the system. Similarly, I have not explored further any government strategies that take forward the imperatives of redress across the 23 institutions now in place. My central objective in discussing this historical legacy has been to show why I regarded it as an important consideration in the selection of the institutions for the in-depth interviews, and as a necessary background to the presentation of the research findings.

this section focuses mainly on the nature and extent of the inequalities that disabled learners have experienced at the schooling level in South Africa.

On the one hand the history of any educational provision that existed for disabled learners prior to 1994 is essentially a history about 'special needs education' at the schooling level in South Africa. However, for disabled learners in South Africa, it is also about how this system formed part of a broader system of racialised, highly unequal education provision in apartheid South Africa. Thus, at the schooling level, education provision was separated not only on the basis of race, but also on the identification and categorisation of learners into those who were regarded as 'normal' and those who were seen to have 'special needs' (Howell and Lazarus, 2003:61). Thus as Engelbrecht and Forlin (1997:4) comment, while the policy of separating special education from the mainstream system is evident in the development of education in other countries as well, the nature of provision for learners with 'special needs' in South Africa has been especially skewed according to the inequalities inherent in the apartheid system. They argue that:

The extent of philosophical and political influence on education in South Africa distinguishes the development of education for learners with special educational needs in South Africa after 1948 from that of other countries, for even in this field the white-black dichotomy has resulted in extreme disparities in the delivery of education. Education in South Africa during the apartheid years was the responsibility of a complex and uncoordinated arrangement of 19 different education departments based on ethnic separation and discrimination on the basis of disability, race and colour.

What is most important in the context of this thesis is the extent to which this stratification of the system at the schooling level resulted in severely limited forms of provision for African disabled learners in particular. The first

discernable provision set up for any learners regarded as having 'special needs' took place through the introduction in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century of schools for disabled learners, particularly Deaf and Blind learners, by specific churches. The schools started were divided along racial lines and initially received no funding from the state (Department of Education, 1998). The trajectory of development thereafter, essentially reflects increasing involvement by the state in supporting those church schools set up for white learners with 'special needs'. What limited provision existed for black learners with 'special needs' continued to be provided at the school level by churches and private organisations. Naicker (1997) explains that these racial disparities grew more extreme as the apartheid system became institutionalised through the Bantu Education Act of 1953 and other associated pieces of apartheid education legislation.

While inequalities in provision for disabled learners through the special school system were shaped by the racial policies of apartheid, it was also strongly influenced by trends in 'special needs' education already discussed in Chapter Two. Like other countries in the world, such provision was "separated and marginalized from mainstream educational provision" and strongly influenced by a "medical model of diagnosis and treatment of 'learner deficits'" (Muthukrishna and Schoeman, 2000:317). Moreover, drawing from Tomlinson (1982) and Barton and Oliver's (1992) observations in the United Kingdom, those learners with 'special needs' in South Africa, were effectively those regarded as being unable to fit into the dominant mainstream education system. In reality this tended to encompass a wide range of learners including those with physical, sensory or intellectual impairments, those who were perceived to have learning difficulties or behavioural problems, those who were 'dropping out' of the system, as well as those who were in trouble with the law (Department of Education, 1998). While as already argued, state provision was substantially skewed towards provision for white learners with 'special needs', if such forms of categorisation were applied to all learners in South Africa, then those

learners who dominated these categories or had 'special needs' were African learners who also faced the deepest levels of inequality under apartheid (NECC, 1992).

This was starkly illustrated through research carried out by a range of non-governmental stakeholders in South Africa between December 1990 and August 1992. This research formed part of a much broader education research initiative undertaken by the National Education Co-ordinating Committee (NECC), a broad alliance of anti-apartheid organisations working in the education terrain, tasked with the responsibility of interrogating "policy options in all areas of education within a value framework derived from the ideals of the broad democratic movement" (NECC, 1992:vi). This initiative was called the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI). Using a broad definition of 'special needs'<sup>48</sup>, which included a diverse range of learners who were experiencing learning breakdown or were excluded from the schooling system, the NEPI investigation estimated that in 1990 there were approximately 4 174 197 school pupils with such 'special needs' in South Africa. Approximately 3 844 295 of these were African learners (NECC, 1992:31). They further pointed to the fact that there was an almost total lack of services for 'special educational needs' in the African schooling education departments (NECC, 1992:30).

Thus by 1994 what existed across the schools in the country was a "highly specialized" and "costly" system of "special needs education and support services for a limited number of learners, the majority being white and Indian learners" (Muthukrishna and Schoeman, 2000:316). Moreover, and most

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<sup>48</sup> The NEPI investigation was undertaken using a conceptualisation of 'special needs' as consisting of a spectrum of needs arising on the one hand from "clear intrinsic deficits of a physical or neurological nature" to those which are extrinsically generated through socio-educational disadvantage (NECC, 1992:29). I have argued in an earlier commentary, that while such a definition correctly identifies the relationship between the learner and their environment as central in causing learning breakdown or exclusion, it still relies on a 'deficit' model of disability and impairment suggesting that disabled learners have 'deficits' which can usually only be met through "highly specialised education resources and assistance on a relatively permanent basis" (Howell, 2000:111 citing NECC, 1992:29)

importantly, such provision was not only driven by a marginalizing and deficit-orientated paradigm, it was also totally inadequate in providing any form of educational opportunity for African learners who were categorised as 'special needs' learners. Since African disabled learners were automatically placed into the category of 'special needs' learners, this effectively meant that unless they were able to access the limited provision available at the few special schools already referred to, there were no opportunities for them in the system at all – even within the Bantu Education system.

The levels of deprivation, exclusion, and marginalisation experienced by disabled learners, especially African disabled learners, was so severe that by 1997, the new government estimated that approximately 70% of disabled learners who were of school-going age were still outside the school system (Office of the Deputy President, 1997:37). They emphasised that the impact of such inequalities was not only relevant to the school system, but that it had resulted in high levels of illiteracy among disabled adults and low levels of skill, which in turn contributed to high levels of unemployment and ongoing poverty. In addition to these inequalities, which the majority of disabled learners experienced, those disabled students who were able to attend the few special schools that existed, mainly white disabled learners, also faced a number of barriers. Until the implementation of substantial curriculum change across the schooling system in the post 1994 period, these few, more privileged disabled learners, were also often disadvantaged through the nature of the provision that existed. Many special schools offered a curriculum that was inappropriate for preparing learners for the world of work and some did not even offer tuition up to the matriculation level (Department of Education, 1998)<sup>49</sup>.

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<sup>49</sup> 'Matric' constituted the final year in the schooling system. At the end of this year, on the basis of the choice of subjects students had completed and the examination of these subjects at what was called the standard of higher grade level, students could obtain sufficient credits to provide them with the minimum entry requirements for entry into higher education.

It is not surprising then that these inequalities at the schooling level have had a profound effect on the number of disabled people who have been able to access higher education. The White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy argued in 1997 that although no reliable statistics existed, higher education largely remained out of reach for the majority of disabled people (Office of the Deputy President, 1997).

Since 1994 there have been a number of changes at the schooling level which have contributed to breaking down some of the barriers experienced by disabled children in attending school, and to the creation of greater opportunities for their participation in the education system. Central to this has been the dismantling of the apartheid education system, which has removed the enforced racial segregation in schooling noted above. While there is still much evidence to suggest that many barriers remain at this level, from the data collected in the 2001 Census, there is also some evidence to indicate that the number of disabled children entering the schooling system has improved (StatsSA, 2003). It may be argued that these positive developments are likely to have increased the number of disabled learners now entering the higher education system. However, the lack of reliable data at the schooling level and especially at the higher education level makes it very difficult to prove or disprove these assumptions (Council on Higher Education, 2005:10).

In concluding this section it is useful to consider the data that emerged from the Council on Higher Education investigation (2005), which, as I explained in Chapter One, has provided an important starting point for this thesis. In the questionnaire that was sent to the institutions, the respondents were requested to complete a table in which they were required to specify the number of disabled students presently enrolled in their institution and then, to disaggregate this data according to race and gender. In a follow-up question they were asked to indicate the number of disabled students enrolled for undergraduate and post-graduate degrees, and to organise this information

according to whether these degrees were being completed through contact teaching or distance education programmes. The report on the investigation (Council on Higher Education, 2005) argued that the responses to these questions and the data that emerged, showed clearly that at the present time it is extremely difficult to obtain any accurate picture of the number of disabled students who are now attending higher education institutions, and even more importantly, moving through the system. Similarly, the report argued further that the limited data that does exist at the higher education institutional level is not always useful in addressing issues impacting on participation rates and experiences. However, taking all the various limitations into account the findings of the survey showed that from this study and using higher education enrolment figures from 2002, disabled students constitute on average 0.27 percent of the student body at these institutions. As the report comments:

We can say with some certainty that 0.27 percent of the responding institutions' total enrolment figures is an extremely small percentage of their student body. Even if a minimum participation rate of one percent for disabled students is considered as an initial target to broaden disabled people's access to higher education, it would take a fourfold increase in current participation rates to meet it (Council on Higher Education: 2005:41)<sup>50</sup>.

### **3.3 The post-apartheid higher education policy framework**

My intention in this section is to provide an overview of what is contained in the higher education policy framework as an outline of the formal parameters in which institutions are operating. However, my lens is one informed by the

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<sup>50</sup> Taken the weaknesses in the statistical information described here and therefore the lack of reliability in the tentative conclusions drawn, I have not attempted in this thesis to develop a statistical profile of the number of disabled students presently enrolled in the public higher education system or associated changes that have taken place since 1994. I believe that to develop such a profile would imply the existence of reliable data across the system that is just not available.

central concerns of this study and, therefore, my objective is to consider the opportunities that the policy framework either opens up or constrains towards the creation of equity for disabled students in higher education. In doing this I have had to recognise the policy framework as a collection of policy texts that reflect the struggles and compromises of the policy process (Bowe and Ball with Gold, 1992; Ball, 1994). These struggles are inherently political, where different voices with different levels of power in the society attempt to influence their outcome (Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, and Henry, 1997). As a reflection of the outcomes of these various “political states of play” (Fulcher, 1989:7), the framework carries with it “both possibilities and constraints, contradictions and spaces” that play themselves out in the “context of practice” (Bowe and Ball with Gold, 1992:15). In recognising these complexities that are inherent to interpreting or evaluating policy in any meaningful way, I have been intent in this discussion to consider the implications of the manner in which disability and disabled students are addressed in the higher education policy framework.

The previous section of this chapter has illustrated the complexity of the forces shaping the post-apartheid higher education system. Therefore, in line with the arguments around the political nature of policy noted above, the higher education policy framework coming out of this period reflects the complexities of these different struggles and contextual influences. Inherent to this process are the shifts and ongoing modifications that characterise the nature of policy where “purposes and intentions are reworked and reorientated over time” (Ball, 1994:17). Cloete (2002:105) captures what he sees as the distinctive features of the higher education policy process over this period. He says:

The post-1994 period can be summarised as having started with a huge, participatory policy effort within a context of optimism for both the expansion of the system and redress for past inequities. This was followed by an ‘implementation vacuum’ in relation to the new policies,

a shift in emphasis after 1997 to efficiency, and finally a reassessment of priorities and a more interventionist approach by government in 2001.

Similarly, as the previous section has shown, policies always enter “existing patterns of inequality” in the society (Ball, 1994:17). As such, the policy imperatives discussed in this section need to be considered together with the context already discussed, especially in relation to the institutional inequalities described. In recognising, therefore, the need to consider and understand the policy framework in this way, I have been cognisant of the fact that in this thesis, I am only able to discuss this framework as it presents itself at this particular time.

In the last section of Chapter Two I argued that two important areas of focus should inform a conceptualisation of equity for disabled students in higher education. I argued that it is necessary to recognise equity in higher education as incorporating the ability to gain entry into higher education programmes and to be able to participate equitably in the process of teaching and learning, thus having fair chances for success. I emphasised that throughout this research, including the way in which the findings are organised and reported, I have attempted to address both these areas of concern. I have applied the same thinking to the manner in which I have considered the policy framework – that is, to consider its implications for disabled students in gaining entry to higher education and in relation to what happens once they are there. In considering the policy framework in relation to what it means for disabled students, I have taken the notion of policy to include both government strategy documents in the area and associated legislation.

### 3.3.1 Gaining access to higher education and its benefits

It may be argued that the central principles informing disabled students' access to and participation in higher education in South Africa are to be found in the country's first democratic constitution. In Chapter 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996) fundamental human rights are guaranteed to all citizens of the country. In Section 9 of this chapter it is recognised that these rights for some citizens may be directly or indirectly compromised by different forms of discrimination that operate in any society. Such discrimination is recognised to arise from differences that may exist among citizens and the use of these criteria to affect such discrimination. One of the criteria listed in the Constitution (Act No. 108 of 1996) is *disability* and therefore, it is recognised as a basis for discrimination against some citizens. The Constitution (Act No. 108 of 1996, Chapter 2, Section 9.3) therefore outlaws discrimination on the basis of disability.

This non-discrimination provision within the Constitution (Act No. 108 of 1996) is extremely important for disabled people in South Africa. Since the country's legislative framework is subject to the provisions of the Constitution (Act No. 108 of 1996), this means that in all spheres of social, political and economic life, discrimination on the basis of disability, is, at least in theory, unconstitutional and therefore illegal. As will be evident in the discussions on the higher education policy, this constitutional imperative is carried forward in a number of pieces of legislation that specifically refer to grounds for discrimination mentioned in the Constitution (Act No. 108 of 1996). Disability would always therefore feature as one of these.

The non-discrimination provisions of the Constitution (Act No. 108 of 1996) reflect the outcome of a process of intense struggle and negotiation by the Disability Rights Movement in South Africa during the early 1990s to have disability recognised in this way (Howell, Chalklen and Alberts, 2006).

However, equally important is the recognition given, and the connection made in the Constitution (Act No. 108 of 1996), to redressing existing inequalities. The Constitution (Act No. 108 of 1996, Chapter 2, Section 9.3) therefore states that in pursuance of equality for all people in our society, it may be necessary to put in place legislation or other measures that protect and advance those people who have been “disadvantaged by unfair discrimination”. Such a scenario was particularly evident under apartheid. Since disability is recognised as a basis for discrimination, disabled people are also recognised as people who have experienced unfair discrimination in the past. In this way, the Constitution (Act No. 108 of 1996) recognises that, for disabled people to enjoy their full rights as citizens, it may be necessary to introduce measures that are aimed at redressing the inequalities they have experienced in the past. To this end, a number of pieces of legislation either recognise disabled people as the target of necessary affirmative action measures, or in some way that locates them as having been historically disadvantaged<sup>51</sup>.

Both these constitutional principles have a bearing on disabled students gaining access to higher education and its benefits. Before moving on to discuss their particular status as historically disadvantaged students in the higher education policy documents (Department of Education, 1997, 2001b), it is necessary to briefly note what the Constitution (Act No. 108 of 1996) says more broadly about the right to education. In Chapter 2, Section 29.1 it states:

Everyone has the right - to a basic education, including adult basic education; and to further education, which the state, through

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<sup>51</sup> One of the most important and far reaching of these is the Employment Equity Act (No.55 of 1998). In this Act, black people, women and disabled people are recognised as groups who must be specifically targeted as the recipients of a range of measures that are aimed at redressing the inequalities across the labour market and in the workplace that existed in the past. The Act has strong operational and accountability mechanisms in place to ensure that such changes take place in both the public and private sectors.

reasonable measures, must make progressively available and accessible<sup>52</sup>.

This means that, as with many countries in the world, higher education is not an automatic right, but is subject to a range of measures that limit access to higher education. For the majority of potential students in South Africa, over and above meeting minimum exit requirements at the schooling level for higher education entry, finding the resources to attend higher education remains a very important barrier. As the research findings discussed later show, disabled students are not immune to the problems that these areas pose for many students.

Against this background, and recognising the importance of a broader set of contextual forces on accessing higher education in South Africa, it is important to briefly outline the legal provisions that would guide disabled students' admission to a higher education institution and thus their entry into the system. The public higher education system in South Africa is regulated through the Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997). In the Act, which, as already noted, is informed by the constitutional principles outlined, attention is given, among other things, to admission to public higher education institutions. The Act (No. 101 of 1997, Chapter 4, Section 37.1) states that subject to the provisions of the Act, the Council of a public higher education institution, in consultation with the Senate, determines the admission policy for the institution, which is open to public scrutiny. This would also extend to various associated policies such as, those dealing with the entrance requirements for specific programmes, the number of students that can be admitted to a programme, and requirements for readmission or exclusion. The Act (No. 101 of 1997, Chapter 4, Section 37.3) also goes on to state that: "The admission policy of a public higher education institution must

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<sup>52</sup> I will be discussing later in this chapter and then in Chapter Seven, how important the notion of 'reasonable' is to the realisation of the rights of disabled students in higher education.

provide appropriate measures for the redress of past inequalities and may not unfairly discriminate in any way”.

Within the context of this study it is very important to consider what these legal provisions mean for disabled students to gain access to higher education. Firstly, the Act (No. 101 of 1997), read together with the provisions of the Constitution (No. 108 of 1996), implies that the criteria of disability cannot be used to keep a qualifying student out of higher education. Thus, without being able to provide a legally informed judgement (or note any legal precedent already set around this area), it would seem that an institution would not be able to inform an applicant that they cannot attend the institution ‘because you are disabled’. Moreover, they would be expected to actively seek to address the inequalities disabled students have experienced in the past through improved opportunities for access. However, since institutions effectively control whom they will admit, it is really at this level that the decision is made, and is ostensibly driven by ‘sound’ academic experience and thinking that sets these entrance requirements, especially to specific programmes. I will be arguing in Chapter Seven that the findings of this research show that, it is this process of decision making and what informs it in relation to disabled students, that becomes the central determinant for entry into or exclusion from the system. The contestation around who is gaining access to higher education in South Africa at present, in relation to the redress imperatives set, is not limited to disability concerns. As the previous section showed, while the racial profile of the student profile may have shifted significantly over the last fifteen years there is evidence to suggest that the class divisions are increasing (Cooper and Subotzky, 2001; Jansen, 2005). Thus, having sufficient resources to attend higher education institutions is a key determinant of who is gaining access to it. While all these concerns are equally important for disabled students, their status as disabled people is of significant importance. This status renders them subject to all the common sense (Gramsci, 1971) perceptions around disability already described in Chapter Two. The legal framework, while creating opportunities

for prevention of discrimination, has few checks and balances in place when it comes to admissions processes and practices that may indirectly discriminate against disabled students.

It may be argued, that non-discrimination of disabled students in accessing higher education is also controlled through the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (No. 4 of 2000), which also recognises disability discrimination as a key concern. In defining such discrimination, the Act (No. 4 of 2000, Chapter 2, Section 9) states that this includes among other practices:

failing to eliminate obstacles that unfairly limit or restrict persons with disabilities from enjoying equal opportunities or failing to take steps to reasonably accommodate the needs of such persons.

Once again it is important to emphasise that, like the Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997), these provisions in this act are very important in setting out a non-discriminatory national legal framework. In fact the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (No. 4 of 2000), goes so far as to emphasise the issue of barriers (or obstacles) and introduces into the framework the duty to accommodate the needs of a disabled person. The Act (No.4 of 2000) therefore suggests that discrimination is possible where barriers are not eliminated and accommodations are not made. It is therefore very important in deepening the notion of disability discrimination to include practices that do not actively seek to remove existing barriers or make positive adjustments so that a disabled person is able to enjoy equitable opportunities (such as the provision of additional support that some disabled students may require). However, within the framework of this study, it is the qualification of 'reasonable' that is so important to recognise. The duty to accommodate the 'needs' of a disabled person may be waved or reduced if it is regarded as reasonable to do so.

This precedent for limiting the rights of a person from a determination of what is 'reasonable' is provided for in the Constitution (No. 108 of 1996). In Chapter 2, Section 36.1 it states that:

The rights in the Bill of Rights may be limited only in terms of law of general application to the extent that the limitation is reasonable and justifiable in an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and freedom, taking into account all relevant factors, including

- a. the nature of the right;
- b. the importance of the purpose of the limitation;
- c. the nature and extent of the limitation;
- d. the relation between the limitation and its purpose; and
- e. less restrictive means to achieve the purpose.

Except as provided in subsection (1) or in any other provision of the Constitution, no law may limit any right entrenched in the Bill of Rights.

The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (No. 4 of 2000) provides no further definition for interpreting what is reasonable in relation to its attention to the 'needs' of a disabled person. It is not possible within the framework of this thesis to explore any of the legal precedents that have been set thus far in relation to the limitation of a person's constitutional rights. What is most relevant in the context of this study, is that the notion of 'reasonableness' as a basis for restricting a disabled student's access to higher education, especially into a programme of their choice, presents as a very important issue. The findings show that within the higher education context the notion of what is 'reasonable' is strongly shaped by attitudes and practices that dominate this particular social setting (Barton, 1996) and those that constitute the hegemony of disability (Oliver, 1990).

In addition to the Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997) there are two policy documents that may be regarded as central to regulating the higher

education system and, most importantly, shaping its transformation in the post 1994 period. These are; firstly, what is referred to as White Paper 3 – A Programme for Higher Education Transformation (Department of Education, 1997); and, secondly, the National Plan for Higher Education (Department of Education, 2001b). The first document is argued to be a framework for change, which outlines the government’s response and adopted policy positions around the transformation of the higher education system in South Africa. This document, as Cloete’s (2002) earlier point emphasises, reflects the outcomes of a range of policy related deliberations between 1994 and 1997 around a post-apartheid higher education system<sup>53</sup>. The second document outlines “the framework and mechanisms for the restructuring of the higher education system” to achieve the vision and goals outlined in White Paper 3 (Department of Education, 2001b:1).

In both these documents, following the provisions of the Constitution (Act No. 108 of 1996), disabled people are recognised as having been historically disadvantaged in gaining access to higher education. As such, White Paper 3 (1997) argues that, as part of an identified need towards increasing and broadening participation in the higher education system, access should be increased to those who have experienced inequalities in the past, including disabled students. The document further states:

Successful policy must overcome an historically determined pattern of fragmentation, inequality and inefficiency. It must increase access for black, women, disabled and mature students, and generate new curricula and flexible models of learning and teaching, including modes of delivery, to accommodate a larger and more diverse student population (Department of Education, 1997:10).

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<sup>53</sup> The most important of these was the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) set up by the Minister of Education in February 1995. It presented a detailed report of its findings to the Minister in 1996.

These important links are sustained in the manner in which the principle of 'equity and redress', one of the eight key principles outlined in the document, is described. The policy defines this principle as follows:

The principle of equity requires fair opportunities both to enter higher education programmes and to succeed in them. Applying the principle of equity implies, on the one hand, a critical identification of existing inequalities which are the product of policies, structures and practices based on racial, gender, disability and other forms of discrimination of disadvantage, and the other a programme of transformation with a view to redress. Such transformation involves not only abolishing all existing forms of unjust differentiation, but also measures of empowerment, including financial support to bring about equal opportunity for individuals and institutions (Department of Education, 1997:11).

The section from White Paper 3 (1997) quoted above immediately locates disabled students as among those who have experienced the inequities of the apartheid higher education system. It also suggests that flexibility in teaching and learning is central to responding to greater diversity within the student population. In this way, it locates disability within a framework that recognises the importance of teaching and learning in the creation of greater equity in higher education. Moreover, it links the imperative for greater access, to issues of participation and success, and locates disabled students within such an understanding. The policy therefore argues strongly for the collective importance of access, participation and success in the realisation of equity. Moreover, it suggests that to achieve these it is necessary to redress those policies, structures and practices that have created and shaped such inequalities. It also argues that it is not enough just to identify these barriers, but to also create "measures of empowerment, including financial support" to create opportunities for equitable participation and thus fair chances for success.

If the equity framework lens I discussed in Chapter Two is applied to the policy statements noted above, it might be argued that these policy provisions provide a strong enabling framework for taking forward, in the right way, the equity concerns I have discussed. However, considering the policy framework from such a perspective also directs me to considering what Ball (1994:25) refers to as second order policy effects. He explains that these refer to the impact which the changes brought about by the policy will make to existing patterns of social access, opportunity and social justice. In this thesis I am most concerned, therefore, with considering what the research findings show about what is happening around these policy imperatives in practice. In doing this, it is possible to begin to draw some tentative conclusions around the strengths and weaknesses of the policy framework in providing institutions with sufficient direction and support, to put into operation appropriate measures that address the equity concerns of disabled students.

Earlier I referred to the National Plan for Higher Education (Department of Education, 2001b), which, as already noted, provides an operational framework for taking forward the vision and principles of White Paper 3 (Department of Education, 1997). Like White Paper 3 (1997), the National Plan (2001b), recognises disabled students as those who have been historically disadvantaged by the apartheid higher education system, and commits the government to increasing their access to higher education. Specific mention is made of the use of earmarked funds to “realise particular policy objectives, such as, for example, research capacity building and increased access of poor students and the disabled to higher education” (Department of Education, 2001b:12). The National Plan (2001b) also argues that while increasing access for disabled students is an important step towards the goal of redressing the inequities of the past, it should also form part of those strategies aimed at broadening the social base of students in South African higher education through the inclusion of “non-traditional

students, i.e. mature students, workers, women and disabled people". (Department of Education, 2001b:28). In emphasising the importance of realising this objective, the policy states that:

The Ministry therefore expects institutions to indicate in their institutional plans the strategies and steps they intend taking to increase the enrolment of these categories of learners, including clear targets and time-frames. (Department of Education, 2001b:28)

The National Plan (2001b), like White Paper 3 (1997) discussed above, also links the access imperative to concerns around participation and success. It discusses at some length the importance of mechanisms such as Academic Development for ensuring that all students are able to participate equally in the process of teaching and learning and thus have a fair chance of success. It asserts that:

Higher education institutions have a moral and educational responsibility to ensure that they have effective programmes in place to meet the teaching and learning needs of the students they admit. This requires that institutions should integrate academic development programmes into their overall academic and financial planning. (Department of Education, 2001b:25).

What is important in the context of this study is that this emphasis on the responsibility of institutions for ensuring equitable participation and fair chances for success, is, however, not related directly to disabled students. Similarly, the connection between Academic Development and disabled students is not made. The policy framework, therefore, fails to address in any meaningful way, the historical omission of disabled students from Academic

Development initiatives in South Africa. This latter area of concern and its importance for this study is discussed in Section 3.4 of this chapter.

### **3.3.2 Two further policies of importance**

The policies and legislation discussed above may be regarded as those that are most important to the functioning of the higher education system and to the direction of change in this sector since 1994. However, as already mentioned, two further policies ratified by the government in the last ten years are also important to the concerns of this study and, therefore, have meaning for disabled students access to and participation in higher education institutions.

The first is the White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy (Office of the Deputy President, 1997). This policy document, which has already been referred to in this chapter, provides a framework to ensure that disability issues are integrated into the overall political, economic and social functioning of the country. This includes essential areas of service delivery. While it is not possible within the parameters of this thesis to go into a more detailed discussion on the provisions of this policy, or what has been achieved thus far in implementing the changes it argues for, two principles in the document may be regarded as especially important to the concerns of this study<sup>54</sup>.

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<sup>54</sup> In Chapter One I referred to a report completed for the Office on the Status of Disabled Persons in the Presidency entitled *Disability Our Voices, Our Rights* (Howell and Chalklen, 2003). The report documents the history of the disability rights movement in South Africa between 1980 and 2001 and the various social, political and economic factors that shaped disabled people's experiences and thus the concerns that became central to why and how they positioned themselves within the broader liberation struggle in this country. In exploring the various gains that have been made in the post 1994 period towards the realisation of the rights of disabled people, attention is also given to how these struggles influenced post-apartheid policy, such as the Constitutional provisions discussed in the previous section. See also the contributions in Watermeyer, Swartz, Lorenzo, Schneider and Priestley (Eds.) 2006, which provide important insights into the concerns of disabled people in a post-apartheid South Africa.

Firstly, the policy accepts and explains the principle of self-representation. This principle has been central to the Disability Rights Movement in South Africa and to similar movements throughout the world. It is included as a principle in the United Nation's Standard Rules on the Equalisation of Opportunities for Disabled Persons (1993) and explained in the following way in the White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy (1997:19):

A fundamental principle which informs the outlook of the disability rights movement in South Africa and internationally is the right to self-representation. This means that the collective determination of disabled people must be used to inform the strategies of the government. In recognizing this principle, the government acknowledges the advisory role of organisations of persons with disabilities and their representatives in the decision-making processes... People with disabilities are best equipped to change perceptions and attitudes towards disability, and should therefore play a central role in the development of strategies and projects through their legitimate organisations.

At the institutional level this policy suggests, therefore, that the voice of disabled students becomes very important to shaping institutional responses that appropriately address their concerns.

The second important principle in this policy is that of "Integration and Sustainability" (Office of the Deputy President, 1997:19). In discussing the importance of this principle the policy explains that:

Historically, disability issues have been addressed in a piecemeal, fragmented way. This has been one of the key factors contributing to the marginalisation of disabled people and the dire poverty of the circumstances in which the majority find themselves.

The policy therefore argues that disability and the concerns of disabled people must be fully integrated into any processes of reconstruction and development within the country. It therefore suggests that, the eradication of the discrimination experienced by disabled people and the creation of equal opportunities for their participation, can only happen where disability becomes an integrated concern within broader processes of transformation. Once again, within higher education institutions, this principle has important implications for how disabled students' admission and participation are understood and responded to. The policy suggests that it must be recognised and responded to in an integrated way within all areas of the institution's functioning.

It may also be argued that the higher education policy framework outlined above is given further depth in relation to disabled students through the provisions of a further education policy entitled; White Paper 6: Special Needs Education, Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (Department of Education, 2001a). According to the policy, its primary purpose is the creation of educational opportunities for learners who have not been able to access existing educational provision or have experienced learning difficulties, largely because the education system has failed to "accommodate their learning needs" (Department of Education, 2001a:6). Disabled learners are regarded as having been most vulnerable to these inequalities in the system. It is explained that particular learning needs may arise from external or internal factors such as socio-economic deprivation or impairments such as blindness. The education system should therefore have the capacity to provide for the "broad range of learning needs (that exist) among the learner population at any point in time" (Department of Education, 2001a:17). Where learning needs are not met, learners experience barriers that prevent them from being able to participate effectively in the learning process. So White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001a), like the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (No. 4 of 2000), discussed earlier, argues for the creation of equal opportunities by addressing the

barriers that restrict or limit equitable participation and by ensuring that the education system is fully inclusive.

If the provisions of White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001a) are considered in relation to the equity framework outlined in Chapter Two, then two issues stand out. Firstly, it suggests that institutions need to address those barriers which limit access to educational provision and/or which prevent particular learners from being able to participate equitably in the process of teaching and learning. Secondly, it argues that it is necessary to put in place strategies that are aimed at building the capacity of the sector to meet the full range of learning needs within the student population. Although there are a number of important things that have to happen for such capacity to be built, throughout White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001a) emphasis is placed on: changing attitudes and overcoming prejudice; developing flexible teaching and learning programmes that respond to the diversity of learning needs; and putting in place mechanisms that can provide additional support to those learners who may require it.

It is not possible within the parameters of this thesis to discuss in any meaningful way the many debates and critiques which continue to rage around the strengths and weaknesses of South Africa's post-apartheid higher education policy framework, or for that matter, the other policies referred to above. However, taking the specific concerns of this thesis into account, one central observation of this framework stands out that is important in concluding this section on the policy framework, and as background to the presentation of the research findings in Chapters Five, Six and Seven.

This observation is reflective of a much more widely debated and substantial critique of South Africa's post apartheid education policy framework in general. It has to do with what a number of writers have argued is the overly symbolic nature of the policy imperatives, what these reflect about the political settlements made in the development of the policy texts, the implications of these for the implementation of the policy and, most

importantly, for effecting necessary change (See especially, Jansen, 2001, 2002; Sayed, 2001). In the context of this study, what is important to note is that the commitments made towards increasing access to higher education for disabled students are largely done in a symbolic manner. While this may be inevitable to an overarching policy framework of this nature, it does, as Jansen (2002) suggests, have important implications for changing educational practice. In this instance, therefore, it has important implications for changing institutional practices that impact on the creation of equity for disabled students in higher education. Jansen (2002:211) argues that where necessary change has not taken place within the education system “the *primary* explanation for non-change lies in the symbolic arena”. My concern, therefore, is that the *symbolic nature of the policy imperatives towards the creation of equity for disabled students in higher education may be inadequate* to effect the kind of changes needed at the level of institutional organisation and practice.

It may be argued that the provisions of the White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy (Office of the Deputy President, 1997) and those contained in White Paper 6 (Department of Education, 2001a) are valuable in drawing attention to the nature of the barriers disabled people experience, where the ‘problem’ lies and important principles and strategies for change. However, since both these policies *do not form part of the central policy and legal apparatus governing the higher education system* and, thus, influencing the policies and practices of institutions, it is difficult to feel confident about their ability to influence the higher education sector in any meaningful way.

### **3.4 Academic Development and the marginalisation of disability**

In Chapter Two I drew from Simpson’s (1996) arguments around learning support in higher education, to develop a conceptualisation for this thesis of what I termed teaching and learning support for disabled students. In doing this, I discussed the nature and form of support provision that is required in

higher education institutions to ensure that disabled students are able to participate equitably in the process of teaching and learning and thus have fair chances for success. I argued, therefore, that such a conceptualisation of teaching and learning support was critical to the creation of equity for disabled students in higher education. I was especially intent on drawing attention to the conceptual distinctions, and the implications of these at the institutional level, that Simpson (1996) makes between learner and learning as part of a learning support framework and the translation of this into 'learner services' and 'learning development'. Of particular importance was the focus of the latter on the teaching and learning process, including elements such as staff development and curriculum flexibility, and thus its operation at the "course and programme level" (Simpson, 1996:24).

As part of the broader focus of this chapter, my intention now is to contextualise this discussion on learning support in higher education within the South African context. Not unexpectedly, such a discussion is one that is inherently connected to the educational inequalities of the apartheid system and the manifestations of this at the higher education level. In essence this is a discussion about the development of specific teaching and learning support initiatives in South African higher education over the last twenty years, which are now collectively referred to in this context as Academic Development. Such initiatives have broadly sought, albeit from shifting perspectives, to address the impact of these inequalities on the participation and success of students in higher education, recognised to have been disadvantaged at the schooling level by apartheid inequalities and their ongoing manifestations. From the earlier discussions on the higher education landscape it is clear that for the majority of black students entering higher education at the present time, the impact of this legacy is still central to their schooling experience.

My reasoning for delving into this specific aspect of South African higher education is twofold. Firstly, I intend to demonstrate that the key concerns that have informed and shaped Academic Development initiatives in South

Africa, including discursive shifts that have taken place and the impact of critical voices within the project (Boughey, 2003), are fundamentally important to the equity imperatives I argued for in Chapter Two and thus to the creation of equity for disabled students in higher education. However, despite the obvious importance of these developments for disabled students, disability and the learning needs of disabled students have largely been excluded from these debates and thus to the shaping of the Academic Development project in South Africa. In Chapter Six, I will be arguing that the findings of this study demonstrate how important this omission has been to the dominant approach, focus and location within institutions of teaching and learning support for disabled students, and thus for the creation of equity. Once again it is necessary to assert that this discussion only addresses those concerns within the debates and analyses of the Academic Development project that are relevant to this study. It therefore cannot do justice to the many important commentaries and analyses, which now constitute this important body of literature around higher education transformation in South Africa.

The first issue that is important to this study, and which resonates strongly with the concerns raised around 'special needs' in Chapter Two, speaks to assumptions around where the 'problem' lies, and thus where the focus of change should be in the Academic Development enterprise. Once again the critiques are about the dominance of a deficit discourse and responses to such perceived deficits that are about assimilation and the 'othering' of the students concerned. These critiques have been central to shifts that have taken place within this terrain; from the first initiatives set up by the historically white English-medium universities in the early 1980s to what is now conceived of as the educational project of Academic Development (Bajjnath, 1997).

Before moving on to discuss these concerns around a deficit discourse more carefully, it is necessary to briefly note that there is some debate now as to

what the Academic Development project in a post-apartheid South Africa encompasses and thus what its focus should be (Volbrecht, 2003:110). Similarly, there are growing concerns around what Boughey (2003:7) suggests is the role it is now “increasingly charged with...the task of contributing to institutional efficiency and, at a wider level, to national competitiveness in a global economy”. These points are especially important to the ongoing transformation of South African higher education and the role of teaching and learning support within it. However, for the purposes of this study, the Academic Development project as it now operates within higher education institutions, is recognised, as Scott (2001:3) argues, to have a “broader compass” than the narrower focus of the initiatives of the early 1980s. Broadly speaking, it has a distinctive equity focus that aims to create “conditions for success” of students disadvantaged by the apartheid education system and its ongoing legacy on schooling in South Africa (Baijnath, 1997:61). However, and of increasing importance, it is also recognised as key to “improving the effectiveness of all educational processes in HE, in the interests of all students” (Scott, 2001:3). In this way it is argued to be an essential element towards ensuring both equity and excellence in South African higher education (Scott, 2003). What is most important, however, to this study, are the debates and critiques that have contributed to these shifts. It is therefore necessary to return to the dominant deficit discourse issues of the early days.

Boughey (2003:1) captures this deficit discourse in these first initiatives in the following way:

In South Africa, the field of Academic Development grew out of an earlier endeavour, termed “Academic Support” which was established in the early 1980s to provide support to the, then, small number of black students who had gained admittance to the English speaking historically white universities and who were deemed to be “underprepared” for tertiary study. The earliest Academic Support

initiatives were essentially liberal in intent in that they located the phenomenon of “underpreparadness” or “disadvantage” in factors inherent to the individual such as language “proficiency” or a lack of “study skills” and addressed these “problems” through add-on provision in the form of tutorials and “special” courses.

Ndebele (1995:4) argues further that by categorising some students (i.e. black students who experienced Bantu Education) as those who are disadvantaged or underprepared, these students are seen as deficient in relation to those students (the normal students) who did not experience Bantu Education (white students) and were sufficiently prepared for higher education. The challenge of teaching and learning support in higher education premised on these assumptions (in this instance called Academic Support) is to make these students “ready to join the rest of the student community once they have been sufficiently ‘prepared’”. Thus through such a process of categorisation; “the namer isolates the named, explains them, contains them, and controls them” (Ndebele, 1995:4) – the same normalization imperative discussed in Chapter Two in relation to ‘special needs’ learners.

Similarly, as Mehl (1988), Baijnath (1997) and Sayed (2003) all argue, since the problem was located with the ‘disadvantaged’ student and their inherent ‘deficits’, no attention or responsibility was placed on the higher education system to change. The nature of the knowledge structures in higher education were never called into question (Sayed, 2003:87) and the universities, including their teaching and learning practices, were part of an “accepted, normal, advantaged, standard world” that should be aspired to (Ndebele, 1995:4). Thus, as with the disabled person or the ‘special needs’ learner, the imperative is to help the disadvantaged or excluded student to fit into an unchanged environment.

In extending these arguments, Ndebele (1995:4) raises a further concern with the categorisation of students in this way and the underlying deficit discourse that, once again, resonate strongly with the arguments discussed in Chapter Two. He argues that, like 'special needs', the notion of 'disadvantage' becomes a technical, depoliticised term describing the perceived educational 'deficits' of the learner, which in turn require a "professional, humanitarian, and curative intervention" – the same as the "benevolent humanitarianism" Tomlinson (1982:5) speaks of. In the highly politicised context of the post-apartheid higher education system and its inherent inequalities, Ndebele (1995:4) suggests:

The notion of 'disadvantage' enables us to avoid such 'embarrassing' expressions as 'black students', 'the oppressed'. That way, the issue is depoliticised through a deft avoidance of race and all it implies in South Africa.

These concerns, especially around the dominance of a deficit discourse in the conceptualisation of teaching and learning support in higher education, are not unique to South Africa (Simpson, 1996:17). However, what is important about them in the context of this study is that they have been central in shaping existing Academic Development initiatives, which in turn are argued to be central to an equitable and just higher education that is also able to produce the skills and knowledge required for South Africa's developmental needs (Scott, 2003:48). Thus the essential elements (and on going debates), which now characterise such teaching and learning support initiatives in South African institutions, have been strongly shaped by the same thinking that underpins the political project of inclusive education in higher education discussed in Chapter Two.

It is not surprising then that the outcome of the above critiques was an alternative outlook on where the 'problem' lay and a different perspective on what needed to change. The critiques noted above all point to the need for

systemic change rather than compensating for the 'deficits' in 'disadvantaged' learners. Mehl (1988:18), locating this argument within the context of South Africa's colonial legacy, argued:

A major issue today for the premier institutions of higher learning in South Africa then becomes one not of assimilation of the colonized within the colonial structures but rather the change of the colonial structures themselves.

This call for systemic or institutional change is central to the concerns of this thesis. However, it is the kind of changes that have been called for within institutions and thus the focus and approach of Academic Development initiatives that resonate so strongly with the elements of the equity project outlined in Chapter Two. The first aspect of the change process that flows directly from the emphasis on systemic change is the attention that is given to what Scott (2001:3) refers to as the "formal teaching and learning process". More specifically, Academic Development initiatives have largely focused on the participation and success aspects of the equity project. They have therefore focused attention on the nature of teaching and learning within institutions and its primacy in determining "what categories of student can enter and succeed in HE" (Scott, 1995:6). It thus links the teaching and learning process within institutions to the creation of equity.

With the focus on teaching and learning, Academic Development initiatives have, therefore, largely been concerned with the kind of learning support that Simpson (1996:23) refers to as "learning development" – that is, as already emphasised, initiatives that within a holistic framework support different components of the system, including staff and students, at the "course and programme" level. Put another way, Academic Development initiatives have primarily been aimed at ensuring that all students are able to access the curriculum and thus have epistemological access (Morrow, 1993) to higher education and its benefits. I have argued in Chapter Two that it is such forms

of access that are so critical for disabled students. However, despite its centrality to their success in higher education, it is also the area where the least obvious and most subtle forms of exclusion take place.

It is not surprising then that with the focus on learning and teaching within the Academic Development enterprise issues such as; curriculum flexibility; teaching and learning methods; assessment practices; staff development; and responding to diversity in the student population, all feature strongly in writings on Academic Development. The latter concern is especially important to this study and resonates strongly with the arguments put forward in Chapter Two. However, in my reading of this literature, the notion of diversity is dominated by differences arising from perceived levels of preparedness for tertiary study and is strongly linked, therefore, to notions of disadvantage within the schooling system (De Groot and Dison, 1996; Scott, 1994, 2001, 2003). Linking the impact of the inequalities of the apartheid system on the diversity of learning needs that the teaching and learning process in South African higher education institutions must respond to, is very important in the South African context. However, in my opinion, the debates around diversity have not extended far enough to grapple with the complexities of what influences and shapes how students access the curriculum and thus what is needed from the teaching and learning process to facilitate such access.

While such omissions may be understandable in the South African context, there are two consequences to this that are important to note. Firstly, a deficit discourse still tends to dominate the thinking in institutions, especially among academics themselves, around students' learning (Boughey, 2002, McKenna, 2003). Boughey (2002:295) argues this strongly in relation to issues of English language proficiency and the 'problems' that students, mainly black students whose first language is not English, have with tertiary study. Secondly, it limits the possibilities of thinking out of the 'under-preparedness box' to consider, as already argued, other factors that impact

on learning styles and methods of engagement with the curriculum. In doing this it not only runs the risk of continuing to categorise students, but it also fails to interrogate the complex interaction of a range of forces such as impairment, schooling experience, language orientation and cultural context (Boughey, 2005:240) on shaping how students engage with the curriculum.

My objective in this exploration of Academic Development has been, as already emphasised, to consider its importance for the kind of change that is needed in higher education institutions to ensure equity for disabled students. While this argument still holds, it is important to emphasise that, as Boughey (2003:3) argues, the developmental work that arose out of these critiques has been significantly eroded as the Academic Development project has shifted (or retreated) once again. Such shifts, she argues, are attributable to the impact on higher education of the government's more recent "stringent macro-economic framework" as well as the increasing marketisation of higher education within a globalising knowledge economy. Thus despite the emphasis on the importance of Academic Development in the government's White Paper 3 on Higher Education Transformation (Department of Education, 1997), the National Plan for Higher Education (Department of Education, 2001b) and the provision of some limited funding for it in the new framework, Funding of Public Higher Education (Department of Education, 2003), its worth is undervalued. Scott (2003:53) argues that its importance to meeting both the equity, developmental and quality imperatives of the higher education system is still not sufficiently recognised in the ongoing transformation of the system. Thus while these debates and their influence on the kind of changes which are needed within higher education are so important for disabled students, the enterprise appears to remain largely removed from addressing their concerns.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

This chapter situates this thesis and the findings of the research within a specific set of historically bound social and material relations – what I have called the South African higher education context. It has discussed those historical and contemporary forces that have been important in shaping the South African higher education system and its history of inequality. This chapter has also provided some background to the historical inequalities experienced by disabled learners in accessing education at all levels. I have argued how important the inequalities at the schooling level have been to restricting access to the higher education system for disabled learners in this country.

This chapter has also explored the post 1994 policy framework governing the higher education system in South Africa from the perspective of disabled students. It has considered what opportunities or constraints the legal provisions and policy commitments create for disabled students to enter higher education without discrimination and to participate equitably in the process of teaching and learning.

In the final section of this chapter, I had discussed some of the historical concerns and debates that have shaped Academic Development initiatives in South Africa and the importance of these to the equity concerns for disabled students discussed in Chapter Two. While these debates and the concerns they draw attention to are so important to disabled students, it is argued that the historical omission of disabled students from these initiatives has important implications for the findings of this study.

The next chapter explains the research design that was developed for the empirical inquiry of the thesis.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **RESEARCH DESIGN**

#### **4.1 Introduction**

In Chapter One I explained that the starting point for the empirical inquiry of this thesis was my involvement in a project commissioned by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in 2003. The aim of the project was to investigate what was happening across the public higher education system in South Africa with regard to disabled students and the opportunities that were available to them. My involvement in this project provided me with an opportunity to be part of the design and administration of a survey questionnaire, which was sent to all 35 public higher education institutions in place at this time. I obtained permission from the CHE to use the data collected through the survey questionnaire for my doctoral research and to undertake follow-up interviews with selected personnel from some of the institutions. This chapter describes the research process that I followed from this initial starting point to the final analysis and presentation of the findings reported in this thesis. My intention in this chapter is to describe how the data for the research was collected and analysed and in this way show how I sought to ensure the reliability and validity of the study. My aim in this chapter is to also provide greater insight into the constraints related to data collection in the South African context and within higher education institutions.

The research process described in this chapter was designed to pursue the two central research questions of this thesis. To reiterate, these were; to explore how public higher education institutions are responding to the admission of disabled students and their participation once they are part of the student body; and to consider how appropriate and adequate these responses are for ensuring that disabled students have equitable access to higher education and its benefits. The chapter begins by describing the two

methods of data collection that were used and their importance to the various stages of the research process. The first of these was the system-wide survey questionnaire linked to the CHE study noted above, which provided me with the data I used to identify areas of focus for the in-depth interviews, the second data collection method used, and to purposefully stratify the sample of institutions to participate in this more qualitative component of the research. The chapter then discusses the interview process in more detail and raises some of the ethical questions I recognised were important to consider in undertaking this research. I finally discuss how I went about analysing the data from the in-depth interviews. I explain how I did this by using the conceptual and contextual framework presented in the previous chapters and triangulating these findings with data from the initial survey questionnaire to deepen my analysis of the picture that was emerging. At the end, the limitations of the research are briefly discussed.

## **4.2 The research process**

### **4.2.1 The initial survey questionnaire**

#### **4.2.1.1 Overview of the survey process**

The questionnaire designed for the initial system wide survey was aimed at eliciting both quantitative and qualitative data that was regarded as important by the CHE for developing a comprehensive picture of what was happening at individual institutions. A copy of this survey questionnaire is attached as *Appendix A*<sup>55</sup>. The intention, therefore, was to make use of a questionnaire to profile the existing situation. However, I also wanted to gather information that would enable the researchers to begin to identify both hindering and enabling conditions impacting on what the project defined as equitable access and opportunities for disabled students. The survey questionnaire,

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<sup>55</sup> As the principal researchers on the project, my colleague, Raji Matshediso, and I, developed the survey questionnaire.

therefore, was aimed at identifying institutional practices and structures in place and recording how the respondents described their roles and responsibilities, including the challenges they faced in their work.

With these broad objectives in mind the questionnaire was organised into 10 sections. In each of the 10 sections information was requested from the recipients in a number of different ways. They were asked to answer *Yes* or *No* to some questions, to provide specific data where possible, to describe specific institutional practices or structures in place and to comment on issues where their opinions were sought. In a few cases, the questions asked the recipients to rank their responses in relation to the question asked. The 10 sections around which the questions were organised were:

- Section A: Profile of Institution
- Section B: Institutional Policy
- Section C: Profile of disabled students at the institution
- Section D: Nature and structure of support services offered
- Section E: Curriculum flexibility/responsiveness
- Section F: Funding of support services
- Section G: Networking
- Section H: Constraints
- Section I: Future Plans
- Section J: Other comments

The covering letter to the questionnaire was addressed to the principals (some technikons) and vice-chancellors (usually universities) of all public higher education institutions in South Africa. In Chapter Three I explained the historical background that gave rise to the various different 'types' and 'sub-types' of higher education institutions that were in place in June 2003 when the questionnaire was sent out. An overview of the institutions in place at this time and therefore the institutions to which the questionnaire was sent is

provided in Table 4.1. The table also shows, as will be discussed later, from which categories the in-depth interview sample was selected.

University of Cape Town

**Table 4.1: Overview of the South African public higher education system in January 2003<sup>56</sup>**

	Type	Sub-type	Name	Sample selection (in-depth interviews)
Universities	HDU (HBU)	African HDU (all situated in 'homelands' or self-governing states under apartheid system)	Fort Hare	3 selected
			North West	
			North	
			Transkei	
			Venda	
			Zululand	
	Non-African HDU (for Coloured and Indian students)	Durban-Westville		
		Western Cape		
	Special purpose HDU (HBU)	Medunsa		
		Vista		
HAU (HWU)	Afrikaans HAU (medium of instruction)	Free State	2 selected	
		Port Elizabeth		
		Potchefstroom		
		Pretoria		
		Rand		
	English HAU (medium of instruction)	Stellenbosch		
		Cape Town	3 selected	
		Natal		
Rhodes				
Distance education	Witwatersrand			
Technikons	HDT (HBT)	African HDT (all situated in 'homelands' or self-governing states under apartheid system)	Border	2 selected
			Eastern Cape	
			Mangosuthu	
			Northern Gauteng	
			North West	
	Non-African HDT (for Coloured and Indian students)	ML Sultan		
		Peninsula		
	HAT (HWT)		Cape	1 selected
			Free State	
			Natal	
Port Elizabeth				
Pretoria				
Vaal Triangle				
Witwatersrand				
Distance education	Technikon SA			
	<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>36 institutions<sup>57</sup></b>	<b>11 institutions</b>

**Key to 'Type':**

**HDU**= historically disadvantaged university; **HBU**= historically black university,  
**HAU**= historically advantaged university, **HWU** = historically white university,  
**HDT**= historically disadvantaged technikon, **HBT**= historically black technikon,  
**HAT**= historically advantaged technikon, **HWT**= historically white technikon.

<sup>56</sup> Table adapted from Cooper and Subotzky (2001:2).

<sup>57</sup> At the time of the research (August 2003), ML Sultan and Mangosuthu technikons had very recently merged to form the Durban Institute of Technology (DIT). The questionnaire was sent to the newly formed DIT and thus to 35 institutions across the country.

In the covering letter to the questionnaire, the principals and vice-chancellors were asked that it be directed for completion to the person in the institution who was at that time *responsible for the provision of teaching and learning support for disabled students where such support existed* in the institution. Where such support did not exist, the principals and vice-chancellors were asked to direct the questionnaire for completion to the person in the institution *directly responsible for the overall provision of teaching and learning support for students generally within the institution*. It was assumed therefore that the respondents to the questionnaire would be the persons within the institution who are responsible for fulfilling this mandate. Throughout this thesis, therefore, where the people who completed the questionnaire are discussed I have referred to them as 'the respondents'.

From the 35 questionnaires sent to institutions (See Table 4.1) a total of 24 were returned. This constituted a return rate of 69% or slightly more than two thirds of the total number of public higher education institutions in the country at the time. For the purposes of analysing the data the returned questionnaires were categorised according to whether they were a technikon or university and according to their history - as a historically disadvantaged university or technikon (HDU/HDT) (i.e. historically disadvantaged institutions, HDIs) or as a historically advantaged university or technikon (HAU/HAT) (i.e. historically advantaged institutions, HAIs) (See Table 4.1 and Chapter Three). The results of the research process were presented in a report, which was published in September 2005 (Council on Higher Education, 2005).

#### **4.2.1.2 Emerging concerns**

In reviewing the survey data that emerged from this process as a starting point for the thesis, and therefore, its value to the central research questions asked, two premises informed the next research steps I decided to take. The first was what I recognised to be the *inherent limitations of a survey*

*questionnaire of this nature to answering the questions I wished to pursue.* Finch (1986), in discussing processes towards evaluating existing policies and their intentions through the use of quantitative surveys, argues that this research method has some important limitations to it as a tool for evaluation. Finch (1986:159) argues that although the data obtained from mainly quantitative surveys can “document the outcomes of policy and practice in a way which is generalizable” and, therefore, useful, they “can say little about the processes which produce those outcomes”. Although, as I have argued, the survey aimed to capture both quantitative and qualitative data, the latter mainly emerged from questions where the respondents had been asked to describe or comment on various services or activities. It was therefore able to provide important and valuable information about *what institutions were doing or not doing* at a practical level to support disabled students on their campuses. However, this data was limited in its ability to provide real insight into what I have argued constitute the essence of an institution’s response to disabled students, or what Finch (1986) refers to as the processes producing the outcomes recorded. I argued in Chapter One that the *strategies and practices* employed by the institutions, to support disabled students’ entry into and participation within them, and therefore the *attitudes and understandings* shaping these, constitute the essence of an institution’s response to disabled students. I recognised, therefore, that to answer the research questions it would be necessary to go *deeper rather than broader* to elicit the kind of information necessary to begin to answer the central research questions of this thesis.

I therefore decided to pursue the *depth* that was required by selecting a sample of the institutions that had returned their questionnaires and to undertake one in-depth interview with the person in the institution responsible for the provision of teaching and learning support for disabled students. In most cases this person was also the person who had filled in the questionnaire. Before moving on to discuss the in-depth interview process, it

is important to first explain a second premise that informed the research process after my initial engagement with the survey questionnaire data.

In Chapter One I explained how my motivation for pursuing this doctoral research was shaped by a number of policy processes that I had been involved in before 2003, which exposed me to important theoretical debates around disability and inclusive education. Similarly, my research work in the higher education area had drawn my attention to concerns around increasing access to higher education systems and the implications of this. I argued that a central concern for me was a need to bring together lines of sociological enquiry in each of these areas, to understand what equity for disabled students means in higher education and consider the institutional responses from this perspective. After my initial consideration of the survey questionnaire data collected in 2003 my intention was to do what Finch (1986:171) describes as “theoretically grounded qualitative research”. She explains the value of this in the following way:

One of the areas in which qualitative research could seek to improve upon much quantitative work is in providing clear theoretical frameworks for empirical work. This, of course, is also in line with the argument that we should be aiming essentially to provide policy makers with reconceptualizations of the issues within which they deal, rather than with ‘facts’.

Finch’s assertions capture what I wanted to do as a next step towards answering the research questions. My intention was to take the findings from the survey questionnaire further by bringing them together with key theoretical issues that were important. In this way I sought to provide a deeper conceptualisation around, and understanding of, how institutions are responding to disabled students. Put another way, I wanted to go beyond a description of what was being provided, to consider what this all meant for

the creation of equity for disabled students. My intention therefore was to also begin to construct a theoretical or conceptual framework for the study.

As a starting point, therefore, I used the data from the survey questionnaire to select 11 institutions for the in-depth interviews and to identify at a general level, and with regard to each of the 11 institutions, key areas of focus to pursue in the interviews.

## **4.2.2 The in-depth interviews**

### **4.2.2.1 Selecting the institutions and interviewees**

In selecting the institutions to approach to participate in the in-depth interviews, I took the population from which to select the sample as all those institutions that had returned their completed questionnaires (24) and had, therefore, indicated a willingness to participate in the study. In the covering letters to the institutions of the original survey questionnaire, it was indicated that some institutions may be approached to participate in follow-up interviews. From the pool of returned questionnaires I then stratified the institutions according to: (i) their historical designation (historically advantaged/disadvantaged technikon or university); (ii) their institutional sub-type (African/non-African and English/Afrikaans) (See Table 4.1), and (iii) their geographical location in South Africa. In constructing the sample I was concerned with using criteria that would yield a group of institutions that would be regarded as sufficiently representative of the South African population of public higher education institutions. Moreover, taken the history I have described in Chapter Three, I was also concerned with using criteria that I considered to be important in influencing the nature and functioning of individual institutions within the public higher education system.

I thus considered their historical development as white or black institutions under apartheid, and therefore as historically advantaged or disadvantaged

institutions, to be most important, as was their geographical location, which itself was linked to the spatial organisation and functioning of the apartheid system. I therefore wanted to include in the sample historically disadvantaged institutions that were located in geographical regions previously designated 'homelands' under apartheid and therefore areas still dominated by conditions associated with rural poverty<sup>58</sup>. I also wanted to include historically advantaged and disadvantaged institutions located in urban areas, but in places that reflected the social and economic divide between white suburbia and black townships. Among the historically advantaged institutions I wanted to ensure that the sample included those that were regarded as the English speaking 'liberal' institutions of the past as well as their more conservative Afrikaans counterparts.

While I considered these to be important criteria for constructing the sample I was also cognisant of the need to consider other issues such as the size of the student body and the institution's classification as a university or technikon. I was also influenced in my thinking by what institutions had said in their questionnaires. In this regard I wanted to ensure that the sample would include institutions that showed different histories in the development of their response to disabled students and/or the more recent government policy goals in this area. This related closely to a desire to include in the sample any differences in approach across institutions, including examples of what I regarded as interesting or innovative strategies, especially in overcoming challenges evident across the system.

While I regarded all these factors as important in constructing my sample, I was also intent on keeping the sample small. As already argued, my intention was to *deepen* my understanding of the situation at a group of institutions rather than merely increase the breadth of the kind of information collected through the questionnaire process. With these considerations in mind I

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<sup>58</sup> See Chapter Three where I explain what is meant by a 'homeland' in the South African apartheid context.

constructed a sample of 11 higher education institutions from among those who had returned their questionnaires. Table 4.1 above provides an overview of the final sample of 11 showing the 'categories' into which the institutions fit. In order to maintain the confidentiality of the institutions who formed part of the sample of 11, the table is only able to show the broad 'categories' into which these institutions fit.

Once I had constructed the sample in this way, I approached the person at the institution who had returned the questionnaire to request their participation in the follow-up interviews. As explained earlier, in the questionnaire process the covering letter sent to the vice-chancellors and principals requested that the document be passed on to and completed by the person presently responsible for the provision of teaching and learning support to disabled students in their institution (Council for Higher Education, 2005). It was assumed therefore that the respondents to the questionnaire were the persons within the institution who were responsible for this mandate. The location of this responsibility within the institution was clarified by asking the person who filled in the questionnaire to indicate their job title and position, their structural location within the institution and the person or body to whom they report. In Chapter Two I attempted to show that in the context of disability, how people make meaning of the issue of educational equity for disabled learners, is especially important to how existing inequalities are understood and the kind of change process that is envisaged. I felt therefore that these individuals and their perspective on the issues under investigation were important to understanding how equity concerns for disabled students were or were not being addressed in their institution. Their opinions and insights were therefore especially important to the study.

In all but 2 cases the person who agreed to be interviewed was the person who was directly responsible for completing the questionnaire. Thus, except

for the 2 anomalies<sup>59</sup>, the sample of people interviewed can be regarded as the person whom the institution recognised as being directly or indirectly responsible for the provision of teaching and learning support to disabled students. In 1 case, more than 1 person from the institution formed part of the team of people who participated in the interview, and thus, in total, 13 people were interviewed. Table 4.2 provides an overview of job titles or institutional designations of the range of people interviewed. Throughout this thesis the people interviewed are referred to as the interviewees.

**Table 4.2: Job title or institutional designation of the people who participated in the in-depth interviews (the interviewees).**

<b>Job title/institutional designation</b>	<b>No of persons</b>
Deputy Vice Chancellor	1
Registrar	1
Dean of Students	1
Head of Student Development	1
Head of Disability Unit/ Disability Programme	5
Responsible person within Student Development/Student Services (with no unit/programme in place)	2
Institutional Equity Officer	1
Head of Disability Forum (institutional stakeholder forum)	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>

<sup>59</sup> In these 2 cases the person who filled in the questionnaire was a more senior person in the institution to whom the person interviewed reports. In the interview process they requested that I interview the person working under them who is more directly responsible for this area.

#### 4.2.2.2 The interview schedule

Although the survey questionnaire data was largely descriptive information, it was valuable in alerting me to what I regarded as areas of concern in the picture that emerged through this survey. I was therefore intent on exploring whether these concerns arose from limitations in the questionnaire process or whether they reflected more complex issues that impacted on the participation of disabled students in their institution. Similarly, from an initial consideration of the survey questionnaire data, I was also able to identify initiatives that seemed interesting or innovative and therefore required further investigation. In this way, the survey questionnaire data enabled me to identify *areas of focus* to pursue in the in-depth interviews. The identification of areas of focus happened at two levels. Firstly, I identified general areas of focus or trends I wanted to pursue with all 11 institutions. Secondly, from reading the individual questionnaires, I identified special areas of focus at each of the institutions that I wanted to follow-up with that specific institution.

In addition to the areas of focus identified through the survey questionnaire, I had also begun to identify, through my reading of the literature and reflecting on the issues that were emerging, central concerns around what was important to the creation of equity for disabled students. This process also served to further focus the areas I wished to pursue or issues I wanted to probe in the in-depth interviews.

Ritchie and Spencer (1994:174) argue that in applied policy research, qualitative research methods can be used to meet various different objectives and that the questions asked will vary from study to study. However, they suggest that, broadly speaking, the questions generally fall into four categories. These are: Contextual (the form and nature of what exists); diagnostic (reasons for or causes of); evaluative (appraising the effectiveness); and strategic (new plans or actions). I found this categorisation a valuable way of organising the different questions and

ensuring that in each of the interviews, I covered the key areas I wanted to explore.

Drawing from all these processes, I constructed a grid for use in the interviews. The grid that I used for the interviews is attached as *Appendix B* of the thesis. The grid was constructed around four areas of focus or categories of questions to pursue in the in-depth interviews. These four categories were: the paradigm shift; curriculum flexibility/responsiveness; teaching and learning support; and a final, generic category, which I called 'other'. These categories reflected a synthesis of what had emerged from the survey questionnaire data and my theoretical investigation. In each of the four areas I then identified various questions that I wished to pursue with each of the institutions and noted any important data that had emerged from their returned questionnaire. In addition I captured a list of questions that pertained to specific questions that had been asked in the survey-questionnaire and answers given by the respondent, which I could use as a basis to stimulate and guide the discussion in the in-depth interviews. These questions are also attached at the end of *Appendix B*. Together the grid and this additional list of questions provided me with an open-ended interview schedule to be used in the interviews.

In each of the interviews I took detailed notes and recorded the discussion, which was then transcribed. While the interview grid and additional questions provided an important guide for the in-depth interviews I also made sure that where necessary this did not constrain the discussion around key areas of concern that emerged as the interview progressed. Similarly, as is evident from the presentation of the findings in the next three chapters, there were times where, after asking an initial question about a particular issue, I then probed that issue more carefully because of the answer that had been given. This often elicited the most interesting and insightful observations and perceptions from the interviewees, as will be seen in the chapters that follow. However, this meant that each of the interviews were of different length,

ranging from between one hour and two and a half hours. Where the interviews extended beyond an hour the interviewees indicated a strong willingness to continue with the interview and to share their experiences.

#### **4.2.3 Ethical considerations**

I regarded two ethical issues as especially important to consider in undertaking this research. The first had to do with the important issues associated with doing 'disability research' as a non-disabled researcher. It is not possible here to describe in detail the many concerns that have been raised in this country and others about the role that research has played historically, most often undertaken by non-disabled people, in the oppression and marginalisation of disabled people (See especially the contributions in Barnes and Mercer (1997) (Eds.) and the concerns expressed in the White Paper on an Integrated National Disability Strategy, Office of the Deputy President, 1997). However, in recognising and respecting the importance of these concerns, I attempted to frame this research in what Oliver (1997:16) calls an "emancipatory paradigm". Oliver (1997:16) describes his own initial conceptualisation of such a paradigm as being "about the facilitating of a politics of the possible by confronting social oppression at whatever levels it occurs".

While I recognised that I would not be able to integrate all those principles into the research that are regarded as central to such a paradigm (Stone and Priestley, 1996), my starting point was to ensure that this research contributed to addressing the inequalities that disabled students have experienced in accessing higher education and its benefits in the past. Moreover, I wanted to ensure that the research would be of benefit to the institutions themselves and to the responsible people who participated in the survey questionnaire and the in-depth interviews. My intention therefore was to research the higher education environment as a particular disabling environment. I wanted to do this from an epistemological basis that

challenges dominant sociological and cultural representations of disabled people (Stone and Priestley, 1996), and creates opportunities for new possibilities in the higher education environment, which have value for all students, especially those who are disabled.

My second concern was to ensure that at all times I maintained confidentiality in the collection, analysis and presentation of the data. At the beginning of the CHE study, and therefore with reference to the survey questionnaire data, the institutions were ensured that the findings would be reported on without using the names of the institutions to which the data referred. As already explained the only reference to the individual institutions was made in relation to their status as historically advantaged or disadvantaged institution and as a university of technikon. I have maintained this same level of confidentiality in the presentation of the interview findings. I have therefore removed any reference to institutional names or programmes in the quotes from the interviewees and have only noted the interviewees as the responsible person from either an historically advantaged or disadvantaged institution.

### **4.3 Analysis of the research findings**

Using my interview notes and transcriptions as a starting point, I undertook a preliminary analysis of the interview data and broadly organised it into the four focus areas discussed above. Through this preliminary process I also attempted to distinguish between types of information shared by the interviewees. Firstly, there was information that was additional descriptive information to what had been provided in the survey-questionnaire. There was also information that reflected the perceptions and opinions of the interviewees around the work that they undertook and their roles and responsibilities within the institution as a whole. This latter information included what I perceived to be their understandings about their functioning within the institutional environment and the challenges they faced in their

work. Similarly, I also reflected on how they talked about these issues, the language they used, and their understandings of the institutional environment and the barriers experienced by disabled students.

Following this preliminary analysis of the interview data, I used the conceptual and contextual frameworks I had begun to develop to consider the findings more carefully. Central to this process was considering the findings in relation to the two imperatives I have argued are central to an equity agenda in higher education. That is, the imperatives of 'access' as well as 'participation and success'. The conceptual framework was especially important to both areas of concern. However, in considering the access imperative, I wanted to draw especially from the policy and legislative framework, discussed in Chapter Three, and link the findings to what was provided for in this framework. It was also especially concerned, as the equity framework described at the end of Chapter Two suggests, to consider those findings that showed how the institution responded to disabled students once they were part of the student body. That is, how they and supported their participation in their academic studies and thus as respected learners within the institution (Wolfendale, 1996).

The importance of these latter concerns around participation and success influenced both my thinking around what emerged from the findings and the manner in which I decided to present the findings in this thesis. Most importantly, it alerted me to the need to go back at times to the data from the survey questionnaire and to triangulate this with findings from the in-depth interviews. I recognised here that, as Babbie and Mouton (2001) suggest, the conclusions I came to from the research would be enhanced by drawing from both methods of enquiry and triangulating the data in this way. After identifying the specific areas in which the triangulation of the data in this way was important, I returned to the survey questionnaire and reconsidered the data from each of the 11 institutions I had included in the interviews. I also compared various findings across these 11 institutions and then linked the

trends that had emerged from this quantitative analysis with the findings from the in-depth interviews. In Chapters Five, Six and Seven, which present these empirical findings, I have attempted at certain points to reflect this process of triangulation in the way the findings are described and discussed.

#### **4.4 Limitations of the research**

In Chapter One I argued that in recognising the limitations of what is possible within a doctoral study, I made a conscious decision to explore what was happening within institutions from the perspective of those people responsible for supporting disabled students' participation. I explained that my decision had been influenced by my involvement in the CHE project and the opportunities it created for me to pursue this research. I suggested however that an holistic picture of what is happening within institutions could only be made if the experiences, perceptions and concerns of disabled students themselves are also captured and integrated into the analysis. It is important, therefore, to recognise the absence of this voice as a limitation to this study and to acknowledge that the findings derive from my analysis of a particular perspective within the institutional community. While the voice of disabled students themselves is most important here, this limitation also relates to other voices within the institutions. Central to these voices must be those of senior management whose leadership and oversight responsibilities in the institution are also important to this area of concern, especially where it involves processes of institutional change. Similarly, as is discussed in Chapter Six, while the attitudes and behaviour of the academic staff is so important to what happens at the 'micro' level of the institution, my analysis of these concerns still draws from the responsible people rather than the academics themselves.

It is also recognised that this research process carries with it the limitations of having to rely on the data sent in by the 24 institutions that returned the questionnaires and the further information obtained from the 13 people who

were interviewed. Similarly, although the sample of institutions for follow-up interviews were stratified to provide as representative a group as possible, a small sample always brings with it inherent limitations as to what can be generalised across the system as a whole. At some points in the chapters that follow, the sample limitation is noted. However, my intention in this thesis was not to profile broadly and superficially what was happening across the system as a whole, but to develop a deeper perspective on key issues of concern and importance to the creation of equity for disabled students in higher education. My focus was therefore on the persons responsible for the provision of teaching and learning support to disabled students as a first 'cut' in the qualitative approach.

It is also important to recognise that in addition to the limitations created by the scope of the data collected, the research reported on in this thesis has also only been able to capture a particular 'historical moment' in a volatile and continually changing higher education environment. As already discussed the 'size and shape' of the public higher education system has undergone substantial change since the survey-questionnaire was administered and the interviews conducted in 2003. Similarly, since the research was undertaken, new initiatives have taken place in the higher education institutions investigated that have relevance to the findings of this study and the conclusions that are reached.

#### **4.5 Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed the research design for the study. It has discussed the two central methods of data collection, that is, a system wide survey questionnaire undertaken as part of a project for the Council on Higher Education and follow-up in-depth interviews with 11 public higher education institutions. It has explained the relationship between the two components of the research process and my reasoning for embarking upon the in-depth interviews as a way of deepening what had emerged from the

initial survey questionnaire process. It explained how the eleven institutions were selected, who constituted the sample of interviewees and how a preliminary analysis of the survey questionnaire helped to shape the questions and issues I pursued in the in-depth interviews. The chapter has also discussed how I went about analysing the research findings, including, at times reflecting back on the survey questionnaire data and triangulating this with the findings from the in-depth interviews. The chapter has also briefly discussed some ethical issues that were important in undertaking this research as well noting some of its limitations.

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## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE PROVISION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING SUPPORT AT THE 'MACRO' LEVEL

#### 5.1 Introduction

The following three chapters present the empirical findings from the research. The primary focus in these chapters is on the findings of the in-depth interviews. However, using the triangulation approach already described in Chapter Four, and where appropriate to the area under investigation, I have also included some of the data that emerged from the original survey questionnaire process. Where the survey questionnaire data is drawn from, it is used in two ways. Firstly, to provide important background information to the discussion that then follows on the findings from the in-depth interviews, in particular, why certain issues were probed and explored further. Secondly, there are also instances where the survey questionnaire data is cited as a reflective tool. More specifically, where particular findings emerged from the in-depth interviews, I reflected back on the survey questionnaire data as a way of deepening my understanding of these findings.

Throughout this thesis I have argued that the objective of my research was to explore how eleven public universities in South Africa are responding to disabled students' entry into and their participation within them. However, I argued further that, in line with the government's imperatives towards the transformation of the South African higher education system, I was particularly concerned with these findings in relation to the creation of equity for disabled students. To this end, I developed a conceptualisation in Chapter Two of what this means in higher education and thus what is important at the institutional level towards the achievement of these goals. It was argued that the creation of an equitable and just higher education system for disabled students involves recognising the equal importance of two central threads. These are: the access imperative, or the ability to gain entry to higher

education institutions and into programmes of choice; and the *participation and success* imperative, which is concerned with ensuring that disabled students are able to participate equitably in the process of teaching and learning and thus have fair chances of success once they have gained access. With this framework in mind, I identified the importance of investigating the strategies and practices of institutions that are in response to disabled students coming into the institution and those that are aimed at supporting their participation in their academic studies once they are part of the student body.

The concerns of equitable participation and fair chances for success are dependent on disabled students first gaining formal access to institutions and to programmes of their choice. It follows then that the research findings might speak first to these access concerns and then move on to those that speak more to the issues of participation and success. I have made a conscious decision to firstly discuss those research findings that speak to the 'participation and success' part of the equation. There are two reasons for organising the research findings in this way. Firstly, it reflects more effectively the exploration of the issues as they emerged from my initial analysis of the survey questionnaire data and then in the in-depth interviews. However, it also reflects what I argued in Chapter Two, was of central concern to this study. That is, ensuring that disabled students are able to access the curriculum within institutions and thus have epistemological access (Morrow, 1993) to higher education. As my analysis of findings of the study progressed, the central importance of these concerns to the creation of equity for disabled students became even more apparent. Thus, in this chapter and the next my intention is to describe and analyse the nature of the teaching and learning support that is provided to support disabled students in their academic studies.

A central tenant of the equity framework developed in Chapter Two dealt with the importance of teaching and learning support within institutions. It was argued that such provision was critical to ensuring that disabled students are able to participate equitably in the process of teaching and learning and thus have fair chances for success. I drew from Simpson's (1996) conceptualisation of "learning development", as a part of an holistic learning support framework in higher education, to outline the kind of support that is important for disabled students to achieve the above. Through this exploration, and drawing from Simpson's (1996) arguments, I identified the importance of conceiving of higher education institutions as having *two levels to the teaching and learning environment*. What is happening at both these levels of the institution's functioning becomes important for investigating how disabled students are supported in their academic studies. In this chapter and the next this distinction is used to describe and analyse the research findings.

In this chapter my intention is to discuss how such provision is conceptualised, organised and delivered at what I have called the 'macro' level of the teaching and learning environment or the broad institutional level. It is at this level where various institutional mechanisms and processes are in place to effectively *organise, support and monitor the teaching and learning environment* within institutions. In Chapter Six this analysis extends to the 'micro' level of the institution, which I take to mean that level of the teaching and learning environment where the *curriculum is delivered and engaged with* and, thus, where the essential and critical elements of the teaching and learning process take place.

It is important to emphasise here that, while this chapter and the next discuss the findings in this way, the conclusions reached in both chapters need to be understood together and considered in relation to what they *collectively indicate about the nature of teaching and learning support* across the institution as a whole. To this end, in the concluding section of Chapter Six, I

have also reflected back on some of the findings presented and conclusions reached in this chapter. The conclusions discussed at the end of Chapter Six, therefore, build on the findings presented in this chapter and consider what is important about the differences that are apparent at these two levels of the teaching and learning environment.

This chapter then, begins the analysis of the research findings by describing and analysing the dominant roles and responsibilities that are assumed by the disability units/programmes and responsible people at the 'macro' level. By looking at these roles and responsibilities it is possible to discern trends into the nature of the support that is offered at this level, including: how it is organised and functions within the institution; the kind of services that are provided; the approaches that are taken, and the challenges faced by the responsible people in undertaking their work. Inherent in this approach has been an attempt to capture how the interviewees understand and conceptualise these roles and responsibilities and their perceptions of the challenges they face. In this way, my intention in the in-depth interviews was to capture the issues of *institutional organisation and practice* as well as the *perceptions and understandings of those responsible* for the provision of teaching and learning support to disabled students.

## **5.2 Institutional location and infrastructure**

Before moving on to look more carefully at the nature of the support being provided at the 'macro' level (Section 5.3), it is important to first describe two overarching issues and their findings that emerged in the study. These findings relate to the dominant institutional location of the existing units/programmes and responsible people (Section 5.2.1) and the differing levels of provision evident across the institutions investigated (Section 5.2.2).

Both these findings arose out of two main areas of investigation initially pursued in the survey questionnaire and then probed further in the in-depth interviews. The first related to information supplied by the respondents about how support services at their institution were organised and the overall division within the institution that was responsible for the management and delivery of such services. The latter would therefore be the responsible division in which they and their possible unit/programme were located and accountable to within the institution. The insights that emerged from this information, therefore, had to do with the issues of *organisational form and location within the institution*. The second area of investigation had to do with the information that emerged about the *human resource capacity and infrastructural resources* that are available at different institutions to facilitate and deliver the support they provide.

I regarded these broad findings as important background information for contextualising the provision of support for disabled students within the overall institutional context and across the eleven very different institutions. They showed that across the institutions there were very clear trends in relation to how existing support provision is organised and located within the institutions. Moreover, they alerted me to the very real differences that exist across the institutions with regard to the levels of institutional resources that exist or are made available to support disabled students. However, despite the obvious differences in institutional resource capacity, these findings also alerted me to factors common to a number of the institutions and the need to consider their relevance to the study.

### **5.2.1 Institutional location**

In the original survey questionnaire, institutions were asked whether they provided any teaching and learning support to disabled students on their campuses. If they said Yes, they were then asked to explain how these services were organised and located within their institution. This latter

question required them to choose from a table with four possible options or to describe their organisation and location if it did not correlate with the options given (the fifth or 'other' option). Table 5.1 below shows these options as they appeared in the survey questionnaire and presents the results from this second question (following the Yes answer) by the historical categorisation of the institution.

**Table 5.1: Provision of existing support services for disabled students (survey questionnaire), by historical categorisation.**

Organisational form and institutional location of support services	Number		
	HAI	HDI <sup>60</sup>	Total
Support services are offered directly through disability unit/programme on campus	8	3	11
Support services are offered through Student Affairs division on campus	11	4	15
Each faculty/department offers services directly to disabled students within faculty/department	5	2	7
Support services are offered through another learning support unit on campus	1	0	1
Other	5	1	6
<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>40<sup>61</sup></b>

Although this set of data that emerged from the survey questionnaire provided me with some important pointers with regard to organisational form and location, it was immediately clear to me that the results of these two

<sup>60</sup> See Chapter Three for an explanation of the terminology historically advantaged institution (HAI) and historically disadvantaged institution (HDI).

<sup>61</sup> In the text below Table 5.1, I explain why, of the 21 institutions who filled in the table, many gave more than once answer, thus accounting for an overall total of 40 responses as shown in this table.

questions needed to be read with caution. Firstly, in the first question although 5 of the 24 responding institutions said *No* they were not providing any teaching and learning support to disabled students (i.e. 19 said *Yes*), 21 institutions in fact went on to complete the second question (the table of options shown above) on how their support provision was organised and located within their institution. This suggested that some form of support provision was in place in 21 institutions rather than 19. However, it also suggested that when the notion of support provision was broken down into different organisational forms the issue became less clear for the respondents. Or, put another way, where disabled students were being supported on their campuses, the form that this support took differed across institutions and was understood and evaluated in different ways by the respondents.

Secondly, the results to the second question that are shown in Table 5.1 pointed to a clear weakness in the questionnaire. The possible options dealing with organisational form were listed in the same table with options pointing to institutional location. The questionnaire had therefore inadvertently confused two different issues – that is, how the support was organised and the institutional location of such support. The results of this weakness were that some respondents chose more than one option in the table where the scenario appeared true to their situation. For example, where there was a unit /programme in place and it was located within Student Services<sup>62</sup>. For others, where their scenario with regards to organisational form and location were not captured correctly in the table, because of the complicated variations in provision, they tended to pick the answer/s that best captured their situation. The result of the latter was that some answers showed organisational form without location or visa versa. Where this

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<sup>62</sup> I have chosen here to make use of the generic term 'student services' to indicate the location of these units. In some institutions the division, which carries out such functions, is called student affairs, student development or something similar. Within the framework of this study, Student Services is taken to mean "a specific integrated group of departments and units providing support and welfare services and programmes for students in higher education institutions (Mandew, Maboe-Phike, Jappie, Bodibe and Hlophe, 2003:3).

happened they tended not to provide any additional information that could assist in developing a clearer picture of both these issues.

In many ways, therefore, the table proved confusing for the respondents and did not elicit clear, unambiguous data about how existing provision is organised and located in the institution. Despite these important shortcomings in the questionnaire, the responses did suggest that *Student Services is the responsible division* at most institutions, whatever the organisational form that the provision takes. Thus Table 5.1 shows that 15 out of the 21 respondents who filled in the table (71%) indicated that their support services were offered through the Student Services division on their campus (11 HAIs and 4 HDIs).

When I looked more closely at the data that is captured in Table 5.1, it was also possible to determine some additional information, which is not immediately discernable from the table. Of the 11 respondents who said that their services were offered directly through a disability unit/programme (first option and reflected in row one of the table), 7 of these also said that their services were provided through the Student Services division (second option)<sup>63</sup>. So of the total of 15 responses reflected in row two of the table, 7 of these had also ticked the first option as well. Looked at another way, 64% of the responding institutions that have a unit/programme in place (7 out of 11) have these structures located within their Student Services division. Eight additional institutions also indicated that although there was no disability unit/programme in place, support was being provided to disabled students through the Student Services division (7 with units/programmes and 8 without, making up the 15 reflected in row two of the table).

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<sup>63</sup> This is not visible from the table

So, of the 21 respondents who filled in the table, 15 institutions were providing some form of support to disabled students through the Student Services division of their institution, although the organisational form may differ (7 with unit/programme and 8 without). Thus overall the data suggests that *Student Services dominates as the location within the institution* from which support for disabled students is organised, directed and delivered.

Moreover, when the data was disaggregated according to the historical categorisation of the institution, the predominance of Student Services as the responsible division, especially where units/programmes are in place, was even more evident in the HAIs. Among the 8 HAIs with units/programmes in place (evident in row one of Table 5.1), 6 indicated that their unit/programme was located within the Student Affairs division on their campus (75%). Only 1 out of the 3 HDIs with a unit/programme in place was located within Student Affairs (33%)<sup>64</sup>.

These findings suggested the following: Among the institutions with the greatest level of resources (the HAIs)<sup>65</sup>, where support to disabled students is being provided, the tendency is for the existence of disability units/programmes to be located within the Student Services division as the desirable organisational form and institutional location for such support. This picture that emerged from the questionnaire data was not surprising. It suggested that 'more meant better' (more institutional resources so better support provision) and 'best' translated into the existence of a formalised structure such as a specialised disability unit or programme that was located within the Student Services division. I was thus intent in the in-depth interviews on exploring whether such an assumption was correct and whether it translated into a more enabling and equitable environment for disabled students' participation and thus to the creation of greater equity. I

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<sup>64</sup> This is not visible from the table.

<sup>65</sup> The background to this assertion, which is linked to the historical development of the higher education system in South Africa under apartheid, is discussed in Chapter Three.

further surmised that it may be an important factor influencing the approach that is taken to supporting disabled students and especially to the nature and extent of the units/programmes and responsible people's engagement with the teaching and learning environment at the 'micro' level. It therefore emerges as an important area for discussion in Chapter Six where the latter is explored.

As a starting point in the in-depth interviews that followed, I therefore clarified with the interviewees their location as a disability unit/programme and/or responsible person within their institution. It is difficult to explain in detail exactly how each unit/programme and/or responsible person is located within the institution, as each institution has a slightly different organisational structure, and divisions carrying out similar functions may be called by slightly different names across the institutions. These differences reinforced my belief that the questionnaire had not provided sufficient opportunity for such differences to be captured. Despite these limitations, however, in the in-depth interviews I was able to confirm that within the 11 institutions investigated through the in-depth interviews, 5 had a disability unit/programme in place (see fifth row of Table 4.2). In 3 of these cases the unit/programme formed a separate, specialised structure within the Student Services division within the institution, with the head of the structure accountable to a Dean of Students or the Registrar<sup>66</sup>. In the fourth case, the unit/programme appeared to operate more on its own within the institution, with the head of the unit reporting to one of the deputy vice-chancellors. In the fifth case, the institution had a disability unit/programme in place but it was conceptualised as a project that formed part of the functioning of the Academic Development Centre<sup>67</sup> on the campus.

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<sup>66</sup> These units/programmes are part of the 11 institutions shown in row one of Table 5.1 that indicated the existence of a unit/programme.

<sup>67</sup> In Chapter Three I explained the development and orientation of the initiatives referred to as Academic Development programmes/units/centres in South African public higher education institutions. Throughout the discussion where Academic Development is referred to, it is used in this way.

In light of my above observations from the survey questionnaire, I had deliberately tried to include among the interviewees, those who came from institutions where an alternative institutional location existed to Student Services. I was interested in investigating whether these differences, especially the project within Academic Development, would influence how the institutions were responding to the participation of disabled students. The heads of these units/programmes therefore formed part of the interview sample (5 interviewees). Of the remaining 8 interviewees a sense of their institutional location can be gained from their job titles or the departments where they work<sup>68</sup>. This information is listed in Chapter Four in Table 4.2. Although these designations give some sense of the institutional location of the responsible people, as already noted, the differences in organisational form across the institutions makes it difficult to reach the same clear conclusions in this area that are evident from those with units/programmes in place. However, it is interesting to note the range of people and their associated responsibilities within the institutions, and thus who is regarded within the institution as being responsible for the provision of teaching and learning support for disabled students<sup>69</sup>.

### **5.2.2 Differing levels of provision**

Findings from the survey questionnaire also helped to provide a starting point to explore the kinds of services that the units/programmes and responsible people were providing. In the survey questionnaire, institutions that were providing teaching and learning support to disabled students had also been asked to describe in some detail the kinds of teaching and learning support services which they offered to disabled students. They were asked in the

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<sup>68</sup> I explained in Chapter Four that although the 11 institutions were chosen to be part of the interviews, the in-depth interviews took place with 13 *individuals*, with 1 institution having 3 people participating in the interview.

<sup>69</sup> In Chapter Four I explained that the survey questionnaire had been sent to the person in the institution responsible for the provision of teaching and learning support to disabled students. It was from this pool of respondents that the interviewees were drawn.

form of a table listing different categories of services to choose from the options given and then to describe the nature of the service that fitted into that category<sup>70</sup>. From the information given in this table and from any additional information supplied in the questionnaire, a fairly detailed picture emerged of the different *kinds of services that may be available* to disabled students across the 24 institutions who returned their questionnaires. While this data showed the *range* of services available across the 24 institutions, it also hinted at the fact that significant differences were apparent with regard to *levels of provision* across the institutions. Thus by these institutions just describing the kind of support services offered to disabled students, it became clear that greater levels of provision were skewed towards the historically advantaged institutions<sup>71</sup>. In other words, the data collected from this part of the survey questionnaire reinforced for me the assumption already made and described in the previous section, that the institutions with the greatest levels of institutional resources tended to have units/programmes in place. Through these structures the greatest range of services and thus formal levels of support provision at the 'macro' level were offered to disabled students.

Although the nature of these services are discussed in the next section, it is important to emphasise here that it became clear to me in the in-depth interviews that this assumption was correct. The capacity of the institution to support disabled students, including the staff members that are assigned this responsibility, is strongly influenced by its historical categorisation and thus its comparative level of resources. Among the 11 institutions included in the in-depth interviews, levels of support provision ranged considerably. At one end of the spectrum the data collected suggested the existence of a viable disability unit/programme. Its viability was ensured through; the provision of

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<sup>70</sup> This table can be found as Question D2 on page 6 of the survey questionnaire, which is attached as Appendix A. Appendix C shows the synthesised overview of the information derived from the data of the table as it appeared in the final research report (Council on Higher Education, 2005:27).

<sup>71</sup> This is also suggested from the data already outlined with respect to Table 5.1.

permanently employed staff with different responsibilities; sufficient equipment and resources to provide minimum levels of technical support to the majority of disabled students presently at the institution, and a level of sustainable funding from the institution allocated for its daily operation. At the other end of the spectrum the data showed a much less sustainable and viable scenario. At one institution an isolated, but highly dedicated individual provided teaching and learning support to disabled students. She supports disabled students as part of her responsibilities within a much broader job description and, in this regard, has found herself at times having to pay for the braille of material for blind students in the institution out of her own pocket. Overall, it became clear from the interview data (see below) that the historically advantaged institutions among the 11 were substantially better equipped to support disabled students in this way than the historically disadvantaged ones. However, it is also important to note here that despite the greater level of institutional resources, there were also a few historically advantaged institutions within the 11 that had very little in place with regard to support services of any kind for disabled students.

The quotations that follow from some of the interviewees about the situation at their institution, illustrate starkly some of the differences that were evident between historically advantaged institutions and historically disadvantaged ones.

*All of our staff are permanent employees of the university now, with the exception of one contract member, and we have six permanent staff [so] the university funds our salaried posts, and we receive an operating budget from the university (Interview with responsible person historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*We are twelve, that includes myself.... the university is very generous in providing us with a budget to run this programme (Interview with responsible person historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*In October we decided we had enough funds from top management to appoint an Administrative officer of the [name of unit/programme]... We've got 6 very large offices and the university gave us 10 reasonably brand new computers this year. And we've also got the Zoom Text and the Jaws programme, scanners and magnifiers (Interview with responsible person historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*There are just three of us. I've got money from the internal development fund... I've applied for R205 000 something and they gave me exactly what I applied for. I've now identified rooms here. When I started here they didn't have any equipment and so on. So I've got the development fund and we have now identified the rooms, we've purchased the equipment, and we are going to break a few partitions. All of them have these kinds of partitions, so we have identified rooms at the bottom there, it's a big space and I will move as well (Interview with responsible person historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*I approached management again for them to give us a computer with a sound card, management was not convinced, they brought us a computer from the library, we only had a computer with a sound card in the library and at that time, the librarian had resigned, so I said to them in the meantime could we not use the computer from the library to help the blind students, then they brought us the computer, then they hired a new librarian and he wanted a computer in his office with immediate effect, then I had to send back the computer (Interview with responsible person historically disadvantaged institution, August 2003).*

*We have a couple of physically disabled students who are in wheelchairs and we have a couple of albinos who have sight*

*problems, those are the main ones that we have come across so far... if it was a first year student and if the person happened to be in the classroom, then we would be able to pick it up but there is no structure or organized way that we look after the needs of students with disabilities (Interview with responsible person historically disadvantaged institution, August , 2003).*

In addition, the above descriptions certainly seemed to reinforce the earlier notion highlighted that 'more meant better' and 'better' translated into the existence of a viable disability unit/programme. Or, put another way, the existence of disability units/programmes on the campuses invariably seemed to mean greater levels of support for individual disabled students. The latter observation was consistently reinforced by other findings to emerge from the in-depth interviews. However, I also became acutely aware during these in-depth interviews that other factors within and outside the institution played a central role in shaping the roles and responsibilities assumed by the units/programmes and responsible people. It became clear, as my analysis deepened, that the existence of such structures did not always translate into the provision of *the kind of teaching and learning support* I argued for at the end of Chapter Two. Thus greater levels of institutional resources to support disabled students, reflected through the existence of such units/programmes, could not always necessarily be equated with a more enabling and equitable teaching and learning environment for disabled students. Further findings described below in this chapter and the next two consistently point, albeit in different ways, to a persistent complexity around the issue of institutional resources and their relationship to the participation of disabled students.

My research strategy, therefore, was to explore the role and functioning of these units/programmes in more depth through the in-depth interviews. My intention was to build on the information that they had supplied in the questionnaires about the services they offered, their perceptions with regard to their roles and functioning within the institution and, most importantly, to

discuss with them the key challenges they faced within their institutions. My intention was also to explore more carefully how support provision was being provided in those institutions where units/programmes did not exist and to consider the importance of any differences that might emerge. The findings in relation to these issues emerge from the discussions that follow, which begin with the kinds of support presently being provided and therefore the dominant roles and responsibilities that were apparent from this study.

### **5.3 Key roles and responsibilities**

As discussed in the previous section, it had been possible from the information supplied in the survey questionnaire to obtain an initial picture of the kinds of services the units/programmes or responsible people were providing to support disabled students<sup>72</sup>. Moreover, from this data it was also possible to begin to discern other important patterns within the overall picture of provision across the 24 responding institutions that could be verified in the in-depth interviews. The most obvious of these was, as just noted, the differing levels of resources institutions either had available or were allocating for the provision of support to disabled students. Besides such information, there were also patterns in the responses to questions asked that directly or indirectly addressed the role and functioning of the units/programmes or responsible people within the institution. These findings were used as a basis for follow-up questions in the in-depth interviews. From this process there emerged a much more complex, contradictory and nuanced picture with respect to their roles and functioning in supporting disabled students within the institution.

These roles and responsibilities are discussed under three headings, which capture three broad roles and areas of responsibility that were discernable, albeit to differing degrees and in differing forms. These are:

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<sup>72</sup> See Footnote no 67.

- Firstly, the undertaking of various training and mentoring activities that provide disabled students with what were regarded as essential or necessary *skills and knowledge* for their orientation to and participation in the post-school world, including the academic environment, as independent adults (Section 5.3.1);
- Secondly, the undertaking of various *academic related services* that form part of the preparation, organisation, delivery, participation in, and assessment of the student's academic studies (Section 5.3.2) and;
- Thirdly, what I have called *a broad advocacy role* that is being played by units/programmes and responsible people within the institution (Section 5.3.3)<sup>73</sup>.

### 5.3.1 Essential life and academic skills

I first became aware of the units/programmes and responsible people's roles in providing disabled students with essential life and academic skills through the activities they described in relation to the *orientation of disabled students* coming onto their campuses. The following quotations capture some of the initiatives described by the interviewees and their work in this area:

*We run an orientation programme for a week with all new students, in the orientation programme we teach students how to use the white*

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<sup>73</sup> From both the information gathered in the survey questionnaire and especially from the in-depth interviews, it became clear that the work of the existing units/programmes or responsible people starts as soon as the institution receives the disabled student's application. The units/programmes and responsible people play a central role in the various processes that are involved in the selection and admission of disabled students into the institution. In describing these roles and activities a number of issues emerged that shed light on those factors that are important in shaping disabled students' entry into higher education, and as will be seen, their exclusion from it. Although these admission and selection related activities form part of the roles and responsibilities of the units/programmes and responsible people, they are not discussed in any depth here but are integrated into the discussion on access in Chapter Seven. This section therefore starts with the area of essential life and academic skills.

*stick, the cane, we provide physical orientation to the buildings, the campus itself, how to get to Res, how to get to lecture rooms, where are the vital offices that you may need to go so we provide the physical orientation, we have lots of talks in that we cram in vital services, what are the services that are available at the university, like the writing centre would come and talk to them about what they offer, counselling and career development would come and talk to them so the vital services would have talks about that and the computer training and all of that happens in the orientation programme (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*This year we asked [name of non-governmental service provider organisation] to give the students mobility training during the orientation week, so that helped a lot. ...In our orientation programme, we have a group of 5000 first year students...every potential first year student gets an information pamphlet, so what we did was that we added to that group all students that were disabled or had special needs, physical and learning disability. We hope to catch it in 2004, so that from the start we get these people. From the start we would know to which lecturers we must go to prepare them for a deaf or blind student in their class. We want to work very proactively...we also want the [name of special school in area] people, if they want to study here, to come with their parents so that we can help them and show them to see what the possibilities are here; to see if the people can manage and what the services are that we have in place presently (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*I remember last year, a black student who came from a very rural area, he didn't even know how to use a cane. So [name of non-governmental service provider organisation] came and gave him*

*mobility training, so that is why it is very important, as I said, it is cost and time consuming, that is why at first you must kick off by giving personal attention to every disabled student. And if you did that for a few months, the student starts getting attention and also adapting like the rest of the first year students (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*We have counselling services; we have advice on coping with disability and sort of challenges that you have with your disability which [name of staff member] runs. The idea is to provide both moral and practical support in terms of your disability, tips on how to get around issues on campus, the way in which to approach academics, the way to make relationships with different departments happen to assist you with your work. [Name of staff member] has long and involved interviews with students around all those kinds of things. Occasionally that spills over into a bit of psychological counselling or emotional counselling, in which case we refer people to the Student Counselling Unit. There is sort of a fine line that is tread there sometimes, but it's largely a practical approach to dealing with your disability and building relationships with people. Relationships are key; we encourage that everywhere we can (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*We are also going to include a career assessment which is going to be a must for every student, especially blind students because we have found that too many students come in not knowing what they would like to do and after the first year after failing the first year their self esteem issues and all of that, they have wasted a year, and then they change direction in the second year, so we want to try and prevent that from happening....so that is something that is very important, because as far as Academic Development goes we find that the huge drop out rate is because of that because they are not getting the*

*guidance that they need (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

From the above descriptions of their activities two important issues emerge that provide greater insight into these specific roles and areas of responsibility. A number of the interviewees describe activities that included providing the students with the opportunity to learn skills and acquire new knowledge, which they saw as essential to the students' functioning as independent, confident adults, both within and outside the institutional environment. The most obvious examples cited were those associated with mobility training and the use of assistive devices such as a white cane for a student with a visual impairment. However, as the fourth quotation cited above illustrates, these interventions may extend to providing the students with emotional and psychological support, usually through some form of counselling. What is especially important to recognise here is that the need for these kinds of services appears to arise because the disabled students entering the institution are perceived to lack 'life skills' that are necessary to their participation as independent students within the higher education environment. This includes skills that are assumed to be part of the childhood learning process and thus gained through the family, the community or from their schooling experiences.

When I probed this issue further it became clear that a number of the interviewees felt that these concerns were especially evident among those learners who had come through the special school system. One of the interviewees captured this issue in the following way:

*It is not only academic development, it is social development, it's the soft skills, if you look again at the whole history of the country, the students have been institutionalised they have been kept away, believing that they were different and because they were different they could not fit in. Let's look at a typical blind student going to a little*

*school for blind people only, a simple thing as a student that goes to this institution had all the support in place, was not even taught how to use the white stick and now comes to university... they have got to learn to use the white stick which they never used for 18 years of their life, they have never integrated with other people, now they come here and they are expected to integrate with 24 000 other students, with lecturers you have never met before (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

What is important for this discussion is that the inadequacies of the schooling system have a range of consequences for the *kinds of support* disabled students are perceived to require at higher education institutions and thus the roles that the units/programmes and responsible people are playing<sup>74</sup>.

Existing unit/programmes and the responsible people are providing many disabled students entering their institutions with what they regard as essential life skills or skills for independent living that they imply should have been developed during their childhood years and especially through their schooling experience. It is interesting to note that despite the very different socio-economic contexts of South Africa and Sweden, Danermark (1999:119), in discussing disabled students' participation in the Swedish higher education system, alludes to similar issues. He argues that, in his experience, disabled students who have come from schools where they studied in "special classes" experienced a range of academic and psycho-social difficulties when they entered the university system". This suggests that this compensatory role discussed above, arises not only from the socio-economic

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<sup>74</sup> The impact of the historically inherited inequities and ongoing inadequacies of the schooling system on restricting the life chances of disabled students will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven, as it presents as a barrier to accessing higher education. As was evident in Section 2.4 of Chapter Two on the Academic Development enterprise, the inadequacies of the schooling system present as major barriers in higher education for many historically disadvantaged students. However, these barriers are deepened by other barriers arising from continued inequalities in education provision for disabled learners at the schooling level.

inequities so evident in South Africa, but also from systems which still categorise and separate disabled students in this way.

The activities described above by the interviewees also suggest that they play a further role in orientating disabled students to the institution itself and the academic environment. This includes orientating them to the physical design and layout of the campus. It also includes, as one interviewee said, introducing them to 'vital services' that form part of the student services the institution offers to all students to support them in their academic studies and generally in their participation within the higher education environment. Examples cited above include counselling services, career guidance and various forms of assistance to help them to cope with their academic studies and as students on the campus.

What is important to note from the descriptions given above is that the units/programmes or responsible people either provide these services directly to the disabled students or they are centrally involved in facilitating the disabled students' access to the services that are available to all students on campus. In the descriptions cited above the interviewees refer to themselves as helping the students to build relationships with academics and to help them to negotiate and manage their participation within the institution as a disabled person. They also describe activities such as 'talks' and various information sharing initiatives in which they create opportunities for the disabled students to be made aware of support services offered by the institution. In both cases the unit/programme or the responsible person is the *key leverage mechanism* in ensuring that disabled students acquire the skills and knowledge that they will need to participate and cope effectively as students at the institution. They provide such provision themselves or they facilitate the contact with other support services. One of the interviewees captured this latter role in the following way:

*We send our students for career counselling if they are in need of counselling and therapy, I prefer sending them and again if you are looking at the whole integrated approach, although it is something that I could provide to them, I prefer that they use the normal channels that all other students have access to as well and go through the normal channels of making appointments, keeping appointments and having that service provided to them so they would use that (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

While this role is very important and obviously critical to the disabled student's ability to participate, it does suggest that the units/programmes or responsible people are key to ensuring disabled students' access to such services. The services are provided by the unit/programme personnel or responsible person themselves or by the mainstream services, with the latter having been accessed through the interventions of the former. This suggests that responding to disabled students is not an integral and sustained part of the programme of these mainstream services. This is especially evident from the descriptions of the orientation activities taking place. They suggest that these other services are drawn into a *special orientation programme* for the disabled students, rather than these services reaching out to disabled students as part of their general orientation activities for all students coming onto the campus.

### **5.3.2 Academic services**

The second key role played by the units/programmes and responsible people, is undertaking various functions that are associated with the preparation, organisation, delivery, participation in, and assessment of the academic curriculum. From my discussions with the interviewees it became clear that the units/programmes and responsible people provided a number of services to disabled students that are a necessary part of their

participation in and completion of their academic studies. The units/programmes or responsible people therefore take responsibility within the institution for providing academic programme-related services to disabled students, which are provided to other students through various divisions or entities on campus, including, in some cases, the faculties themselves. From the in-depth interviews five such services were evident. These were: various examination-related services; the provision of information communication technology (ICT) facilities and associated training; services related to the organisation and delivery of lectures and tutorials; the provision of teaching and learning materials and various Academic Development related activities. The first two services mentioned were most pronounced among the areas mentioned by the interviewees.

The evidence showed that the units/programmes or responsible people were involved in directly assisting disabled students with the undertaking of their examinations. As the descriptions that follow indicate such assistance includes: ensuring that examination papers are in accessible formats; providing a separate examination venue for disabled students to complete their examinations where they may require additional assistance such as a scribe or extra time<sup>75</sup>; providing invigilation; and providing necessary equipment or support personnel where such assistance is needed for the student to complete their examination.

*[Name of institution] has an extra time venue where straight extra time is granted to students, but anyone who needs to write on a computer or anyone who needs a scribe or any kind of intervention like that will write in the [Name of unit within disability unit/programme] (Interview*

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<sup>75</sup> Although such provision may be available to any student that is granted additional time or other alterations for sitting an exam, what is important here is that the quotations which follow seem to imply that where disabled students are involved the sitting of the exam may take place at the unit/programme or in a venue administered by them, with them providing the invigilation services as well.

*with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*[we] also make them aware of our services; naturally, because a lot of them write tests here, they get extra time (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*And then I have a Tests and Exams Officer...she is primarily responsible for all tests and examinations and she liaises with the academics to find out when tests are being written, gets timetables, Braille's them in time, gets the question papers if they need to be brailled or enlarged or whatever and has all of that done on time, invigilates for the examinations, makes sure she is here until the last student leaves ...she often sits here until 5 or 6 in the evening for a morning exam so she does the invigilation, so you need the invigilation service (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*We encourage departments to provide their own invigilators. If they don't provide one, we will provide one. The reason why we encourage people is that we want to promote the participation of the department as much as possible. We would rather they were included in this process than think it is some sort of thing that happened out there. But in some instances departments refuse for budgetary or other reasons, and in that case we would employ an invigilator ourselves and we will always provide a scribe where necessary, set up the computers, set up the assistive technology and so on (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

As was already evident from the interviewees' comments around orientation activities, the last quotation emphasises the extent to which the units/programmes or responsible people appear to be constantly grappling

with an inherent tension within their work. This involves providing individual disabled students with additional support, which they may require to undertake their studies and complete the course requirements, as well as trying to ensure that the responsible divisions or services within the institution address the needs of disabled students as part of their responsibilities. As the evidence from the in-depth interviews already begins to show, a clear tension exists for the units/responsible people in their work - between the recognised need for an integrated approach and providing disabled students with support that may not be available to them if the units/programmes or responsible people do not provide it.

From one or two of the responses already presented above, it is evident that the provision of ICT facilities and associated training for disabled students forms part of the responsibilities of the units/programmes and responsible people. A number of the interviewees referred to both the acquisition of computers, computer training and the provision of facilities that include adaptive computer equipment for use by the students during various academic activities such as exams.

It would appear that the degree to which such facilities are offered depends a lot on the available resources. However, the quotation below illustrates how, in one institution, the role of the units/programme extends into the provision and management of such facilities for disabled students in the residences as well.

*What we have also done is that we have created two other computer centres at two residences, so we have dedicated computer rooms there, which is only available to [name of disability unit/programme] students (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

Similarly, when asked about their staff complement, some of the institutions made mention of one or more members of the team who are responsible for the ICT facilities and training. The quotation below captures this:

*Then we have a computer lab Supervisor/Manager, he supervises all the activities in the computer lab, he is responsible for training the students on how to use the computers, upgrades of programmes etc. He also has to research upgrades and what the latest trends are....so we are in keeping with the latest trends and we keep getting the new programmes and teach the students how to use the new programmes in order to make them go out into the workplace and be able to compete. He buys the equipment, finds out where to get the best equipment at the best prices, checks what is available overseas and much of our equipment we get from overseas...he is our IT specialist (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

Although the area of ICT provision and training can be located within the notion of academic services, it is also important to recognise this service, especially the training component, as another example of the provision of essential knowledge and skills. Once again, the units/programmes and responsible people are playing a central role in providing disabled students with skills that are essential to their ability to participate in the academic environment and, arguably, as graduates for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. In drawing from the kind of skills that Michael Gibbons (1998) lists as requirements for all graduates in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, the National Plan for Higher Education (2001) includes computer literacy and information management among the enhanced cognitive skills graduates should obtain from a transformed South African higher education system (Department of Education, 2001b:31).

In the in-depth interviews the importance of ICT competency for academic study within the institutional environment and as essential skills for the work place were emphasised by numerous interviewees. The two quotations below capture these two important areas. The first explains the challenges faced by a disabled student to meet the institution's requirements for his essays to be typed rather than hand written. The second emphasises the units/programmes and responsible people's perceived responsibilities towards providing disabled students with ICT skills that they will need for a competitive market place.

*And then we have a student that has multiple disabilities, he was involved in an accident he can only use one side of his body so he can see with one eye and he can write with one hand but the side of his body that is okay is his left hand side which is weakening so he also needs the computer as back up, so most of the time I let him write the material and if I have time to accommodate him, I type the material and give them to the lecturers to mark, if I don't have time the lecturers do understand, because it is a rule that assignments have to be typed .... But then there are some lecturers that don't like handwritten material and there are those that accept that the condition does not allow the student to, but at the moment he is trying to buy a computer for himself so that he could try and type everything when I don't have time because they are all dependent on one computer and specifically that computer is used more by the blind student than by them because he studies on it and he has to write assignments and all the tests...and then some lecturers who don't accept their material they take 15percent off their marks and for me I feel it is not right (Interview with responsible person, historically disadvantaged institution, August 2003).*

*No employer is going to provide every bit of information for you on tape, no employer is going to provide you with Braille information.*

*They will give you a PC, if you need adaptive devices, fine, now you work, what we were hoping to do was to train them to compete openly in the labour market and then being PC literate, their world has also been extended because now they can compete not only locally but internationally as well (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

Although examination-related activities and ICT provision stood out as the main academic services undertaken by the units/programmes and responsible people, other information shared by the interviewees showed their involvement in other such activities. Some of the inputs already quoted point to the important role the units/programmes and responsible people play in the provision of teaching and learning materials into accessible formats. Some of the interviewees also cited their involvement in activities such as ensuring that lectures are taking place in venues that are physically accessible for students using wheelchairs or other mobility-related assistive devices. One interviewee said:

*Other direct services – we ensure for example, that people with mobility impairments have accessible venues, so we do a lot of lecture theatre swapping, venue swapping, sometimes get into tiffs around that, sometimes don't (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

However, as the above quotation suggests, this role is often an interventionist one. Where units/programmes and responsible people have to intervene to try and ensure that the disabled students are able to participate with as few hindrances as possible in the teaching and learning process or activities of the institution. It would appear that this role is a difficult, ad-hoc one. As one interviewee commented; "I'm constantly in crisis management mode" (*Interview with responsible person, historically disadvantaged institution, August 2003*).

The final area of responsibility that may be located within the notion of academic services, is the central role which the units/programmes and responsible people appear to play in the area of Academic Development for disabled students. It became clear that a number of the unit/programme personnel or responsible people play a key role in advising students about the structuring of their academic programmes. Similarly, they also appear to play an important role in monitoring the disabled student's progress and advising on programme or subject changes, especially where the student's are not coping with the requirements of the course. In Chapter Three it was explained that one of the ways in which institutions have attempted to address issues of 'underpreparedness' among 'historically disadvantaged students' is to allow them to complete their studies over a longer period of time than is usually required. This may include the provision of foundation courses or extended curriculum options in the first year. Scott (2001:6) explains what he regards as the importance of such provision for students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds. He says:

Because of the well-known inequalities in the school sector, most students from disadvantaged educational backgrounds, however talented they may be, are underprepared for traditional HE study and require additional provision, particularly at the point of entry into HE, in order to realise their potential to succeed. The purpose of the additional provision is to enable students to develop their subject knowledge, academic literacies and skills to a level that provides an effective foundation for successfully completing their HE studies.

The issue of extended curriculum or programme options referred to in the quotations below are therefore a central part of Academic Development initiatives in South African higher education. Their scope extends to all students who are regarded as having been educationally disadvantaged through continued structural problems and inequalities in the schooling system. What is important to recognise within the context of this discussion is

the role that is played by the units/programmes and responsible people when it comes to extended curriculum options for disabled students. From the way in which some of the interviewees described this issue it appeared that they were centrally involved in assessing and monitoring these curriculum options when it came to disabled students. Thus the units/programmes and responsible people appeared to be playing a role in relation to disabled students that is undertaken by the mainstream Academic Development structures or programmes on the campus for other students. It is difficult to assess from the quotations to what extent the mainstream structures are involved with the unit/programmes and responsible people in such Academic Development -related processes. The 'we' in the quotations below may refer to the units/programmes or responsible people together with other Academic Development personnel. Despite this cautionary note, what is very clear from the inputs is that the units/programmes and responsible people are centrally involved in Academic Development related processes where they involve disabled students. The following quotations capture the inputs from those institutions where the above was evident.

*A lot of them are actually on the extended programme...we would give them that opportunity, but it is also very important that if we do, we monitor it very carefully, especially during the first semester tests, and if they want to drop certain courses then they do. If they want to do that, by all means and some of them have already done that and after the first semester tests and even after the first exams in June, they know, it is too much. So we give them that opportunity, but also talk to them about not killing themselves in the whole process. We explain to them that there is the possibility for them to go on the extended programme (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*We have had historically to date a high failure rate in first year students, often we had to have a special dispensation to allow them*

*into second year and then from second year they will tend to pick up and eventually become successful graduates...We do that. We reduce the load and encourage them to do a degree over 4 years instead of 3 (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*We offer the student a choice of an extended curriculum. We do not force a student to take on an extended curriculum because some students have proved to us that they can do it in 3 or 4 years, but we offer a choice to students at the first year level, if they choose not to opt for the extended curriculum and if at the end of the first year they have performed poorly we would then say to them that they will now take the extended curriculum because you have proven that you cannot manage. And one of the reasons why we offer the extended curriculum is because we also then negotiated with NSFAS<sup>76</sup> to provide the financial assistance over the extended period (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

### **5.3.3 Playing a broad advocacy role**

It also became clear that the roles and responsibilities of the units/programmes and responsible people extend beyond the parameters of the two areas noted above. From data collected through the survey questionnaire and then followed up in the in-depth interviews, it was possible to identify what I regarded as another important role that the units/programmes and responsible people were playing within the institution that had meaning for this study. In addition to the roles and responsibilities already described, the units/programmes and responsible people undertake

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<sup>76</sup> National Student Financial Aid Scheme. NSFAS was set up by the government in 1999 to provide and manage bursaries and loans to students in the public higher education system (See the National Student Financial Aid Scheme Act, No. 56 of 1999 and [www.nsfas.org.za](http://www.nsfas.org.za)). Some bursaries for specifically for disabled students are now provided through NSFAS.

a number of tasks and assume various responsibilities that collectively translate into playing a broad advocacy role within the institution. More specifically, a number of the activities undertaken by the units/programmes and responsible people, both formal and informal, were aimed at strategic engagement with the institution with the intention of raising awareness about disability issues and putting it on the 'institutional agenda'. While this additional role extended beyond those services aimed at supporting disabled students in their academic studies, a consideration of what this advocacy role meant in the institutional environment and why it had arisen, was to reinforce trends already evident from the other more dominant roles.

I first became aware of such activities and responsibilities when I considered information that had been given in the survey questionnaire. In the questionnaire the respondents had been asked to indicate whether they provided any other services to disabled students that were "not related to the direct provision of teaching and learning support".<sup>77</sup> If they said Yes to this question they were then asked to explain these other services. All 19 institutions that had indicated that they were providing teaching and learning support to disabled students said Yes to this question as well.<sup>78</sup> This was the first indication to me that, where provision was in place, the units/programmes and responsible people were undertaking responsibilities that extended beyond supporting disabled students in their academic studies. In their descriptions of these other activities a number of the institutions talked about playing an advisory role to various departments and services on the campus as well as to the management of the institution. While the information supplied in the survey questionnaire tended to speak to the notion of advice, it was when I followed these issues up in the in-depth interviews that it became clearer that this role had a much stronger advocacy component to it. From the previous discussions the lack of integration of disability issues and addressing the needs of disabled students within

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<sup>77</sup> This is question D14 on page 10 of the survey questionnaire. See Appendix A.

<sup>78</sup> See Section 5.2.1.

mainstream processes in the institution is clearly evident. It is not surprising, therefore, that this advocacy role appeared to be strongly orientated to raising awareness about disability issues and the needs of disabled students where ever and when ever possible within the institution. The following quotations from the interviewees capture the activities that I have categorised within this broad advocacy role.

*I sit on key committees because they have realized that [name of institution] does take disability quite seriously, so I would like to believe, so when it comes to for example the senior appointment selection committee, I sit on that committee, I mean when we interviewed the Vice Chancellor, he had to answer questions around disability, he needs to be able to tell me how he feels about diversity, so in that way I hope, I like to believe that the university takes us seriously. I sit on various committees and people have come to realize that it is not something that can be ignored (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*The [name of unit/programme] is expected to play that role, although the [name of unit/programme] is located in Student Development and we fall under the Dean of Students, our obligations to the university extend way beyond that, from Properties and Services, ensuring transformation of campus, all new developments, to HR and consulting for HR and providing that kind of support etc (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

The participation of the units/programmes and responsible people in such activities and the playing of this role are clearly important to, as one of the respondents said “putting disability on the institution’s agenda”. Furthermore, as with the roles and responsibilities already described, it is clear that if this role was not being played by the units/programmes and responsible people within the institution, it is likely that even less attention would be given to

disability issues and the needs of disabled students. Once again, therefore, the units/programmes and responsible people appear to be playing a role within the institution that, while being essential, clearly arises out of deficiencies and inequities that prevail within that institution. One of the clearest examples of this was where the senior management of the institution responded negatively to the participation of disabled students. In such a context the responsible person's role as an advocate appeared essential to disabled students 'survival' within the institution. The experience recounted below of one of the interviewees illustrates starkly how important his interventions were, but, equally, how significant were the barriers arising from the attitudes of senior personnel.

*Earlier this year [the student] said he phoned [name of institution] and said that he wanted to register with them and told them that he was blind and somebody on the phone told him he could come to [name of institution], so he came to our campus and when he was here he explained and said he phoned and was told he could come and he filled in the form and they made the mistake of taking the R100, when he came back to register they wanted to say we cannot accommodate you and then I jumped and said but your application form required them to explain the nature of their disability and when you took R100 up till today, you needed to have done something because you promised the student and that is where I took the initiative of saying I would coordinate everything, but I don't think I get the support that I deserve. This should have been our first priority since basically the student is our main client and he was supposed to have been treated like all other students - have the material on time, we needed to make alternative materials on time but then we are not doing that, one is struggling to try and do that ... people are not happy that I challenged the idea of them not accommodating blind students [and] all I know is that the DVC was less interested, he was fuming when he was told that we had a blind student and we needed extra materials and so on,*

*why did we bite off more than we could chew, that was the answer that we got, so I don't know how aware management is ...I don't think that they are aware, because if they were, they were supposed to jump at the idea, they were supposed to support me right through, they were supposed to actually understand (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

Although this incident stood out from the data collected in the in-depth interviews, other interviewees also emphasised the extent of the challenges that arose from negative attitudes and lack of support from senior management. The following two quotations show the concerns of the interviewees in this regard.

*The huge battle is getting senior management to realize the importance of accepting all students, for as long as senior managers are not going to believe that there is a place in their institutions for people with disabilities, nothing is going to happen (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, September 2003)*

*Management is the one that plays an important role based on the experiences I have had at [name of institution]. If you tend to want more support from them, you don't get it as much as you can, there are a lot of barriers that are still there that people don't accept that people with disabilities can make it in institutions of higher learning. They still want them to be left out there to just do other short courses where they could be placed, meanwhile, they also want to develop their careers, so management is the one that I think has a lot of problems (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

The differences in the attitudes of senior management that were apparent across the 11 institutions and their importance to the findings of this study also become evident in Chapter Seven. Not unexpectedly, how senior management responded to the admission of disabled students and what informed their approach to the issue, presented as a central finding shaping disabled students' access to higher education institutions. In the context of this discussion what is especially important to consider is the extent to which this advocacy role played by the units/programmes and responsible people is intensified when there is greater resistance at this level around the participation of disabled students.

#### **5.4 Discussion and conclusions: The separation and categorisation of disabled students**

In line with the distinction made throughout this thesis between the 'macro' and 'micro' levels of the teaching and learning environment, and the focus and operation of teaching and learning support for disabled students at these different levels, this chapter has focused on the former. My objective in this chapter has been to discuss the services that are in place and thus the kind of support that operates at the broader institutional level, what I have called the 'macro' level, to support disabled students in their academic studies. In undertaking this task I have sought to describe, and in this way identify, the dominant roles and responsibilities of the disability units/programmes and responsible people where such provision was in place at the time the fieldwork was completed. The task has therefore been orientated towards exploring the *nature of existing support provision* at this level as a way of understanding how institutions are responding to disabled students' participation within them. This final section of the chapter synthesises the central findings that have emerged through this line of enquiry and draws out critical issues that are important to the concerns of this study.

At the outset it is important to recognise that the support services provided at the 'macro' level and explored in this study, appear to provide individual disabled students with necessary knowledge and skills, which they may require to participate in the higher education environment, and, arguably, as independent adults in the broader society. In this way, the services provided appear to be very important to the provision of the minimum levels of support they may require to participate with any degree of independence and confidence as students within the institution and thus to undertake their studies with any degree of success. It would seem, therefore, that the kind of support discussed in this chapter becomes an important *enabling mechanism* for individual disabled student's participation in the existing academic environment of institutions. Thus, in the present context, the services provided at this level by the disability units/programmes and responsible people are, on the one hand, very important for the individual disabled students that are able to access them. Put another way, without the existence of such basic services, it is likely that few disabled students would be able to participate with any degree of confidence and independence within the academic environment as it is organised and functions at present in their institutions.

While recognising, therefore, the importance of such institutional provision for individual disabled students in the present context, the findings discussed in this chapter also highlighted other issues that become equally important to consider. In many ways, these other concerns turn the attention away from the individual disabled student and their ability to cope in the present context. The focus shifts to what *underpins and influences the nature of the provision* that is provided and the *importance of this orientation to the equity concerns* addressed in this study. My intention now is to explore these deeper questions and to consider the consequences of the findings from this chapter for the creation of a more equitable and just higher education system for disabled students.

This analysis into the roles and responsibilities of the disability units/programmes and responsible people, shows that, at the 'macro' level of the institution's functioning, a clear separation exists between the various forms of support, both psycho-social and academic, that are provided for disabled students and those that are in place for other students on the campuses. My contention, therefore, is that through the *orientation, organisation and delivery of the services* explored in this chapter, the recipients of these services are responded to within the institution as a *separate group of students*. Thus the nature of the support provision at the 'macro' level serves to separate disabled students out from the rest of the student body. This has important consequences for how disabled students' participation within the institution is understood and thus responded to. I have, therefore, regarded this overarching finding, which I will call *the separation and categorisation of disabled students*, as central to the concerns of this study. It is especially important for two reasons:

- (i) Firstly, while the services focused on in this chapter may provide individual disabled students with some important forms of support, their organisation and delivery reflects a structural manifestation within the institution of a particular attitude towards disabled students and their learning needs. Put another way, the dominant way in which the services are organised and delivered at the 'macro' level of the institution, is underpinned by a *distinctive ideology* that shapes and gives meaning to it and, in this way, legitimises it.
- (ii) Secondly, the separating out of disabled students in this way, that is, through the organisation and delivery of support services at the 'macro' level, strongly influences how the institution as a whole, including the senior management, *understands and views their responsibilities* towards disabled students. This in turn has consequences for the *kind of institutional changes* that are

regarded as important towards creating a more equitable and just higher education system for disabled students.

My intention now is to discuss these conclusions in more depth and to consider their importance to the concerns of this study.

In Chapter Two I drew from Oliver's conceptualisation of the hegemony of disability (Oliver, 1990) and thus Gramsci's (1971) work on the concept of hegemony, to explore what shapes dominant understandings of disability. This was then extended into the education terrain where I demonstrated how such understandings underpin and give meaning to the category of 'special needs' learners and, in this way, what has historically shaped the dominant nature of educational provision for disabled learners. Central to such understandings are the assumptions that are made about normality and, more specifically, that disabled people are not normal (Abberley, 1997). These arguments emphasised the extent to which the positioning of disabled people as 'not normal' has been central to providing a justification for the separation in education provision that has been, and continues to be, evident in education systems throughout the world, especially at the schooling level. Thus, as already suggested, the fact that disabled people are not regarded as 'normal' forms part of the hegemony of disability and thus a "justifying ideology" (McClellan, 1979:184) for the structural separations that are made between them and 'normal' learners.

There is no evidence from the findings presented in this chapter to suggest that disabled students are physically separated within higher education institutions in the same way as they have been at the schooling level. However, the manner in which the support services at the 'macro' level are organised, and thus how the support is provided in the institution, effectively separates them out from the rest of the student body in important ways. Most importantly, such separation happens because disabled students are seen as students who are different from the other students in the institution or

the 'normal' students on the campus. In this way, while individual disabled students may have access to particular forms of support, as a group they are positioned within the institution as students who are not 'normal'. Most importantly, this positioning reinforces the perception that the learning needs of disabled students and thus the nature of the teaching and learning support they may require, is different from what is required by the 'normal' students. It follows then that such support cannot be provided through the 'normal' channels of the university, but can be most appropriately provided through separate forms of support provision.

Drawing from Slee's (1999:110) assertions captured in Chapter Two, through the functioning of such provision, disabled students are placed outside the construction of the 'normal' student or are placed outside the construction of the recipients of the mainstream student support and academic services of the campus. So, while the nature of the support provided at this level, reflects the structural manifestation of this pervasive ideology around disabled students, the daily functioning of these services reinforce such forms of categorisation, and thus separation, within the institution. Williams (1977:110), in discussing the Gramscian notion of hegemony, argues that particular values and meanings become a lived reality because they are "constitutive and constituting – which as they are experienced as practices appear as reciprocally confirming [and] ...thus constitutes a sense of reality for most people in the society". Thus, the pervasive ideology that constructs disabled students as not 'normal' and therefore not part of the 'normal' student body, informs the nature of the provision explored here but is in turn reinforced and given legitimacy through the operation of these services. The affective separation and categorisation of disabled students through the organisation and functioning of such provision, therefore, becomes hegemonic within institutions and thus part of a common sense (Gramsci, 1971) around supporting disabled students' participation in higher education.

Moreover, Leathwood and O'Connell (2003:599) argue that, as soon as such separations are made between students in the higher education environment, those students who are separated from the mainstream become "homogenized, pathologized and marked as 'Other'". Moreover the "features" of these students are compared and judged in relation to the "features" of those students who are regarded as normal, and obviously against whom they "may be found wanting" (Webb, 1997:68). These assertions resonate strongly with Shakespeare's (1994:290) assertions drawn from and commented on in Chapter Two around the notion of "otherness" and the prejudices experienced by disabled people. It may be argued here that in the higher education environment, separating and categorising disabled students in this way, however well meaning and effective for individual disabled students in the present context, fails to address, and, may in fact, reinforce the prejudicial cultural representations of disabled people emphasised by Shakespeare (1994:296).

Throughout a number of the interviews I was struck by how such 'othering' was reinforced in the way in which some of the interviewees talked about the disabled students. They used terminology such as "our students" or "[name of disability unit/programme] students", thus defining them in relation to their status as recipients of these services. Similarly, there were times when the interviewees categorised or classified their services by making distinctions between what is 'normal' and what they provide. The following quotations capture some of these, often subtle, forms of separation and categorisation.

*The services [are] mainly for people who can't write and can't read in the normal manner. So blind students, quadriplegics and people with sort of neurological disorders who can't write (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*Everything we actually render for the mass students, we do for the disabled students, sometimes on a more personal basis, because*

*some of the study methods we do in a smaller group for the other students, so we would do it individually. Exactly the same (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003)*

*I prefer that they use the normal channels that all other students have access to as well and go through the normal channels of making appointments, keeping appointments and having that service provided to them so they would use that (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*I fight this university all the time and play on their conscience and guilt and all of that, at the same time I understand... I mean in salaries alone, the university is putting in more than [amount], for a small department for 100 students, it's a lot of money. You talk to the Financial Director and he says you have 100 students and we are putting in over just [amount] into your unit, I have got 23 000 other students, you tell me how do I justify giving you more money when I have got to also think about 23 000 other students against your 100, and it makes sense, I understand (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

It became clear to me that this positioning also reinforced the perception that the support requirements of disabled students could in fact not be adequately met by mainstream services on the campus. They were different and in fact required forms of knowledge and expertise not available in other parts of the institution. While there is no doubt that particular forms of support may require some specialized skills, this perception seemed to extend into other areas of the institution's functioning. The comment below suggests that even in areas of recruitment, the units/programmes and responsible people are regarded as having the appropriate knowledge and skills to undertaken this

function with regard to potential disabled students. One interviewee explained her feelings around this issue:

*We are not going to leave it only for the marketing department of [name of institution]. We feel it is a specialised field and yes they can come along with us, but as a disability unit we must tell people<sup>79</sup>, tell pupils, tell teachers and parents what we can offer them at this stage. They can then decide that these pupils can come to [name of institution] or they can go to [name of institution] or they can go to another place (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

Once again, it is important to acknowledge that in the present context the disability units/programme and responsible people may be important to addressing some of these concerns. However, such perceptions and argument, does, in my opinion, perpetuate the notion that mainstream services or divisions of institutional functioning are not appropriately placed by virtue of their knowledge and expertise to address the concerns of disabled students.

This argument leads into what I regarded as one of the most important consequences of the separation and categorisation described above. I will call this a *lack of integration and overall institutional responsibility* towards disabled students. Throughout the chapter I discussed various services that are provided by the disability units/responsible people to disabled students. It was argued that if the students were not disabled, these same services would be provided to them by existing, mainstream student support services on the campuses. These include: orientating the students to the physical environment of the campus and various support services that exist for all students; providing them with ICT facilities and training towards the

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<sup>79</sup> My emphasis

development of minimum levels of skill and proficiency in this area; providing the students with forms of support that fit within the framework of Academic Development interventions, and undertaking various services around the assessment of the student's academic studies. The fact that the disability units/programmes and responsible people take responsibility for such provision for disabled students, suggests that the existing mainstream services are not sufficiently accessible to disabled students, or that they do not see disabled students as their responsibility. The following additional comment from one of the interviewees captures this reality.

*We find that in some areas, [name of Academic Development unit] is prepared to take on students with disabilities, and in some areas they don't. For example, issues around computer literacy, our disabled students tend to rely heavily on us for computer literacy skills, research skills and so on, because [name of Academic Development unit] has not developed their courses in an inclusive way for disability. Particularly around multimedia, we picked up a lot of difficulties there. This is obviously something we bring to the attention of [name of Academic Development unit], but there is not sufficient political clout around disability to change that. They don't feel that they are responsible and that is a line that they are going to stick to...they would see that for instance computer literacy, research skills or writing skills for people with disabilities are different to those skills for people who don't have disabilities and therefore they will shift responsibility for that. It is very difficult to change that mindset, but it is one that should be changed in my view, it certainly is something that I continually press for (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

This lack of integration and overall institutional responsibility when it comes to disabled students presents as a central finding in this study and is reflected in a number of different ways in the various areas that I

investigated. In the context of the support provision that is offered to disabled students, one of the most important ways in which it manifested itself, was in the obvious and pervasive *tension* that existed for the units/programmes in carrying out their work. More specifically, it was clear that the units/programmes and responsible people were constantly trying to grapple with meeting the support requirements of disabled students and taking responsibility for them within an unresponsive environment. This includes providing basic academic services to disabled students and trying to get other services and the institution as a whole to integrate the requirements of disabled students within their programmes. The most obvious examples cited from the interviewees were; the central role that they appear to play with regard to organising and administering examinations for disabled students, including invigilation services; and their involvement in the provision of Academic Development related services for the students. What is especially important to emphasise here is that their responsibilities include not only providing disabled students with support services which they may require but, in fact, *taking over core academic functions* within the institution.

It is important to emphasise that all the interviewees from the institutions where such provision is in place, were aware of and commented on this tension. However, attitudes differed slightly about the extent to which a more integrated approach with regard to supporting disabled students was practically possible within their institutions at present. Although it was clear that all these respondents felt that they had to take responsibility within the present context for meeting these needs among disabled students, some were clearly more concerned about the extent to which this role was a 'default' one and should be constantly challenged. The following capture some of the respondents' views about this tension.

*As much as I like the integration idea, we found that it is not going to work, then again you have computer centres throughout the university, what guarantees do we have that the adaptive devices that we use*

*which is extremely expensive, will be respected by other students. To avoid negligence, breakages and costs, the centralized unit is easier, it's a dedicated unit and we look after what is here. What we have also done is that we have created two other computer centres at two residences, so we have dedicated computer rooms there which is only available to [name of disability unit/programme] students, again for the same reasons, we need to be able to control who goes in there and who uses the equipment because it is so expensive, and adaptive devices is like a new toy to someone who does not really need it and he is going to experiment and explore different things and most probably break it and not take responsibility for it, unfortunately, as much as we want the integration there are certain services that have to be dedicated (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*When it comes to registrations at the [name of unit], we will only register people that we support for various things. We don't register every person with a disability at [name of institution]. There are many people who come and are going through the system without our direct support, which is the way we want it. Our goal is to not have to see the people, if people are coping fine, it is better for them, it is better for us (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*Initially our strategy was not to ask for a formalised budget, because then the university wouldn't take responsibility for the issue, but that approach is not working, you need a dedicated person to drive the issue. (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*I think one needs to get through to the core business of the university, the issues around disability, the idea that disability is a part of all our*

*lives and part of everything we do and that hasn't happened at [name of institution]. You have the main business of the university and disability tagged on and I would like to see that changed. I would like to see a much more integrated approach to provision for disability (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*Again it is about mainstreaming, you don't want the disabled students huddled in a corner playing chess and they become the chess club. The chess club must have people from all walks etc (Interview with historically disadvantaged institution, August 2003).*

It is also possible to discern a form of the tension discussed above in the concerns expressed by some of the interviewees about the dependency they saw developing between disabled students and the disability units/responsible people. In a context where the mainstream institutional environment fails to take responsibility for the support requirements of disabled students, it is not surprising that these students would be dependent on those services or people that did attempt to address their concerns. However, what was of concern to some of the interviewees was that they might, in fact, be in danger of perpetuating similar forms of dependency, especially at a psychological level, to those created through the special school system. The consequences of such dependency at the schooling level have already been alluded to when the interviewees referred to their role in providing disabled students with life skills, which they argued the students had not received in their schooling years. However, as some of the interviewees suggested, such dependency can easily be replicated. This is likely to happen if disabled students are dependent on the units/programmes and responsible people for necessary support and academic services, and in this way are separated from mainstream campus activities and provision, where their requirements are not catered for. One interviewee explained the

challenges he had faced when he attempted to confront what he perceived to be this growing dependency:

*They [the students] see [name of unit/programme] as an extension of that special school and then [name of unit/programme] becomes that home, it serves the mothering purpose, it provides once again the cocooning that happened at school level. When I just started, at the end of this passage we had a common room for students we were growing every year, our student numbers were increasing, we needed more space... so I asked to take the common room away from the students and they fought me on that because I was taking away something that was theirs, it was their common room where they felt at home, but more than just needing space, my main purpose of taking that room away from them was because I saw that room further alienating them from other students and I realized that that is not what they needed, because when they graduate from this university and go out into the workplace, they would be totally lost and we were not helping them at all by providing them with a common room because we were keeping them away from the concourse area, keeping them away from other students, so what we were doing by taking away the common room was forcing them to go and sit in the concourse and have their sandwiches, we were forcing them to mingle with other students something they had never done before and you can understand the fears that came out of that (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

It is also possible to argue that the nature of the advocacy role that has been discussed in this chapter, is one that reflects at times, the disability units/responsible people's attempts to mediate a further manifestation of this tension on their campuses. As with the provision of academic services and essential skills, this advocacy role is by its very nature a contradictory one. The units/programmes and responsible people constantly grapple with the

tension of raising awareness about disability issues themselves, while at the same time trying to get all the role players within the institution to do this as part of their inherent responsibilities. As the two quotations below show, the unit/programmes and responsible people may become a collection point or 'dumping ground' in the institution for anything that has to do with disability.

*As sure as anything, if you send anything related to disability to [name of institution] it will end up on my desk, so I don't necessarily think that that is ideal; I think it is not ideal at all. The difficulty is really to try and get out of that sort of perception that the [name of unit/programme] handles all things 'disability'. Very difficult also, because of the turnover of staff, one finds one has success in training people in HR and Properties and Services, then you have a turnover of staff, new people, and disability is not seen as a central part of most job descriptions when new people are employed, and so you begin again. So it is a continual exercise (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*I don't want the Unit to turn into the last voice on disability at [name of institution]. I think the administration at [name of institution] would welcome that, us taking it all away, being the final voice. I think it would be damaging to people's ability to speak out for themselves, so again there needs to be more participation of people with disabilities, there needs to be more interest (Interview with responsible person, historically disadvantaged institution, August 2003).*

It is very important to recognise that, as the second quotation above emphasises, in playing this role within the institutions, the unit/programmes and responsible people, become, albeit not always willingly, the 'voice' of disability within the institution. As the quotations illustrate, while this may be a very important and necessary role within a context in which disability continues to be marginalized, it is once again a contradictory role. The

second interviewee suggests that this role is one that is often played because the voice of disabled students within the institution is not given sufficient attention and recognition by the institution. It may be convenient for others in the institution, especially the senior management of the institution, to defer to the support personnel rather than to the students themselves. However, if they do not use the power which they have to raise issues that they feel are important to disabled students, there is the very real risk of the perceived concerns of disabled students slipping off the agenda or not being considered at all. Without being able to verify this concern through the direct commentary of disabled students, the quotations, nonetheless, do seem to suggest that the 'voice' of the units/programmes and responsible people is stronger in this arena than the students themselves – or is given more weight by the institution.

It was clear therefore that many of the responsibilities that are undertaken by the disability units/programmes and responsible people arise out of a lack of integration and overall institutional responsibility towards disabled students. While at a pragmatic level the roles and responsibilities played and assumed by the disability units/programmes may be necessary to compensate for such inadequacies within the system, the inequalities in the institution that underpin this compensatory role are not addressed.

Earlier I argued that no evidence existed to show that at the higher education level disabled students are physically separated in the same way as the schooling system. However, this chapter has shown that the organisation and delivery of support services for disabled students at the 'macro' level effectively provides a similar "segregating solution to the problems these children [students] present to the educational apparatus" (Fulcher, 1989:39). Put another way, the organisation and functioning of support services at this level provides a solution to the problems that disabled students may present to the academic environment as it is presently organised and functions. It is, effectively, the higher education variant of the 'special needs' project. Such

forms of provision and the inequalities that they disguise or compensate for must, therefore, be interrogated using the same sociological tools discussed in Chapter Two, which have shaped the challenges to 'special needs' education at the schooling level.

In the context of higher education and the concerns of this study, what becomes especially important to consider, and which is alluded to above, are the imperatives towards *normalisation and assimilation* that these "segregating solutions" (Fulcher, 1989:39) support. In Chapter Two, drawing especially from writers such as Tomlinson (1982), Barton, 1986, Fulcher, (1989) and Slee (2001b), it was argued that such 'solutions' act as a "safety valve for the central educational apparatus" (Tomlinson (1982) cited in Fulcher, 1989:39) in dealing with differences that learners may bring to the teaching and learning process or in accessing the curriculum. Such differences are dealt with through 'solutions' that are argued and justified as being in the best interests of the learners concerned and which are removed from the organisation and functioning of the mainstream system. This system then is not called into question and therefore there is no imperative for it to change in any significant way. Put another way, since disabled students are not seen to be part of the 'normal' student body, the 'normal', mainstream institutional support services and practices are not called into question.

Drawing from Sayed's (2003:84) concerns with the concept of 'inclusion' noted in Chapter Two, it may be argued that disabled students are targeted for "special inclusive measures", in this case the kinds of support services discussed in this chapter, which are then separately organised, resourced and orientated towards addressing the difficulties the students might experience. So, while it may be acknowledged that disabled students could experience difficulties, the focus is towards strengthening the 'special measures' rather than on transforming the institution, including the responsiveness and accessibility of the 'normal' support services to address the support requirements of all students. This orientation, or what I have

suggested constitutes strengthening a particular type of segregating solution (Fulcher, 1989), is developed further in the next chapter. I will argue that it has a strong bearing on the attention that is given by the institution, including the existing disability units/programmes and responsible people, to what is happening at the classroom, department or faculty level – what is now explored as the ‘micro’ level of the institution.

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**CHAPTER SIX**  
**THE PROVISION OF TEACHING AND LEARNING SUPPORT**  
**AT THE 'MICRO' LEVEL**

**6.1 Introduction**

This chapter continues the presentation of the empirical findings from the research by extending the discussion already begun in the previous chapter, into how disabled students are supported in their academic studies. In this way, it deepens the focus in this thesis on the concerns around participation and success, which I have argued are central to the creation of an equitable and just higher education system for disabled students. This chapter, however, addresses these concerns by focusing on the 'micro' level of the teaching and learning environment. This refers to the classroom, department or faculty level, or as Simpson (1996) puts it, the course and programme level. It is at this level that the curriculum is delivered and engaged with and, therefore, where essential knowledge is shared and transferred in the academy. It is also that part of the institution where academic staff and students are most directly engaged together in the process of teaching and learning.

This chapter begins by considering how disabled students' participation at this critical interface is supported through the roles and responsibilities assumed and services offered by the disability units/programmes and responsible people. However, since it is here that the interaction between the students and the academic staff is most intense, the attitudes, behaviour and pedagogical practices of the latter emerge as central to the analysis of what is happening at this level. This chapter, therefore, describes the findings from the research process that emerged as I moved from: attempting to understand how disabled students' participation is supported at this level; to recognising and analysing deeper concerns around the key challenges that emerge for disabled students' equitable participation at this level, and thus in

their attempts to access the curriculum. This line of enquiry in turn took me back to considering how the disability units/programmes and responsible people were engaging with the academic staff as a key stakeholder group within the institution. These explorations alerted me to the challenges that exist for the units/programmes and responsible people in this regard. Most importantly, however, I was forced to confront what these findings showed about how the 'micro' level of the teaching and learning environment is viewed and addressed within the overall response of institutions to disabled students participation and success. I regarded these insights as central to the equity concerns that underpinned the purpose of my study.

## **6.2 Mediating disabled students' engagement with the teaching and learning process at the 'micro' level**

From the evidence already discussed in the previous chapter, it is clear that the units/programmes and responsible people provide a range of services to individual disabled students that are aimed at *supporting their participation in lectures, tutorials, examinations etc.* Similarly, the evidence shows that they are centrally involved in *academic planning activities* that relate directly to the overall facilitation and monitoring of the student's progress in their courses, including playing an advisory role where necessary. Most importantly, however the findings presented in the previous chapter show that the support personnel are involved in assisting disabled students on an ongoing basis to *negotiate various issues with the academic staff.* These issues appear to extend from daily classroom activities to more general concerns about the nature of the student's participation in a programme, including meeting various course requirements. In this way, the units/programmes and responsible people are directly involved in *mediating the terms of disabled students' engagement with the teaching and learning process at the 'micro' level.*

While all these aspects of this mediation role were important findings for this study, it was in exploring the latter component with regard to engagement with the academic staff that I became aware of how important this role was to the disabled student's experience. Its importance to their experience, however, arose because it attempted to address and minimise what I realised was a more serious and pervasive challenge than had been captured in the survey questionnaire. Through the discussions on what I have called this mediation role, it became evident that the attitudes and behaviour of individual academics towards disabled students in their class manifested either as an important enabling mechanism towards the student's success or as a critical barrier and therefore a major challenge for the students and the responsible people in their work. The discussion that follows begins by describing this mediation role. It then moves on to describe the various lines of enquiry I pursued, drawing from both the original survey questionnaire data and the in-depth interviews, to arrive at the conclusions reached about what was happening at the micro level of the teaching and learning environment.

As already argued, from the descriptions shared by the interviewees and presented in the previous chapter, it is already evident that they are regularly involved in engaging with the academic staff around the needs and concerns of disabled students in their classes. Although the disability units/programmes or responsible people appear to try to limit their involvement in such negotiations by encouraging disabled students to engage with their lecturers in their own way, many examples were cited in the in-depth interviews, some of which have already been presented, which indicate that a more direct interventionist role is played at times. The following comments from the interviewees capture this role and its different facets quite succinctly.

*Our policy is as far as possible, to allow relationships to develop between students with disabilities and academics naturally. Our policy is non-interventionist, unless issues arise. When issues do arise, we have the clout to intervene and to change things, but we feel that the quality of that teaching relationship is enhanced by a personal relationship between student and teacher, so we don't want to interfere with that (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*If the student is having a problem within the lecture environment itself we are then at liberty to intervene on the student's behalf, letting the lecturer know that these are the special needs of the students, and we find the moment the intervention comes from us the lecturers are more willing to accommodate the student's needs, they realize then that this is not a chancer, they are not trying to pull the wool over my eyes, so its valid. That's why we try and encourage the students to register with us. Registration with us does not cost anything it just gives us permission to be able to intervene on their behalf (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*We don't have situations where people are reluctant to allow a student to bring in a tape recorder or to ask for the existing support or whatever, but now and then you would have instances where you need permission from the lecturer to say that I would like to bring a tape recorder, please allow the student to use a tape recorder in class because he has a disability, otherwise you may have all 1200 students going to class with tape recorders so this is something we have to prevent, but what we make sure we do is at the beginning of the year we make lecturers know that so and so will be in your class this year*

*and will be using a tape recorder and we find that when we let them know and they are aware of it they really don't have a problem (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

In these discussions on their involvement with academics two issues became clear about this role and its application within the institution. Firstly, as the above quotations show, it primarily involves engaging on an ongoing basis as *individuals with individual lecturers on behalf of individual disabled students*. One of the interviewees argued that this approach was necessary and important for obtaining the lecturer's co-operation. He argued:

*I also found that when you approach a situation personally one on one with the individual lecturers, where you sit down and you chat with them and show them data on the condition and you say that these are the person's needs that are beyond their control, she has the intellectual potential to complete this to acquire a degree if we give her the opportunity, they are so open to doing that once they know (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

Secondly, it was evident that this role was one that often required *negotiation* between the unit/programme staff or responsible people and the academic concerned on behalf of the student. A number of the interviewees argued that in their experience the terms of such negotiation and intervention on their part needed to be non-confrontational. For some, this meant recognizing the value of changing attitudes through information sharing and what they argued was an educative process that led to greater awareness and understanding. For others, the non-confrontational approach extended to recognizing the nature and functioning of the 'system' and strategically engaging with it to leverage the best possible opportunities for the disabled students. The quotations below capture these sentiments.

*But when you go there being forceful and demanding, I think a lot of the attitude [of academics] comes from that because perhaps previously it was done in that way, I demand, I am entitled to that (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*One has to be diplomatic, because at the end of the day you are dealing with the welfare of the student. You want the very best outcome for the student, and you want the very best learning experience, and we are all part of that process. We see ourselves as part of the university, and part of delivering that process of learning for the student. We are not here to score political points; we are here for the welfare of that student (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*When I was a student I had a friend who was a professor here, he was a mentor for me and he taught me about the concept of 'the hinges of power'. One has to locate the hinges of power if one wants to get things done. And that is very much the case. One needs to build relationships (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*Those relationships have to be built up and one has to be respectful of those relationships. Something I learnt very quickly actually when I took over the [name of unit/programme] that demands get you absolutely nowhere. One has to work within the system and one has to build relationships and get people on board (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

This approach, as already noted in the previous chapter, is not limited to engagement with the academic staff. However, what is important in the context of this discussion is how this mode of engagement, which attempted

to strategically obtain individual academics' support and co-operation towards individual disabled students, appeared to shape the *form of their engagement*, overall. Moreover, it presented as the *dominant manner* in which the units/programmes and responsible people interacted with the academic staff and thus with the process of teaching and learning at the 'micro' level within the institution.

The importance of this finding for my study became even more apparent when I considered it in relation to two further areas of investigation that I pursued. Both had started from a consideration of some of the initial results from the survey questionnaire, which, as with many of the other findings, developed into more important and complex issues than had been revealed through the survey questionnaire process. These were: *the attitudes and behaviour of academic staff* as an identified challenge for the disability units/programmes and responsible people; and related to this, the *nature and extent of the work that was undertaken by the units/programmes with the academic staff* as a key stakeholder group within the institution. I regarded the latter area as an important indication of how the units/programmes were *responding to the challenge* that academics' behaviour and attitudes posed.

### **6.3 The attitudes and behaviour of academics**

In the survey questionnaire the area of academic staff was largely addressed in two ways. Firstly, in the section that asked the respondents a range of questions about the kind of work they undertook within the institution, they had specifically been asked to indicate whether they undertook any work with the academic staff to support them in responding to the learning needs of disabled students. Their responses to this question are presented at a later stage in this chapter, as they are central to the discussion on how the units/programmes are responding to academics as a key stakeholder group within the institution.

The second way in which the issue of academic staff was raised in the survey questionnaire was in a section that attempted to identify constraints that the disability units/programmes or responsible people may face in their work<sup>80</sup>. From a list of specified constraints the respondents were asked to choose the three most important constraints to their work and to rank these three accordingly. One of the possible constraints that they could choose from was; "Resistance from academics in the institution". None of the 24 (0%) respondents identified this as their most important constraint. Only 3 (13%) went on to choose it as their second most important constraint and 5 (21%) as their third most important constraint. These responses recorded from the survey questionnaire suggested that resistance by academics was not regarded as a significantly important constraint across the different institutions. Or, the units/programmes and responsible people faced other constraints which they regarded as more important than resistance by academics. Interestingly, in the in-depth interviews and as the analysis of the findings progressed, a very different picture was to materialise and I reached the conclusion that the findings of the survey questionnaire described above were, in many ways, misleading.

In my initial reflections on these findings from the survey questionnaire, I was aware that a number of other researchers in relatively recent studies, which have focused on the barriers that disabled students experience in higher education, had identified the attitudes and behaviour of academics as an important barrier and thus a key focus for change (see especially, Hurst, 1993, 1998 (United Kingdom); Hall and Tinklin, 1998 (Scotland); Riddell, 1998 (Scotland); Duquette, 2000 (Canada); Foreman, Dempsey, Robinson and Manning, 2001 (Australia); Holloway, 2001 (United Kingdom); Crous, 2004 (South Africa); Beuchamp-Pryor, 2004 (Wales); Shevlin, Kenny and McNeela, 2004 (Ireland)). As both a barrier and enabling mechanism to disabled students' experience, Beuchamp-Pryor (2004:109) points out that

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<sup>80</sup> See Section H on page 14 of the Questionnaire (Appendix A).

the learning experience for a disabled student becomes strongly dependent “on how far departments and academic staff listened to, and responded to, their concerns”. My overall impression from these studies was that, at the very least, the area of academic staff had not been appropriately and/or adequately addressed in the survey questionnaire.

This observation seemed especially important in light of the conceptual framework that was emerging in my study and the importance of the academic staff in this regard. As I argued in Chapter Two, making sure that all students are able to access the curriculum, what I referred to as epistemological access (Morrow, 1994), is central to an equitable and just higher education system for disabled students. Thus, what was happening with the academic staff, as the key conduits for affecting such access, seemed especially important to the issues of concern in this research.

Both these observations suggested to me that, as a starting point, I needed to explore the area of academic staff more substantially in the in-depth interviews. My intention now is to discuss those findings that emerged from the in-depth interviews about the attitudes and behaviour of the academic staff. The conclusions that I reached from analysing these findings reinforced for me the concern expressed above: that the findings of the survey-questionnaire in this area were, at best, inadequate in reflecting the depth of the problem or the extent of the challenge that the attitudes and behaviour of the academic staff posed for the units/programmes or responsible people and, therefore, for the disabled students themselves.

It is important to begin this discussion by noting an important observation that I made as the interviews unfolded. I recognised that much of the information initially shared about the attitudes and behaviour of academics arose within the context of questions that I posed around other issues. Most often, the challenges that the units/programmes and responsible people faced with regard to academics were expressed in the context of the discussion on the

mediation type role described earlier. In other words, dealing with negative attitudes and resistance from some academics, was largely just expressed and articulated as a necessary part of the job and, most importantly, an inevitable feature of the academic environment. In this way, such problems just had to be responded to as they arose with individual academics. It was only when I began to probe the issue further with the interviewees and explore their experiences more carefully that clearer insights emerged into this critical area of concern.

This line of enquiry showed that for a number of the interviewees, problems that students and they themselves experienced with some academics arose largely from the latter's *lack of awareness and understanding* about disability and the learning needs of disabled students. This included fears about what it meant to have a disabled student in their class and their ability to deal with what they perceived to be the challenges involved in this situation. The following comments from the interviewees, where this issue was probed more carefully, capture these sentiments and thus, for them, the nature of the problem:

*We are having a problem with academics with this person who is just about blind and I suppose you can say it is an attitude problem, it does come down to that, but in many respects it is just that they haven't thought about what is happening...but it is this kind of mindset that you have to try and change. It is really very difficult (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*I think also it is the insensitivity or lack of knowledge on the part of the lecturers. For instance, the example of the student who couldn't read the map, the lecturer just said he didn't know what to do and said so. It was like it wasn't his problem; it was the student's problem (Interview with responsible person, historically disadvantaged institution, August 2003).*

*Sometimes an academic will find that they have a disabled student in their class and they will freak and come rushing over to us to find out what they should be doing, which is fine with us. We work through those kinds of things with them (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*Initially that reaction is great and then comes the anxieties and trepidation of I'm not prepared to do this, I have never done this before, I have never been exposed to people with disabilities (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

So for some of the interviewees, negative attitudes by academics and their subsequent responses towards the presence of disabled students in their classes arose out of fear or a lack of awareness and knowledge about the needs of disabled students. It manifested in behaviour that was insensitive or unresponsive to the learning needs of the disabled student, but largely arose from nothing more than limited awareness and understanding. The other interviewees did not dispute these sentiments. However, their responses suggested that the issue of negative attitudes among academics arose from a more complex set of issues and translated into direct and indirect forms of resistance, albeit to differing degrees, towards the participation of disabled students in their classes. In considering these sentiments and the examples they cited by the interviewees, it became clear that within the institutions such attitudes and behaviour are further complicated and often disguised by other attitudes and practices that dominate the academic environment. Two areas of concern emerged from the interviews that provide insight into this argument.

The first was the assertion by some of the interviewees that, in fact, there were academics within the institutions whose attitudes and associated behaviour showed *evidence of 'prejudice and bigotry'* towards disabled

people. In their opinion, therefore, negative attitudes and unresponsive behaviour sometimes went deeper than a lack of awareness and needed to be recognised and challenged as such. One of the interviewees explained an incident that had happened which demonstrated for him such sentiments.

*Certainly in the year before last we had a plainly resistance issue, plain bigotry, there is no other way to put it. So we have had at least one case of that. Generally people won't admit to that sort of prejudice though and so generally one talks people around, whether there is underlying bigotry is an open debate, but generally one doesn't find that that comes to the surface. In the particular instance where there was bigotry, it was based on issues of safety, issues of someone working in the lab etc, but the language that was used in the interviews plainly betrayed the lecturers true feelings and in fact in front of the Head of Department, I mean it was plain to everyone, including the HOD in that instance that this person was in fact just plainly bigoted. A very uncomfortable and embarrassing situation for the department as well (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

The above points to personal attitudes and forms of prejudice that clearly extend beyond the institutional environment and are shaped by attitudes towards disabled people in the broader society. In fact, taking the levels of discrimination faced by disabled people in the broader society, such sentiments are not unexpected among people within the institution. As Tett (1999:116) emphasises, "In general, the ethos of institutes of higher education tends to reflect existing social inequalities".

While it is important to contextualise such personal attitudes in this way, the second important area to emerge from the discussions relates more directly to the nature of the teaching and learning process at the faculty and classroom level. Some of the interviewees described instances where

negative or insensitive attitudes by academics and their associated resistant behaviour relate directly to *issues of flexibility in the teaching and learning process* at this level. In other words, as the quotations that follow illustrate, some academics are reticent to change or adapt their teaching and learning practices in order to facilitate the participation of the disabled student and ensure their access to the curriculum. This extends from methods of teaching in the classroom to forms and processes of assessment. Whatever the specific form the barrier takes for the disabled student, they all arise from the academic's reluctance to introduce into their teaching any changes that are different to what they have done previously and/or to what they regard as the correct way of doing things. The resistance that is evident appears to be primarily a reaction to the need for such change rather than overt prejudice. As one respondent put it, academics "are resistant to change by nature". The following examples cited by the interviewees capture the importance of flexibility for disabled learners in the teaching and learning process, and arguably within the entire academic environment. They also illustrate its importance in shaping the attitudes and resistance of some academics.

*We have academics who refuse to for instance, read overheads if they have blind students in their class or refuse to change venues if they have someone who is unable to access their venue, because they have always gone to the venue right next to their office and why now must they walk across campus to be accessible, that sort of thing (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*One student last year who has multiple disabilities, she has a sight problem and physical disabilities and is a very young, brilliant woman in the sciences, had an exam in the evening and she sort of indicated to the lecturer that she doesn't see properly, but the lecturer didn't take notice and instead of risking her own test she went and fell and*

*broke her bones. The Vice Chancellor was very upset about it and felt that the lecturer was insensitive (Interview with responsible person, historically disadvantaged institution, August 2003).*

*Exams at [name of institution] in [most] departments are strictly multiple choice type of exams and in Economics, students are expected to interpret graphs and a blind student cannot see the graphs, so in that case can't they adapt the questions and make alternative questions for them, maybe discuss this concept which will end up looking like the result of the graph, something of that nature which is something that I was looking at because with this years paper, because the papers were normal they were not adapted in anyway and students were marked I think out of 75, the other 25 goes to the graphs and the blind student cannot read the graph he just jumps the question and leaves it, which if ninety percent of the work is in that fashion, they are being disadvantaged again. So it is high time that academics understand what type of students they have so that they can deliver properly according to the needs of the students not only students that are on campus, they need to be sensitive towards their needs (Interview with responsible person, historically disadvantaged institution, August 2003).*

*[The student] reads very slowly, so she wanted to read during our mid-year vacation. She went along to one of her departments and asked for the reading materials for the next term and they weren't just able to give it to her, and she was very frustrated, she was in tears about it and as she experienced it, the department is not co-operating, but they are just not geared for that. The deadline they were working towards getting this material ready was the beginning of the next term, not the end of the previous term, because there was a blind student that wanted to read during the vacation. It is that kind of issue that is a difficult one. It is easy to go and buy software so that she can go and*

*read, but it is this kind of mindset that you have to try and change. It is really very difficult (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*Like there was an Economic cassette that I specifically listened to, where a lecturer said, can you see this line is going that way and the other one that way, and after I listened to the cassette that the blind students made in class, I sort of give them feedback, how can we work on this, because the students cannot see, so why cannot it be line A and line B, line A going horizontally and line B going vertically, something like that so that the student can create a picture of what is happening, so there are lecturers that I approach, some will take it as a positive comment, but some will say that they are not prepared or they just treat the blind students like all the other students, they need to attend the class whether the style of teaching is proper or not (Interview with responsible person, historically disadvantaged institution, August 2003).*

It became clear, as the discussions with the interviewees progressed, that the challenge of addressing issues of flexibility within teaching and learning at the faculty and classroom level, and associated resistance by academics, is complicated by two further issues. These may be regarded as factors that arise directly from the way in which the *academic environment is structured and functions* and from broader issues that shape the *project of higher education*. The first issue that emerged from these discussions was the extent to which notions of flexibility in teaching and learning are linked to concerns around *quality and excellence* in the academic environment. In other words, to do things differently in the faculty or classroom, especially to the way they have been done in the past, or the way the lecturer is used to doing them, automatically translates into potentially undermining the quality of the teaching and learning process and thus the standards that have been set. The quotation below expresses these concerns.

*There are a number of important challenges though. The notion of academic excellence is important. So where courses have to be altered or components of courses have to be changed, it is a massive challenge for the university in terms of deciding whether that is a core component of the course or whether it is marginal, whether a course is dramatically affected by the change in the curriculum and so on. Pitching that sort of flexibility is very hard for academics. They don't exclude anything from their course, and so it is a very careful negotiation where this happens, to make sure that happens properly (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003)*

The second issue to emerge through these discussions suggested that the attitudes of some academics and their resistance to greater flexibility are strongly influenced by the *power relations* that exist within the institution. The inputs cited below from the interviewees about academics in their institutions all directly or indirectly point to this area of concern. More importantly, however, they provide greater insight into the mediating role described earlier. They illustrate how the success or failure of this role and thus the outcome of the engagement with the academic on behalf of the disabled student is influenced by the hierarchy and thus relations of power that exist within the institution, especially between the disability units/programmes or responsible people and academic staff.

*Some staff hate us...lecturers don't like being told what to do (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*Lecturers are a problem up to a certain point, there are those who would go all out to help me to support students, there are those that feel that I am encroaching onto their territory and they don't take instructions from me, they don't report to me so to speak (Interview*

*with responsible person, historically disadvantaged institution, August 2003)*

*But then some lecturers don't want to work with them because they don't take instructions from me, they run their departments the way they want to and I leave them out and the ones that are willing to work with me I work with them, so unfortunately at [name of institution] people run departments like they are running their households, I'm very sorry to say that (Interview with responsible person, historically disadvantaged institution, August 2003).*

*People [academics] are not very open to that, because their attitude is that you hired me in the first place, I was considered professionally qualified to do the job, but now you are telling me that I have got certain deficiencies or disabilities, if you want to use the same terminology (Interview with responsible person, historically disadvantaged institution, August 2003).*

*The added embarrassment [to an incident of resistance by an academic] was I think that this person has a fairly senior position within the university structure. It wasn't a junior person by any means. One hears excuses on the part of the university community, sort of senior staff, around how someone has academic excellence; someone has an incredible record, one has to put up with the eccentricities of some specialists, because it is in our interest to have them on our books. Those kinds of arguments are put forward, but you take them with a pinch of salt. To me it is inexcusable (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

While all six of the quotations speak to relations of power within the institution, especially in the first three between the units/programmes/responsible people and academics, the last quotation

brings together both the issue of *power and academic excellence*. It suggests that notions of academic excellence (personified through senior staff and their experience) become a basis for sanctioning and legitimising resistance by some academics to changes that are necessary to accommodate disabled students. Such legitimacy arises from the power and status that the person's academic competence gives them within the academic environment.

The importance of the issue of power and legitimacy within the institutional environment was reinforced when some of the interviewees commented on the importance of having an institutional policy in place. They argued that the existence of a clear institutional policy that outlined the institution's commitment to accommodating disabled students provided the disability units/programmes and responsible people with a mechanism that forced 'difficult' academics to take the issue seriously. Put simply, it gave them the institutional power and legitimacy to hold academics accountable for addressing the needs of disabled students in their classes. The following quotations from some the interviewees capture these sentiments:

*One would first contact that lecturer and inform them about [name of institution's] policies accepted by Council...that gives us a lot of clout in terms of what we can compel that person to do. Very occasionally it can get ugly, but ninety-nine percent of the time it doesn't (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*I think here its also very much in the beginning where we throw policy at people and say we have a policy at this university...it's key in that it has a place in that we are able to say, as far as I see the policy is the university's written commitment to accepting and providing a service to students. It's an official document like any other policy and if it is contravened there would be consequences as well (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*If I could manage to have a policy I think it would work better (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*When you deal with academics, you have to have something to refer to. They are aware of the National Plan, but for as long as there is no commitment from the institution itself, they are just going to ignore it. We can always say, here is the policy, what are you doing about it. For as long as it is like a thumbsuck, they won't bother (Interview with responsible person, historically disadvantaged institution, August 2003).*

While the above discussion has been concerned with the challenges of negative attitudes and resistance among academics, as can be expected, the opposite scenario is equally important to disabled students. Where the interviewees talked about situations in which academics were responsive and engaging around the participation of disabled students in their classes and open to greater flexibility in their teaching practices, this has had other, very positive, ramifications for the student's experiences at the institution. Some interviewees cited examples where individual academics had gone "beyond the call of duty" to support and accommodate disabled learners in their classrooms. In general though the comments made about positive attitudes among academics were more varied and it was more difficult therefore to discern a clear trend among the interviewees, compared to the evidence from the sentiments expressed about negative attitudes and resistance among academics. The more positive statements ranged from broad statements about high levels of co-operation among staff to more tentative statements about improvements that have taken place, albeit with some reservations about what the future holds. The quotations below capture these positions.

*There is a wonderful openness to accepting differences, at the same time I want to add that at [name of institution] we don't really have a*

*problem as far as lack of cooperation between lecturers and this unit, in fact they really go out of their way to help the students (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*I think that was one of the successes in the short term, to accomplish so much goodwill among the lecturers. It's time consuming...[but] we got extremely good co-operation from all the deans of the different faculties. People really went out of their way (Interview with historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*One HOD really went out of her way and got her lecturers together on how best to help [the disabled student] and that sort of stuff, whereas other departments said tell us what you want and we will think about it (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*I think it will be wrong to generalise, because there are many academics who work very hard to be inclusive (Interview with historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*I think as time goes by, certainly in the time that I have been at [name of institution], I experience less and less resistance, probably less now than ever. It surprises me, I must admit. Sometimes I think why are things going so swimmingly, when are things going to go wrong? (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*The staff have a fairly high exposure to all forms of disability. I feel that they would be very open to ways of addressing that., whether they are capable of adapting teaching methodologies is a different matter (Interview with responsible person, historically disadvantaged institution, August 2003).*

Similarly, there were examples cited by some of the interviewees, which showed that where the academic staff had been open to change and had embraced more flexible practices, the consequences for the disabled students had been profoundly important. The stories of three students' experiences as recounted by the interviewees capture this important finding.

*She was at the Honour's level and was constantly on medication, she needed breaks, she would get dizzy, she would get hungry, she needed periods of rest, so instead of asking her to submit her essays or Honour's thesis by June, they extended that to November, so it was a simple accommodation that would not have been granted if they were not aware of the needs (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*An HOD approached me two weeks ago, he was asked by his Dean to speak to me. They have got a student who has only an arm up to the elbow; this is his right arm. He taught himself to write with his left hand. When it comes to the issue of placing him and the employer to do the experiential learning, the employer says we can't accept this student, because we have in the workplace safety regulations etc. I countered that by referring the HOD to the website of the Association of Foot and Mouth Painters, because the argument was that this person would not be able to do the drawings, because you would need to use both hands; not the CAD CAM, but to do a drawing on the drawing board, at the firm in which he was going to be placed. I asked him to do that and come back to see me. He [the HOD] saw that people painted with their mouths and feet. I told him that there could be innovative ways in which this person could actually overcome that. Thus if you give him a CAM CAD programme on the computer, he [the student] can do it, because then he uses just the one hand. It is a drafting firm and they said they needed him to use both hands. So what I am saying is that if you put it lower down on the floor, he can*

*use his foot to hold the ruler and draw lines, or something of that nature. It sounds extreme, but then [the HOD] is actually taking it and running with it and he is trying to see if he can find someone who would accept this. In the meantime the student is practicing. He actually said that he never actually thought of using his feet or his mouth. His mouth to hold the ruler or pencil and his good hand to use the ruler or set square and then use his mouth to draw the line (Interview with responsible person, historically disadvantaged institution, September 2003).*

*We have another student that has very severe physical disabilities, artificial legs, limbs are underdeveloped and manages to use an elbow and one finger to type and he has a wheelchair now ...and he wants to do Fine Arts, he paints with his mouth, who are we to stop him...We gave him the chance and after the June exam, I sent the lecturer an email asking how he was doing...the email comes back glowing, he has done so well. One of the core courses there is sculpting, and they were worried about that, what happens in second and third year level, so we said lets try and work around it, what does the student want to specialize in, he does not want to specialize in sculpting, he wants to specialize in painting, so why make sculpting the issue, why use that to deprive him of the opportunity. Okay, at first year level he had to do sculpting and he had to work with mud and that was fine, he managed to do that somehow or the other and he got a friend to help him, can they not do the same for second and third year level seeing that, that is not an area that he is going to specialize in, the department then needs to make a compromise here, you know that is not what he is going to major in, instead of using wood sculpture, lets restrict him to the mud, and they said that they were fine with that, because we will be evaluating him on his painting, so they managed to come up with that compromise, (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, September 2003).*

In recognising that within any institutional environment such differences in attitude, behaviour and approach are apparent across the academic staff, it would be easy to merely see the challenge as one of dealing with the attitudes of 'bad' and 'good' individuals. However, the responses of the interviewees as presented above show that the structure and functioning of the institutional environment is central to shaping the attitudes and behaviour of the academic staff. Moreover, the relations of power within the institution, which are shaped by the hierarchies inherent to academic practice and the carrying out of the core business of the academy, impact on effecting change to dominant attitudes and practice. As Shevlin, Kenny and McNeela (2004:26) point out from their investigation into the participation of disabled students in the Irish higher education system:

The support team at higher education do not appear to have the power to cause change in general college or staff practices. The 'seasoned academics' are a key example: their constant regression to traditional ways caused many participants to give up on the expectation that these lecturers would ever learn to ensure that the students with disabilities actually received what was, in theory, transmitted to them.

Very importantly, one of the central ways in which such relations of power are legitimised in the academic environment is through the discourse of academic standards and notions of quality and excellence. Those who are seen to have the knowledge and expertise to maintain standards of excellence are afforded greater power within the institution and through this power are able to define and give meaning to what quality and excellence may or may not mean. This issue of quality and power and how it is exercised and given meaning within higher education institutions, has been emphasised and analysed in some of the literature on gender relations and inequalities in higher education. While Morley (2003:106) in her study on quality and power in higher education speaks to the issue of gender, her

insights are extremely valuable to considerations of disability as well. She captures both the concern around how power is exercised, what she calls “expert power”, and who has the authority to speak around issues of quality and excellence. She argues:

In the academy, processes of power are complicated by the autonomy and authority that accrue as a result of expert power. It can mean that those beyond the boundary of knowledge cannot question a professional judgment. This is particularly pertinent in the case of quality assurance where judgements of worth can be nebulous and arbitrary.

Drawing from Morley’s argument, the findings discussed above suggest that calls for greater flexibility in teaching and learning practices, which are critical for the effective participation of many disabled students, may confront these power relations, where they challenge academic staff who are accorded such status and power within the institution. Moreover, they are able to justify their opposition to greater flexibility and refuse to make the accommodations that some disabled students may require (Duquette, 2000) by arguing that it threatens the academic standards and quality provision of which they are the experts. Or, put another way, resistance to greater flexibility is sanctioned when those with the power in the institution to legitimately speak about these issues, challenge it as a threat to quality and excellence.

Ball (1990:28) deepens this important concern further by suggesting that while quality and excellence are seen as central values in higher education, they are most often defined “in terms of research and specialised study, not general education and the experience of learning”. Because greater flexibility and thus the learning needs of disabled students, speak most directly to the experience of learning, rather than to research output and specialist study by academic staff, its importance to definitions of quality and excellence in higher education is given limited attention. Brown and Simpson (2004:74)

reinforce this concern by commenting on the “benchmarking standards” that are laid out as part of the quality assurance process for higher education in the United Kingdom. They make the point that in reviewing these standards there is no “implicit or explicit understanding either that the standards may be achievable in alternative ways or that in some cases, alternative standards may be both acceptable and appropriate”. Thus considerations of and mechanisms for the assurance of quality provision are unlikely to consider issues of flexibility in teaching and learning as measures of excellence. So, while Nunan and McCausland (2000:70) may argue that inclusive practices should be seen as “one measure of educational excellence”, the evidence gathered in this study suggests that they are often seen as a threat to excellence. It follows then that practices that are aimed at meeting the learning needs of disabled students may be regarded as part of this threat.

Although the responses from the interviewees bring to the fore these issues of power and status within the institution and their impact on the participation of disabled students, they also suggest that responding to the learning needs of disabled students within the classroom situation touches on further, very sensitive issues, for academic staff. These include: (i) perceived challenges to a staff member’s competence; (ii) their working conditions; and, (iii) the levels of support that are available to them within the institution.

Riddell (1998:217), in discussing the participation of disabled students in the Scottish higher education system, suggests that these concerns for academics are deepened by the changes that are taking place within higher education. She argues that the context in which academics are now working is one where the imperatives towards widening participation have been accompanied by growing marketisation and managerialism within the sector. For academics this has meant an “intensification of academic labour and low morale”. She reports in relation to her own research that while academic staff expressed the “desire for the lot of disabled student to improve” they also

“insisted that this had to be seen in the context of their increasingly pressurised working life” (Riddell, 1998:217).

This argument is given greater weight by Webster and Mosoetsa’s (2002:65) findings into the changing academic workplace in South Africa between 1995 and 2001. For South African academics the changing features of higher education that Riddell (1998) alludes to, and what they refer to as “academic managerialism”, are exacerbated by the transformation and equity demands placed on the higher education system in South Africa since 1994. They argue that these changes have had a myriad of, mostly negative, effects on academic staff. They refer among other concerns to: increases in the intensity of academics’ work; feelings of powerlessness in the face of change; and an increase in emotional labour, where they are “expected to change the way they see themselves” (Webster and Mosoetsa, 2002:76).

What is important for this discussion is that issues of greater flexibility and responsiveness to learning needs may be seen as key contributing factors to the general stresses that they identify. Responding more effectively to the learning needs of disabled students may be seen to: increase the intensity of what is required of staff in the teaching and learning process; deepen feelings of powerlessness, especially where they feel unable to cope with what a student may require of them; and demand of them a level of self-evaluation and critical reflection, especially of their teaching practices, that has not been required of them in the past. The present higher education context can therefore be regarded as one that has the potential to deepen the barriers, which academics’ attitudes and behaviour may pose, for disabled students.

These conclusions suggest that the attitudes and behaviour of academics are shaped by a complex set of forces. These forces derive from their positioning as members of the academic staff within an institution of higher learning, which is subject to broader socio-economic forces that influence its direction

and functioning. The degrees of flexibility and self-awareness of teaching and learning practices that responding to the learning needs of disabled students may require from academics, can only be developed through systemic changes. Such changes must provide alternative frames of reference, especially to the values that dominate the discourse of academic standards and quality and excellence in higher education. Moreover, they will have to challenge the relations of power that maintain and reproduce the status quo.

In the context of this study, these arguments become especially important if they are considered in relation to the dominant manner in which the disability units/programmes and responsible people presently engage with the academic staff. Such comparison suggests that the kind of systemic change that is needed cannot be achieved through the sole intervention of disability support personnel carefully *negotiating with individual academics* on behalf of individual students – the mediation role I discussed earlier. Riddell (1998:204) argues that such forms of engagement are premised on a liberal approach that centralises the individual as the agent of change, who is expected to respond rationally and fairly to inequalities that are highlighted. This approach she argues “ignores the resistance of powerful groups to giving up power voluntarily”. In the academic environment such an approach ignores or fails to confront the underlying reasons for negative attitudes and resistant behaviour by academics. So while it may assist individual disabled students on a day-to-day basis to negotiate their way through the system, it is limited in its ability to change the system that creates these barriers in the first place.

It is also necessary to consider the limitations of this role in relation to what has been argued is central to an equitable and just higher education system for disabled students. In Chapter Two and throughout this thesis I have argued for the importance of curriculum access or epistemological access (Morrow, 1993) as, arguably the most important concern in this regard. It has been argued that academics through their role as teachers and mentors are

vital to facilitating such access. If their attitudes and behaviour translate into teaching and learning practices that exclude particular students, in this case, disabled students, then such practices restrict and limit access to the curriculum for these students. It follows then that if the individual mediation role is unable to effect the kind of systemic change that will alter negative attitudes and resistant behaviour, it is also unable to make any substantial inroads into the development of more flexible and responsive teaching and learning practices across the faculty or the institution. Once again it must be asserted that while it may be able to affect such change among individual academics towards the accommodation of an individual disabled student, it is limited beyond these parameters.

While the emphasis here is on the limitations of working with individual academics, Shevlin, Kenny and McNeela (2004:18) make a similar argument with regard to what they call an “individualised approach” to supporting disabled students in the context of the Irish higher education system. Their arguments are persuasive in asserting that individual approaches will always have a limited “impact on practice and provision”. If their assertions are applied to this discussion, the assertion can be made that individual approaches with academics will always be limited in their ability to effect changes in teaching and learning practices across the institution as a whole.

This argument is especially relevant if the specific policy context addressed in this study, which is outlined in Chapter Three, is considered. In a context where the policy imperative exists to increase the number of disabled students in the higher education system, the number of academics who will be teaching disabled students are likely to increase as access is improved. Foreman, Dempsey, Robinson and Manning (2001:323) make this argument clearly in their case study of an Australian university responding to similar policy imperatives instituted by the Australian government. They argue:

Assuming increasing numbers of students with a disability enter tertiary education in response to legislation and policy imperatives, it may become more difficult for universities to provide specialist support to each student on an individual basis.

Although their argument extends beyond the issue of engagement with academics, to broader concerns with an individual approach to supporting disabled students, the mediation role is strongly orientated towards engaging with individual academics on behalf of individual disabled students. This suggests an *unsustainable model* for a system committed to increasing the participation of disabled students and, most importantly, creating the opportunities for their equitable participation and fair chances for success. Similarly, in a context where resources are limited and remain unequally spread across a historically unequal terrain, the weakness of this approach becomes even more apparent.

#### **6.4 Moving beyond the mediation role**

The conclusions that I reached above confirmed for me the need to reflect back on any findings from the survey questionnaire and the in-depth interviews, which would assist me to answer a central question that was emerging around the challenges posed by the attitudes and behaviour of the academic staff. This was: To what extent were the disability units/programmes and responsible people through their work moving beyond the individual mediation role and employing other strategies that would have the potential to affect the kind of change argued for above? With this question in mind, I began to analyse further the nature and extent of the work, if any, which the units/programmes and responsible people were undertaking with the academic staff that involved engaging with them as a *target group or key stakeholder group* within the institution. That is, any work that was being done with academics, in addition to the mediating activities

already discussed and which targeted all academics, not just those with disabled students in their class.

To obtain a comprehensive answer to these questions I first identified the need to return to data captured in the survey questionnaire, which spoke to the nature and extent of any work that was being carried out with the academic staff. The discussion now, therefore, returns to findings that emerged from the initial survey questionnaire process. In the questionnaire this line of enquiry had started with a question, which asked the respondents if they undertook any work with the academic staff that was aimed at supporting or assisting the latter to respond to the learning needs of disabled students in their classes. Of the 23 institutions who responded to this question, 15 respondents said *Yes*, they were working in this way with academic staff (65%) and 8 respondents said *No* (35%). Thus just over one third of the responding institutions were *not working with the academic staff* in any way. Included in the latter group of institutions were those *with and without existing units/programmes or responsible people* in place as well as a *mix of institutions in relation to historical categorisation*.

Taking the issues discussed above regarding; the challenges posed by academic attitudes and behaviour; their importance to disabled student's participation; and the importance of the teaching and learning process in the creation of equity for disabled learners, I regarded the '*No*' finding of 35% to be high and therefore important for my study. Similarly, the mix of institutions making up this group suggested that this finding could not only be attributed to levels of existing institutional resources or the existence of a unit/programme or responsible person.

Further responses in the survey questionnaire shed some light on the possible reasons for this finding. If the respondents had answered '*No*' to the above question, they were then asked to fill in a table in which they identified what had stopped them from working with the academic staff. Before

reflecting more carefully on the responses to this question, it is important to note here that although 8 respondents had said 'No' to the previous question, 10 respondents in fact went on to fill in the table. This suggests that the number of responding institutions who are *not working* with the academic staff or where this role is extremely limited and/or poses a major challenge, may be closer to 43% (or 10 out of 23 and almost half the responding institutions). Tables 6.1 and 6.2 below show the responses to these questions according to the historical categorisation of the institution<sup>81</sup>.

**Table 6.1: Working with academics to support them to ensure that disabled students are able to participate more effectively in the classroom (survey questionnaire), by historical categorisation.**

Response	Number		
	HAI	HDI	Total
<b>Yes</b>	10	5	15
<b>No</b>	5	3	8

<sup>81</sup> This table and the previous question on working with academic staff are reflected in the Questionnaire as questions E1 and E3 on page 11 (see Appendix A).

**Table 6.2: Factors that have stopped institutions from working with academic staff (survey questionnaire), by historical categorisation.**

Factors hindering work with academics	Number		
	HAI	HDI	Total
There is insufficient capacity (human or financial) to undertake this kind of work	3	4	7
This kind of work will not benefit students with disabilities	0	0	0
Academic staff are resistant to being supported in this way	0	2	2
Do not have sufficient management support to undertake this kind of work	0	4	4
Other	3	1	4
<b>Total</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>17<sup>82</sup></b>

The findings presented in Table 6.2 above show that the issue of *insufficient capacity*, both human and financial, was regarded as the *most important hindering factor* to working with academics among the 10 responding institutions (7 out of 10 or 70% as reflected in row one of the table). This was followed by insufficient management support and the category of ‘other’ (Rows four and five respectively in the table). With regard to the latter the following explanations were given<sup>83</sup>:

*The number of students with disabilities is very small and therefore has little impact on the studies/facilities*

<sup>82</sup> As noted above 10 respondents completed the table. The total of 17 thus reflects that the respondents identified more than one reason why they were not working with the academic staff.

<sup>83</sup> If the ‘other’ option was chosen, space was provided in the questionnaire for the respondents to comment on this choice. See page 11 of the questionnaire (Appendix A)

*We have had limited discussions with academic staff about the needs of disabled students*

*This type of support is not a priority at the institution, therefore human resources have not been made available to offer the service  
Insufficient number of students to warrant it*

The survey questionnaire also went on to ask those respondents who had filled in the table to indicate if they had any *plans* in place to work more directly with the academic staff. 6 of the respondents indicated that they did have plans in place to undertake this kind of work (Yes) and 4 said 'No', no such plans were in place. The latter respondents were then asked to comment on their selection of 'No'. It is important to note that among these latter respondents, 2 of the respondents had previously indicated that they had a functioning disability unit/programme in place. Moreover, both institutions had selected insufficient capacity (human or financial) and insufficient management support to undertake this kind of work. It was clear therefore that at both these institutions, despite the existence of disability units/programmes, work with the academic staff was not taking place or was very limited because of perceived capacity limitations and a lack of sufficient support from the management of their institution.

The data that emerged from this line of questioning in the survey questionnaire suggested to me that a dominant perception existed among the respondents about working with the academic staff. This perception was, that their ability to undertake any work with academics, beyond interventions or mediation on behalf of individual disabled students, is undermined by limitations in their capacity. This is primarily caused by a lack of human and/or financial resources, which in turn may be influenced or reinforced by the support they receive from management. While this appeared to be very clear from the responses to the survey questionnaire, the findings from the in-depth interviews already discussed about the attitudes and behaviour of

academics suggested that, once again, other factors may be equally important in influencing this scenario. In addition, considering the survey questionnaire findings more carefully showed anomalies in the data that further reinforced these concerns.

Firstly, among the institutions that had said no work was being done with academics, there were both historically disadvantaged and historically advantaged institutions. This is evident from Table 6.2. Thus despite the very different levels of institutional resources across these institutions, including existing support provision for disabled students, the issue of insufficient capacity was still cited with regards to working with academic staff. Similarly, among those institutions who were undertaking work with their academic staff, there were historically disadvantaged institutions with substantially less resources available to undertake this kind of work but were still managing to do it. This suggested to me that capacity to undertake this kind of work, including perceptions regarding what sufficient capacity would entail, could not be necessarily equated with the level of financial and human resources available at the institution.

Secondly, in the kinds of services listed in the table in the survey questionnaire on the existence and nature of support services being provided,<sup>84</sup> no institution had chosen to mention an activity that was aimed at working with the academic staff as a target group within the institution. Although I recognised that it was important not to read too much into this omission, as it may also have reflected a limitation in the manner in which the question was asked and the table structured, it reinforced for me the picture that seemed to be emerging. This was, that work with academic staff as a target group within the institution, or at a systemic level, was either limited, non-existent, posed a significant challenge to the responsible people, or was

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<sup>84</sup> See footnote number 67 in Chapter Five and Appendix C.

not perceived to be important with the mediating role already described being seen as the 'norm'.

Despite the limitations of the survey questionnaire, I felt that the findings from these questions were important, especially in light of the interview findings already discussed in the previous section. The importance of the issues of power and status within the institution as well as the increasingly pressurised academic workplace on shaping academics' attitudes and behaviour could not be disregarded in relation to these findings from the survey questionnaire as well. Read together, the two sources of data reinforced the perception that the challenges involved in working with academics as a key stakeholder group extended beyond the issue of capacity. I surmised that working with academic staff in this way was also strongly influenced by the same issues of power, status and working conditions already alluded to.

In this way these findings from the survey questionnaire reinforced the insights that had already been developed as to why the individual mediation role tends to dominate the nature of the units/programmes and responsible people's engagement with the academic staff. My analysis had already suggested that moving beyond this role to a more systemic approach is substantial and requires, as Riddell (1998:218) suggests, structural change. While Riddell's (1998) assertion of the need for structural change is valuable in pointing clearly to where the problem lies and thus the kind of change that is needed, the analysis of my findings thus far, emphasised a need, in my opinion, to deepen this understanding of structural change. More specifically, it was important to consider the nature of the structural change that is needed to ensure that the teaching and learning process within institutions, especially at the 'micro' level, responds to and accommodates the diversity of learning needs that exist within the student population. I concluded that facilitating change in the attitudes and behaviour of academics, which manifests in greater flexibility and responsiveness in their teaching practices, is a central element in the kind of structural change that is needed. Thus the *kind of work*

that is carried out with academic staff becomes important in facilitating such change.

These conclusions correlated strongly with findings in other studies where changing the attitudes and behaviour of academic staff is discussed. In considering the necessity for such change, a number of writers have cautioned that affecting such change must of necessity move beyond just “disability awareness initiatives” (O’Connor and Robinson, 1999:101) to informing “the design and delivery of changing teaching and learning strategies” (Ross, 2000:92). Riddell and O’Connor and Robinson all emphasise that such a shift means moving beyond trying to get academic staff to change by appealing to their “good will” (Riddell, 1998:218) or training them “to deliver a ‘benevolent humanitarianism’” (O’Connor and Robinson, 1999:101)<sup>85</sup>. Rather, it involves strategies and initiatives that tackle issues such as teaching methodology, flexible learning, methods of assessment, course design and, thus, reflective practice (Adams, 2002:9).

Within the context of this discussion I was therefore concerned with reflecting back on what had emerged from the in-depth interviews about any work that was being undertaken with the academic staff, which I regarded as moving beyond the individual mediation role already described. Included in the interview sample were responsible people from 6 of the institutions who had indicated in their survey questionnaires that they were working with the academic staff. I therefore returned to the interview transcripts where I had discussed with them the kind of work that they were undertaking. I analysed these discussions further and drew out what had emerged to this line of questioning.

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<sup>85</sup> Although O’Connor and Robinson use the notion appropriately to refer to academic staff in higher education, the notion of benevolent humanitarianism comes from Sally Tomlinson’s (1992) initial work on a sociology of special education. See Chapter Two.

The responses from the interviewees showed that where the responsible people were working with academics in this way, or moving beyond the individual engagement already described, *important differences* were apparent in the approach and content of this work. These differences emerged when the interviewees described their involvement with the orientation of new academics coming into the institution or where they had undertaken various initiatives to reach out to the existing academic staff as a group.

The following quotations describe the work that some of the respondents are doing in this regard:

*Another thing is something that the university is very involved with is academic induction ceremonies, so when new people [staff] come in, the university runs at least 4 times a year induction programmes for new staff not only academics but support staff as well and during this academic induction programme one of the talks we give is on student services and I go there for a small slot and say this is what we have (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*Last month I gave an awareness lecture to the new lecturers on campus. With us they call it the Education Innovation Group and all the new lecturers are trained there in terms of different aspects e.g. how to lecture, how to do test writing, all the regulations and now we have a foot in that to say how do you deal with a disabled student in your class. ...when I did it the other day, I told them about the different students on campus, the different disabilities, so that they know what disabilities are, even learning disabilities, not only physically disabled students, and what their main needs are; and how they as lecturers can assist them, like for instance the deaf students to look at them when they are speaking and to give them the lecture notes*

*afterwards.....at the end these people don't see it as disabled students, they see it as students. And with a little bit of difference, sometimes they need a little bit of extra help, but then they don't see it as this huge task they can't manage. They are empowered, because after that education or induction, they feel empowered and more relaxed to deal with these students. It is also relaxing for them to know that we are not on our own in the classroom, there is student support and the Disability Unit is there, so we can make use of them (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*I had an interesting workshop last week the first of its kind where I called together academics and held this workshop especially for them. This stemmed from a number of research projects that students have been involved in over the years and one of the things that came out repeatedly was we don't know how to teach students with disabilities, so we thought we would do this as a trial run and run a workshop on how to teach students with disabilities. We had about 16 lecturers who attended the workshop.*

*[Was it voluntary?]*

*Yes, it was, we especially targeted at this stage, lecturers who are directly involved with teaching students with disabilities, so we looked at those who are right now involved with our students and those who came, came out of sincere interest because it was voluntary. It was a full day workshop where I had people come in and talk about the different disabilities, how to teach someone who is blind, how to teach someone who is deaf, how to teach someone who has a learning disability (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*In March I had my first awareness-raising seminar...at the first seminar we traced the development of the Disability Rights Movement*

*in the world and then in South Africa. Then we did misconceptions, stereotypes, and all those things. Then we had an interactive kind of workshop focussing essentially on the physically disabled, blind and partially sighted. You know the misconceptions and stereotyping there – all persons with low vision will require large print, all blind persons will be Braille readers, walking with a long cane, a guide dog – those kinds of issues (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*The department of teacher education runs holiday workshops for academics interested in improving their teaching/learning strategies. Various subject didactics are tackled to improve student participation and improving the teaching methodologies...because the teaching and learning environment is never a case of I have arrived. You are always learning new dynamics...[our plan is also] to come up with an innovative system of teaching and learning methodologies for those students that struggle for whatever reason and you combine it with the counselling and everything... you then structure the learning environment to suit the needs (Interview with responsible person, historically disadvantaged institution, August 2003)*

The above quotations capture most of the types of responses from the people interviewed around the kind of work that is being undertaken with the academic staff by the units/programmes and responsible people. From these responses three different trends were evident in the *approach and content* of the various activities.

The first trend is evident from the first three quotations. It is clear from what is described here that the emphasis is placed on two areas of information sharing. The first involves informing the academic staff, especially the new staff about the support services that are available to disabled students and thus to them as staff members. The second revolves around educating staff

members about, as the interviewees said, “how do you deal with a disabled student in your class” and “how to teach students with disabilities”. In this regard, the emphasis seems to be on addressing these questions by looking at what are identified as different ‘types of disabilities’ and how one responds to these types in the classroom situation. As the one interviewee says at the end of the third quotation above, the focus had been “about the different disabilities, how to teach someone who is blind, how to teach someone who is deaf, how to teach someone who has a learning disability”.

It is important to note that this approach contrasts strongly with the approach described in the fourth quotation, which captures the second trend. In that instance the focus appears to have been orientated towards addressing the participation of disabled students in the higher education environment within the framework of a broader rights struggle within the country. There is an underlying assumption in this approach that to effectively respond to the learning needs of disabled students in the classroom, staff must first be aware of the historical struggles that have taken place towards ensuring that disabled students are now able to access higher education. However, it is also interesting to note that the approach taken in these initiatives (described in the fourth quotation) also appears to have aimed at challenging the approach evident in the previous three examples. The interviewee emphasises how he attempted to challenge “misconceptions” and “stereotypes” about disability and especially about teaching disabled students. With regard to the latter, the emphasis appears to be on getting academics to be responsive to the learning needs of particular students rather than to assume knowledge of such needs by knowing more about the type of impairment.

In the fifth and final quotation presented above, which reflects the third trend, there appears to be a strong orientation to improving and enhancing teaching methodology and skills so as to improve levels of participation among all students. In this way disability appears to be located within a broader

framework of diversity and not separated out as a specific issue requiring specialized knowledge or expertise. The emphasis is placed on responsiveness to different students in the classroom. However, it also appears that recognition is given to the fact that disabled students may be more vulnerable to experiencing difficulties and more likely to “struggle for whatever reason” and responding effectively may require an “innovative system of teaching and learning methodologies”. It is difficult from this description to get a sense of how much attention is given to disability issues and thus to specific barriers that may confront disabled students in the classroom situation. However, it is interesting to note that while the first three quotations discussed and this last one, all refer to issues of teaching and learning methodology, the orientation is different. The first three emphasise responding to type of impairment whereas the latter emphasises responding to differences among students and developing expertise to accommodate students who may “struggle” at times. This latter orientation was only articulated by one of the interviewees.

In giving consideration to the points raised earlier about the kind of training that is needed to influence the teaching and learning process and the limitations of the mediation role in this regard, an important conclusion can be drawn. This has to do with the differences that are apparent between what is emphasised in the mediation type interventions and the five training initiatives described above. As already discussed, in the former the emphasis is on engaging with individual academics about the learning needs and concerns of an individual disabled student in their class. In a number of the quotations cited the interventions are reactive and often orientated to avoiding a crisis that has the potential to arise. Similarly, the approach is towards negotiation and mediation towards a workable and acceptable solution. It may be argued that such negotiation and mediation is orientated to achieving the “good will” that Riddell (1998:218) refers to. In contrast, in most of the five training initiatives quoted above, the emphasis is clearly, albeit from differing perspectives, on the teaching process. Although the approaches differ

considerably from “how to teach a Deaf learner” (the first three) to the development of new and innovative teaching methodologies that respond to diversity in the student population (last quotation), the common feature of these initiatives is the *focus on teaching*. Moreover the approach is a proactive one that reaches more than a few individual staff members with the intention of “empowering” staff as one interviewee put it, to meet the learning needs of disabled students who may come into their classes.

It is interesting to note that although the fourth quotation, describing an awareness-raising seminar on the Disability Rights Movement, does not talk specifically about teaching, its emphasis is on challenging existing stereotypes and locating the learning needs of disabled students within the disability rights struggle in South Africa. It may be argued, therefore, that this initiative moves away from the establishment of “good will” (Riddell, 1998:218) and argues for the need to approach the issue from a rights perspective. Similarly, in challenging existing stereotypes and the concerns that have shaped the Disability Rights Movement in South Africa, the approach introduces new ways of understanding and addressing the learning needs of disabled students. Despite some limitations that are apparent in the different approaches, all these training initiatives go much further than the individual mediation role in facilitating the kind of changes that I have argued are necessary for the creation of equity for disabled students.

## **6.5 Discussion and conclusions: A weak pedagogical approach**

This final section of Chapter Six draws out the main findings that emerged from my analysis of the ‘micro’ level of the teaching and learning environment and draws necessary links between the emerging issues from this chapter and the previous one. My intention in this section, therefore, is to not only comment on what emerged from the analysis of this ‘micro’ level, but also to consider these findings in relation to what emerged around the organisation and functioning of existing support provision at the ‘macro’ or broad

institutional level. In this way, this section draws together the findings of the research process, which spoke to the 'participation and success' concerns of the equity framework described and argued for in Chapter Two.

In Chapter Two I argued that for an equitable and just higher education system to exist for disabled students, the teaching and learning process within institutions must be able to respond to the different ways in which students access the curriculum. I argued that such a responsive teaching and learning process was critical to ensuring that disabled students were able to have epistemological access to higher education and its benefits (Morrow, 1993). I concluded therefore that the teaching and learning process within institutions should be recognised as the most *important element to an equity project* for disabled students. Thus, institutional strategies aimed at supporting the participation of disabled students should primarily be directed at the domain of practice in institutions where the essential elements of teaching and learning take place – that is, at the classroom, department and faculty level, or what I called the '*micro*' level of the institution. This chapter has shown that the attitudes and behaviour of the *academic staff* are critical to what happens in this domain and thus to the participation of disabled students. It follows therefore that the provision of teaching and learning support must be structured and organised so as to be able to influence, support and impact on *pedagogical practice* across the institution and especially at the '*micro*' level. This means that such provision must be able to provide students with specific forms of additional support that they may need to access the curriculum, and it must also be able to operate at a '*systemic-micro*' level to develop the institution's overall capacity to respond to such forms of diversity. I will call this a *strong pedagogical approach* that is primarily orientated to *systemic change* (building the capacity of the system) at the '*micro*' level of the institution.

The findings presented in this chapter collectively suggest, in my opinion, the dominance of what I will call a *weak pedagogical approach*. That is, an

approach to the provision of teaching and learning support for disabled students, which is weak in its ability to provide the kind of support and thus affect the kind of change that is argued for above. There are three overarching findings that emerged in this chapter that have lead me to this conclusion. These are:

- (i) The dominance of a strong *individual approach* by the units/programmes and responsible people towards engaging with the academic staff on behalf of individual disabled students, despite the limitations of this approach in addressing the obvious challenges that exist in this domain;
- (ii) The *relatively limited attention*, in comparison to the roles and responsibilities described in the previous chapter, that is given to working with academic staff as a key stakeholder group within the institution and thus in *influencing and supporting pedagogical practice*;
- (iii) The identification of *insufficient resources*, despite the very different levels of institutional resources available across the institutions, as the central constraint influencing the above.

In considering these overarching findings more carefully I have started from the following premise. It is only by considering these findings in relation to the evidence presented in the previous chapter that it is possible to properly interpret their meaning, in relation to what I have called a strong pedagogical approach and its importance to the creation of equity. Thus, my assertion that a weak pedagogical approach is dominant across the institutions arises from what these findings say, not only on their own, but also in relation to what was evident in the previous chapter. Two issues of concern are especially important in this regard.

Firstly, in the previous chapter I drew attention to the extent to which the work of the units/programmes and responsible people at the 'macro' level is

orientated towards assisting and supporting individual disabled students. I argued that such support appeared to be very important for individual disabled students to be able to participate with any degree of confidence and independence in their academic studies. However, I argued further that while recognising the importance of such services for helping individual disabled students cope with the existing academic environment, their impact was limited beyond meeting individual student support requirements in this way. Thus, the dominance of an *individual approach* in relation to the units/programmes and responsible people's engagement with the academic staff, what I referred to as an individual mediation role, deepens the trend that was already evident in Chapter Five. Moreover, the findings in this chapter provided even stronger evidence, in my opinion, of the inherent limitations of such an approach in the academic environment. I argued that the individual mediation role was inadequate and, arguably inappropriate as well, to addressing the complexity of the challenge, which the attitudes and behaviour of academics clearly present for disabled students' participation in the teaching and learning process.

The individual mediation role, therefore, provides more evidence of a stronger orientation across institutions towards strategies aimed at supporting individual students and engaging with individual staff rather than those with a broader systemic focus. If this is considered in relation to what I defined as the essential elements to a strong pedagogical approach, the following finding stands out. The dominant approach across institutions, with regard to the conceptualisation and provision of teaching and learning support for disabled students, is orientated away from, or is weaker in the area of, systemic change and thus building the capacity of the system. Thus, as already argued, such an approach may assist individual disabled students to cope with their academic studies in the existing academic environment, but it does little to build a more responsive teaching and learning environment.

The second issue of concern speaks more specifically to the domain of practice or level within the institutions that appears to be the *primary domain of practice* for the units/programmes and responsible people. I argued above that if the roles and responsibilities of the units/programmes and responsible people described in this chapter and Chapter Five are considered and compared, those described in Chapter Five appear to dominate their work. Thus the teaching and learning support provision that operates at the 'macro' level of the institution appears to be more visible, stronger and given greater attention, than that which is undertaken at the 'micro' level of the institution. It is the latter which, by its very nature, is able to influence and shape pedagogical practice, while the former is orientated more directly to offering technical support and providing particular services to individual disabled students. If this trend is considered in light of the strong pedagogical approach argued for above, then the emphasis on the 'macro' level, as the most important domain of practice, is incorrect or inappropriate for the delivery of a strong pedagogical approach. Put another way, and returning to the initial arguments made in Chapter Two, this trend suggests that *the primacy of the teaching and learning process in the creation of equity in higher education (Scott, 1995) is insufficiently recognised when it comes to disabled students.*

It is also important to recognise here that this emphasis on the 'macro' level also serves to direct attention towards those constraints that appear to impact most directly on what is provided at this 'macro' level. It follows that these 'macro' level constraints then become seen as the most important constraints to supporting disabled students in their academic studies and thus to concerns around equity. In Chapter Five it became clear that those institutions with the greatest level of resources, the historically advantaged institutions, were substantially better equipped to provide the kind of technical support and specific services that were evident at the 'macro' level. Thus, the issue of institutional resources was recognised to be important to teaching and learning support provision at this level. Put another way, the

amount of resources the institution has available to allocate to such services, is central to the quality and extent of the provision that exists in this domain of practice. Since this 'macro' level is seen as the most important domain of practice, it is not surprising that resources also become seen as the most important variable impacting on and restricting disabled students' equitable participation in higher education. This greater emphasis on the 'macro' level thus directs attention towards resource constraints and away from pedagogical practice, which I have argued reinforces a weak pedagogical approach.

In Chapter Five I also argued that from the data collected it appeared that 'more meant better' and 'better' translated into well-established and resourced disability units/programmes undertaking the kinds of services and playing the roles described. Using the 'macro'/'micro' level distinction I have argued for, 'better' would then also translate into a greater emphasis on 'macro' level provision. Moreover, such provision would be organised in the form of separate, distinct disability units/programmes located in Student Services, which primarily provide technical support and specific services to individual disabled students at this level. However, I have argued that a strong pedagogical approach is the 'best' approach. It is central to the equity concerns argued for in Chapter Two, and is orientated towards the 'micro' level as the primary domain of practice. This latter notion of 'best' is therefore different to these earlier perceptions of what is 'better'.

It implies that more available resources directed towards and invested in 'macro' level teaching and learning support, does not necessarily mean a more responsive teaching and learning environment for disabled students. In fact, as demonstrated in the previous chapter, the earlier notions of 'better' consisted of forms of provision, which effectively reinforced the separation of disabled students from the rest of the student body and compensated for an overall lack of institutional responsibility and integration around the learning needs of disabled students. Thus, just gaining access to greater levels of

resources may not automatically translate into more equitable participation at the 'micro' level and thus opportunities for success among disabled students. The arguments above suggest that, it is *where and how these resources are allocated* and thus the *conceptualisations of teaching and learning support that underpin* these decisions that become most important. Moreover, if such resources are used to merely improve such support provision at the 'macro' level, where improvement implies 'more of the same thing', there is little incentive or pressure to move towards developing the kind of 'systemic-micro' capacity argued for earlier. Thus, having more resources does not necessarily mean a stronger pedagogical approach or the commitment to facilitating such forms of institutional change at the 'micro' level.

I have regarded these insights into the *resources* issue and the complexities and contradictions that are apparent when the findings are carefully considered as very important to this study. It also presents as a central finding in the next chapter, which deals more specifically with the formal access issues. In many respects the arguments I am making in this chapter suggest what I would regard as a weakness in the argument made by Matshediso (2005:284) into his recent study on access to higher education for disabled students. In discussing disabled students' right to higher education in South Africa, as a developing context with limited resources, he argues that "rights without money are meaningless" and thus "real rights need resources to be secured". He thus correctly argues, in my opinion, that resources are critical to the realisation of this right and thus fundamental to disabled students' equitable participation. However, in taking this argument further he is *uncritical of the nature of the support that is presently being provided and thus where and how existing resources are allocated, or where future resources should be directed*. I have attempted to show here that these latter questions become central to considerations of equity for disabled students in higher education. Moreover, there are central weaknesses to the way in which existing teaching and learning support is conceptualised and operates within the institutions explored in this study. Thus, unless the

resources issue is considered and interrogated in relation to the nature and organisation of appropriate teaching and learning support for disabled students, we are no closer to the realisation of disabled students' 'real right' to higher education – if such a right is recognised to include having the epistemological access to higher education (Morrow, 1993) that I have consistently argued for. It is as much about having sufficient 'money' as it is about where and how such 'money' is spent that makes the right to higher education 'real' for disabled students.

My concern here is that without such a careful interrogation the focus on resources has the effect of *becoming a "technical polemic"* (Armstrong, Armstrong and Barton, 2000:9), which, as I emphasised in Chapter Two, draws attention away from the processes and practices of teaching and learning in the classrooms and faculties (Fulcher, 1989; Slee, 1996, 2001a). In this way we fail to call into question or address those *exclusionary mechanisms and practices* in higher education institutions that are central to reproducing the inequalities that disabled students experience. My intention now is to consider more carefully what emerged from the findings of this chapter that are important to this overarching concern.

Fraser's (1995:82) arguments around remedying injustice and the importance of distinguishing between what she refers to as "affirmation or transformation?", are useful here. In making an argument for the importance of the latter, she refers to the "underlying generative framework" which is responsible for or contributes to and shapes the inequitable outcomes evident in our society – in this instance, the inequalities experienced by disabled students in the higher education environment. My intention now is to consider those forces operating within the institution that 'generate' and reproduce the weak pedagogical approach I have described above, and, which I have argued, undermines the creation of equity for disabled students. Since it is this *generative framework* (Fraser, 1995) that shapes a weak pedagogical approach, and thus restricts the parameters of what becomes

possible at the 'micro' level of the institution, it also becomes as Fraser (1995) suggests, the focus of corrective action and reconstruction. I am suggesting, therefore, that the forces that will now be discussed become key areas for change, in shifting from the weak pedagogical approach that is evident to the strong pedagogical approach I have argued for.

In the context of this discussion the first area of importance has to do with a finding noted at the beginning of Chapter Five. This is the dominant *organisational form and location in the institution* of the existing units/programmes and responsible people in the institutions explored in this study. In Section 5.2.1 of Chapter Five I explained that despite some limitations with the initial survey questionnaire data, it was clear that the dominant organisational form and location of existing teaching and learning provision for disabled students, was as distinct or specialised disability units/programmes, located within the Student Services division on campuses. I explained that I was intent on establishing through further exploration in the in-depth interviews what the implications of this were for the creation of a responsive and equitable teaching and learning environment for disabled students. From the findings presented in this chapter and from the conclusions already reached and described above, it is now possible to draw some conclusions around this issue. My overarching conclusion from this analysis is that the dominant *organisational form and location of existing teaching and learning provision* for disabled students is *important to the 'macro' level emphasis* described above and thus *to a weak pedagogical approach* within institutions.

In Chapter Two I discussed Simpson's (1996) conceptualisation of an holistic model of learning support in higher education and emphasised the value of this model for teaching and learning support provision of disabled students. I particularly concentrated on the distinction that Simpson (1996:24) makes between "learner services" and "learning development" and the importance of the latter to disabled student's participation in the teaching and learning

process. What is especially important in the context of this discussion is that Simpson's conceptualisation of "learner services" correlates strongly in the South African context with what is referred to as Student Services – the dominant location of the disability units/programmes and responsible people in the institutions explored in this study. To reiterate, Simpson (1996) argues that "learner services" are those that are aimed at meeting what I will call the psycho-social needs of the student, which, if not met, may impinge on their ability to learn effectively. He specifically makes mention of services such as student counselling, accommodation services, financial assistance and student health and welfare services. Thus, there is a very definite orientation within these services towards the learner themselves and meeting their psycho-social needs. Moreover, as Simpson (1996) emphasises, these services do not operate or are not delivered at the course or programme level but rather within the broader institutional environment – what I have referred to as the 'macro' level. As already emphasised, such services are distinct from "learning development" that is directed at teaching and learning at the course and programme level (Simpson, 1996:24) and thus the 'micro' level.

It is interesting to compare these assertions about "learner services" with how the notion of "student services" is understood in the South African context. Mandew, Maboe-Phike, Jappie, Bodibe and Hlophe (2003:3), in discussing the development of student services in South Africa, argue that it collectively refers to those departments and units within universities that provide "support and welfare services and programmes for students in higher education institutions". They go on to argue that, like Simpson (1996), student services are central to effective student learning and success. However, they are designed to "complement and add value to the first mode of learning, namely the in-house curriculum". Of particular importance is the facilitation of "effective learning experiences outside the traditional lecture-room situation" (Mandew et al, 2003:22). They similarly identify services such as health services, counselling and careers, student accommodation and financial assistance as central components of effective students services. It is also

interesting to note that in their listing of the core services that should make up Student Services they list “disabled student’s support” as one of these services (Mandew et al, 2003:92). This serves to reinforce the initial finding that Student Services is regarded as the appropriate location of teaching and learning support for disabled students.

If the findings reported in the previous chapter on the dominant location of existing teaching and learning provision for disabled students are considered in light of the above, then such provision is most predominantly located within the realm of “learner services” to use Simpson’s (1996) distinction. As such, its structural location within the institution underpins its conceptualisation as a service orientated to supporting disabled students *outside the classroom* and thus outside the “first mode of learning” (Mandew et al, 2003:22). In other words, it is located within a set of services in the institution, which are specifically conceptualised and organised so as to operate primarily at the ‘macro’ level of the institution. Moreover, it is in fact designed to *complement* what happens at the classroom level, that is, at the ‘micro’ level where the “first mode of learning” (Mandew et al, 2003:22) takes place. In this way its location within the institution shapes and legitimises an *orientation away from that domain* within the institution that is *most important to a strong pedagogical approach*. Similarly, it reinforces an approach that is designed to complement rather than to influence or change the attitudes and practices of the academic staff at the classroom, department and faculty level.

This latter point also suggests that the dominant location within the institution of the disability units/programmes and responsible people also impacts on the *power* that they have to work with and influence the attitudes and practices of academic staff. In this chapter I showed how important power relations within the institution were to the issues discussed in this thesis and, most importantly, how the manner in which such power is exercised and legitimised within the academy, impacts on disabled students’ participation. These arguments around the dominant institutional location suggest that the

units/programmes and responsible people are located outside the realm of the institution (i.e. at the departmental and faculty level) where they would be seen to have a legitimate right, and thus the power, to influence what happens at the 'micro' level.

It is important to recognise that Riddell (1998:217) also raises similar issues around what she refers to as the "Institutional position of the Disabled Student's Advisor" in her commentary on the Scottish higher education system. She argues similarly that such a post is conceptualised and located within the institution so that the responsible person is accountable to the management of the institution and responsible to disabled students "with no direct links to academic staff". She argues further that, taken the concerns argued earlier around the changes taking place in the academic workplace, the advisors as "non-academics" are "responsible for chivvying staff into making provision for disabled students at a time of intensification of academic labour and low morale". Thus what she calls the institutional position serves to reinforce the challenges that working with academic staff and influencing pedagogical practice already present.

This concern around institutional location is therefore not restricted to the South African scenario. However, it becomes especially important to this context if it is considered in the light of the arguments I have made in Chapter Three around the historical development of the Academic Development project in South Africa. I argued here that these initiatives have been extremely important in linking equity concerns to teaching and learning in higher education institutions, especially for students previously excluded. I emphasised that it was this project, and thus the debates, activities and provision that emanated from it, that have been, and continue to be, most important to influencing pedagogical practice and ensuring that all students have the epistemological access to higher education (Morrow, 1993) I have argued for. The primary domain of practice of the Academic Development

project is therefore the classroom, department and faculty level – the ‘micro’ level of the institution.

I argued in Chapter Three that, despite concerns with its shifting scope, purpose and transformative potential in a higher education system increasingly affected by globalisation (Boughey, 2003), it still comes closest, in the South African context, to the kind of “learning development” provision that Simpson (1996) argues for. In South African higher education Academic Development related initiatives and services are, therefore, central to supporting and influencing pedagogical practice and responding to a more diverse student body. However, as emphasised in Chapter Three, the learning needs of disabled students have largely been ignored in the historical development of these initiatives. Very little has changed in this regard. Disability does not generally feature as part of the concerns around diversity and responsive teaching and learning that Academic Development seeks to address.

What is important to recognise in the context of this discussion is that the primary location for teaching and learning support that presently exists for disabled students appears to reinforce this historical omission. In doing this the potential for Academic Development to be recognised as central to generating a strong pedagogical approach to teaching and learning support for disabled students remains largely unexplored. Rather, it reinforces the notion that teaching and learning support for disabled students is different and separate from other forms of teaching and learning support. It is more strongly orientated towards meeting the psycho-social needs of disabled students and helping them to ‘cope’ in the mainstream academic environment.

The conclusions I reached around the organisation and location within the institution of existing teaching and learning support provision emphasised how important this initial finding was to the overall picture that emerged

across the institutions. These conclusions became even more important when I looked back at what had emerged from the institution where the programme responsible for the provision of teaching and learning for disabled students was conceptualised as a *project within the Academic Development division* of the institution. The following extracts from my interview with the responsible person show how important, in my opinion, these differences in its conceptualisation and location have been to what it had achieved as a very new initiative within the institution.

*[Can you explain how your project started up?]*<sup>86</sup>

*When I came in November 2001, they had already started the project as such within Academic Development, which is the broader part of Student Development as such. So this is academic Development where you look at skills cluster and so on that you build into your learning material. It works on curriculum, learners, you work on staff development and institutional development – those are the pillars of academic development and this is one part of that development. I came into the situation where they had this policy, but I looked at that policy when I came in and I said that there was no grounding to that policy, it must be grounded in something, are you basing it on certain legislation, are you basing it on a model? That's how I started. I said lets go a little bit broader than disability and look at things that are generally not classified as disability, but would obviously feature as a barrier.*

*We looked at it from a holistic perspective. We've got here Career Development and Counselling in Academic Development. We've got here, where we work with access foundation modules; bridging modules, courses and so on. We say we can't do that for the student population if one component is missing and people say it is good, you*

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<sup>86</sup> My emphasis.

*have your pictures there for your academic support, but what about learners who are deaf, that kind of conceptual understanding, what about the access of that material from a concept point again for learners who are blind? So what we do is, I serve that role, so that no matter what we are building, I am there at every point.*

*Say if the learner says we need something on CD ROM, we get the faculty to do it. What we did from the beginning of this year when they were budgeting, it started last year and I pushed that through, that each faculty budgets for its own, because we can't carry the load eventually, because then our budget would then be inflated. So we say you budget for that.*

*[So each faculty has the responsibility to budget to make their learning materials accessible?]*

*Absolutely.*

*[I have not picked that up in any of the other institutions].*

*Yes, because we fought for this. We said that it was not only one person's responsibility; we have to accept collective responsibility for learners. If you are prepared to provide a non-disabled learner with study material, then you must do the same, because there must be no discrimination.*

This extract and the initiatives it captures only reflect some examples of strategies that are important in facilitating change and building the kind of 'systemic-micro' capacity argued for. However, what is important in the context of this discussion is that it does suggest that conceptualising the provision of teaching and learning support for disabled students as an integral part of the organisation and functioning of the Academic Development division, does have important consequences for how the learning needs of disabled students are supported and responded to within

the institution. Put another way, this conceptualisation of teaching and learning support for disabled students and its associated institutional location comes closest, from the findings of this study, to the mode of teaching and learning support argued for in Chapter Two.

This chapter and the previous one have discussed those findings that emerged as central to the equity imperatives around participation and success described in Chapter Two. These two chapters have therefore addressed those findings that provide insight into how disabled students are supported in their academic studies and what this means for the ability to gain epistemological access to higher education and its benefits (Morrow, 1993). Chapter Seven now returns to those findings which were important to understanding what happens when disabled students apply to be admitted to the institutions explored in this study.

University of Cape Town

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### ACCESSING HIGHER EDUCATION

#### 7.1 Introduction

In the previous two chapters I reported on those findings that provided insights into how the institutions explored in this study are supporting the participation of disabled students in their academic studies. Chapter Five described and analysed the roles played and the responsibilities assumed at the broader institutional level, by those units/programmes and people responsible for the provision of such support – what I called the ‘macro’ level. Chapter Six extended this analysis by focusing more directly on the classroom, department and faculty level or the ‘micro’ level. It explored the nature of the units/programmes and responsible people’s engagement with the teaching and learning process at this level, and especially with the academic staff, as central to this process.

These chapters highlighted how the manner in which existing teaching and learning support provision is conceptualised, and therefore how it is organised and provided, is central to how disabled students’ participation is supported and thus to the equity considerations raised in Chapter Two. At the end of Chapter Six, drawing together key findings from the ‘macro’ and ‘micro’ level analysis, I pointed to what I have argued are weaknesses in the approach that dominates how the institutions investigated are supporting disabled students in their academic studies. In this way, these chapters primarily addressed concerns around equitable *participation* and ensuring fair chances for *success*.

This chapter shifts the focus to concerns around *access*<sup>87</sup>. More specifically, my intention in this chapter is to discuss those findings from the investigation that provide insight into what shapes the *admission* of disabled students into the institutions explored in this study. It thus speaks to issues that impact on disabled students' formal access to public higher education institutions in South Africa (Morrow, 1993). However, in discussing these findings it is important to emphasise that they primarily emerge once again from the input of those individuals who were interviewed for the study and my analysis of what these perceptions and experiences say about what influences admission processes for disabled applicants. Since the findings arise from the *perceptions and experiences of the responsible people* in the institutions, they need to be read bearing in mind two important points.

The first of these is that the findings focus on what is happening at the *interface* of the higher education institution and the broader society. This means that the chapter is concerned with discussing those barriers that are apparent or come to the fore when disabled students apply to enter a public higher education institution. This includes meeting the requirements to be accepted to the institution as well as being admitted into the area of study and programme of their choice. For the purposes of this study, entry to higher education, and thus access to its opportunities and benefits, is seen to relate to both these concerns – gaining entry to an institution *and* into a programme of choice.

While the issues discussed in this chapter are insightful in pointing to critical concerns affecting disabled students' access to higher education, they only speak to one facet of a much more extensive and complex set of barriers that

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<sup>87</sup> At the beginning of Chapter Five I explained that there were two reasons for organising the research findings in this way. Firstly, it reflected most effectively the exploration of the issues as they emerged from the analysis of the survey questionnaire data and then in the in-depth interviews that followed. Secondly, and most importantly, I have deliberately dealt firstly with that area which has emerged as central to the equity concerns of this study – that is, considerations of epistemological access for disabled students (Morrow, 1993).

impact on access to higher education for disabled people. As argued in Chapter Three, the barriers at the societal level that impact on disabled students' ability to access higher education in South Africa are extensive and deeply rooted in the socio-economic and political inequalities that shape the society. The limitations in the breadth and depth of this study mean that these issues have not been explored in any depth.

Some insights into the continuing inequities that are evident at the schooling level, especially in some of the special schools, in preparing disabled students for higher education, were presented in Chapter Five. While these inequalities were only alluded to in relation to how they manifest when disabled students enter the higher education environment, it is clear that they remain a barrier for disabled students in accessing higher education. It would be remiss, therefore, not to emphasise that any holistic and comprehensive analysis of access to higher education for disabled students in South Africa must recognise the importance of these broader socio-economic factors. These extend beyond the specific inequities mentioned at the schooling level to broader links between disability and poverty in South Africa. Moreover, they extend to recognising and understanding the complex ways in which disabled students are positioned within the class-based stratification that persists in South African higher education, despite the gains that have been made in removing the racial inequalities of the past (Cooper & Subotzky, 2001). Barriers arising from apartheid inequalities, such as language and geographical location, while central to the challenges faced by so many learners attempting to access higher education and its benefits, are also of critical importance to disabled learners<sup>88</sup>.

My intention in this chapter has been to capture those structural and ideological forces emanating from the higher education environment, as a

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<sup>88</sup> Greater insight into the nature and extent of these socio-economic barriers for disabled people, especially in accessing educational opportunities in the past, is provided in Chapter Three.

particular “social setting” (Barton, 1996:3)<sup>89</sup>, that act as *further barriers* to disabled students’ attempts to gain access to this level of the education system. Once again, therefore, my intention has been to provide a deeper level of analysis by exploring, through the perspectives of the interviewees, what is happening *within institutions* that shapes these access concerns for disabled learners. The findings in this chapter show, as was evident in the previous chapters, how dominant attitudes and perceptions of disability are given meaning in the higher education environment, in a way which often undermines the creation of an equitable and just higher education system for disabled students. This chapter explores how these forces serve to undermine the realisation of disabled students’ right to access higher education *without discrimination*.

The second point to emphasise here in considering the findings in this chapter is that they do not reflect the *views of disabled learners* who have attempted to gain entry into higher education institutions or the disabled students presently in the system and their experiences in gaining admission<sup>90</sup>. It is only by exploring and capturing these experiences that a holistic picture of the access issues can be obtained, and the complexity and depth of the concerns around access can be fully understood. My intention in this chapter has been to capture, through the perceptions and experiences of the responsible people in the institutions, how the responses of institutions shape particular barriers that disabled students come up against. This line of enquiry therefore, as with the other findings presented in this study, can only

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<sup>89</sup> In Chapter Two I argued for the importance of undertaking what Barton (1996:3) refers to as a particular sociological task, which he argues involves making the connections between the structural conditions that shape and define a particular social setting and the lived reality of people’s lives. My intention in this chapter is to once again recognise the higher education environment as such a social setting with its own distinctive forms of organisation and practices.

<sup>90</sup> In Chapter Four I identified what I have considered to be an important limitation to this research project. This has to do with the absence of the voice of disabled students in this study and the importance of their experiences and perspectives in this regard. I argued here that to obtain a truly holistic and informed perspective on the nature of the “social setting” focused on in this study (Barton, 1996) these views and experiences are critical. These experiences and perspectives must, therefore, form the focus of further research to deepen the findings of this study.

be regarded as one part of a broader picture of a disabling society (Barnes and Mercer, 2004). However, as I have argued in Chapter Four, these concerns should be regarded as central to considerations of equity for disabled students in higher education and thus to dismantling disabling barriers.

In the previous two chapters the discussion drew from findings from both the survey questionnaire and the in-depth interviews. It was argued that the latter were important in providing a more nuanced picture of what emerged from the survey questionnaire and thus greater insights into what is happening within institutions. In fact, the findings emphasised how important the in-depth interviews have been to deepening and, at times, appropriately altering or correcting the picture that the survey questionnaire data revealed. This argument is taken forward in this chapter, which draws mainly from the in-depth interviews.

## **7.2 Admission, accommodation and the 'reasonable' responsibilities of the institution<sup>91</sup>.**

### **7.2.1 Exploring the notion of admission to higher education**

In Chapter Three it was explained that, in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996), disability is specified as one of the criteria on which discrimination of any kind is prohibited. It was argued further that the commitment to the prevention of unfair discrimination is directly applied to admission to the public higher education system through the provisions of the Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997). This Act says that an admission policy of any public education higher education institution has to provide for redressing past inequalities and

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<sup>91</sup> I am using the concept of accommodation holistically here to refer to all the institutional practices and processes that are in place to create a conducive teaching and learning environment for all students. It therefore extends beyond the notion of accommodation as the provision of student housing.

cannot unfairly discriminate in any way (Chapter 4, Section 37:1).

Furthermore, it was argued that the imperative towards non-discrimination is given further weight through Section 9 of the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act (No.4 of 2000), which provides for the prevention of unfair discrimination on the basis of disability.

I argued, therefore, that in terms of the formal legal provisions in place, no disabled person could be refused access to a public higher education institution merely because they are disabled or, put another way, because of the existence of a physical, sensory or intellectual impairment. I argued further that over and above these minimum requirements specified by the legal framework, access to higher education is, as it is in many countries, restricted by other factors. Firstly, potential students have to have the funding to pay for their tuition fees. Secondly, they must have finished their schooling having met certain minimum entry requirements for higher education. They may also have to meet additional entrance requirements specified by the institution at their discretion for acceptance into particular courses. Although, as explained in Chapter Three, such determinations have to be made in tandem with the government's redress and non-discrimination imperatives for the sector, what is important for the purposes of this discussion, is that it is this scenario that sets the scene for a disabled student's admission to a public higher education institution.

It is important to emphasise here that the original survey-questionnaire had not explored in any meaningful way the area of admissions<sup>92</sup>. Thus, while it was able to provide important pointers to what was happening to support disabled students already in the institution, there was little in the questionnaire that provided useful background information for this line of questioning. However, within the parameters of the equity framework outlined

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<sup>92</sup> This assertion arises from the limitations in scope of the Council on Higher Education study, which was focused primarily on what institutions were doing to support disabled students on their campuses and thus developing a picture of what was happening across the sector as a whole.

in Chapter Two, I recognised that the access interface was important and thus needed to be addressed in the in-depth interviews.

With this background in mind, my first question in the in-depth interviews was to establish whether any of the interviewees, during the course of their work, had come across instances where students had been refused admission to their institution or other institutions because they were disabled. Two important findings emerged from the responses to this line of questioning. The first was the assertion by 2 of the 13 interviewees that, based on information they had come across or situations that they had been involved in, disabled students were definitely being refused admission to an institution or to an area of study and programme of their choice because they were disabled. They commented:

*An interesting issue for me is the refusal of academically sound students for courses that they qualify for on the basis of disability. Disability is the only category of people who get refused entrance to courses who would academically qualify, which to me makes them an interesting category of people. You can qualify for some Science degrees, but if you have certain kinds of disabilities you can be refused participation on that course.*

*[So is that still happening, that people are refused entry to a particular course on the basis of disability?]*

*Absolutely, without a doubt, it is happening....well in some situations it is justified, but in most situations it is not justified. We pick up on it because people come and complain, when we have appeals from students (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003)*

*In the other Student Affairs departments [on other satellite campuses of his/her institution] when I called they don't have such students, so I*

*don't know if after registration they say they don't have facilities and we cannot accommodate you, I don't know, but [I know] that the blind*

*student that we have on campus had matriculated in 2000 and had tried other institutions and was turned down (Interview with responsible person, historically disadvantaged institution, August 2003)*

The second finding to emerge was the more dominant response and is already alluded to in the two quotations above. None of the other interviewees were willing to commit themselves to the assertion made above that, yes, it was definitely happening. However, in elaborating on their responses and exploring the issue further with them, it became clear that the opposite was also not true. That is, that a student's impairment did not feature as a factor for consideration in the process of admission and was not used as the basis for rejecting the student's application. Their assertions pointed to the fact that, in their experience, disabled students had, in fact, been refused admission to the institution or from a particular course or programme of study because they were disabled. However, equally importantly, were the assertions that were made about the extent to which these decisions were justified or reasonable. They were, therefore, often articulated by the interviewees themselves as being 'fair decisions' under the circumstances, since, according to the institution, it would not have been possible to accommodate the student.

As a starting point these initial responses from the interviewees suggested that disabled students' access to higher education is strongly linked to and shaped by the existence of impairment. While this was not unexpected, these initial assertions also alerted me to two further concerns that I realised needed to be probed further as the interviews progressed. The first concern suggested that the notion of admission, and thus access, needed to be addressed at two levels. It not only involved *gaining access* to a higher

education institution but also and most importantly to the *student's programme of choice*. It became clear that this latter concern was extremely important to considerations of discrimination and the extent to which impairment is used as a basis for exclusion. Thus, while the existence of an impairment may not always result in the exclusion of a student from an institution, the evidence collected in this study suggested that it is more often used as a basis for refusing a student admission to a particular course or programme of study. It also became clear that in the latter instance the student might be offered alternative placements or 'counselled' into other options. In this way, the student's choice is restricted, but the institution is not seen to be discriminating on the basis of disability. In analysing the findings that emerged around the admission of disabled students, it became clear that the issue, therefore, needed to be engaged with at these two different levels.

The second issue that I was alerted to from these initial inputs was that the rejection of a student at both of the levels described above could be justified and regarded as *reasonable and fair*. As already noted, the legislation in South Africa that would inform access to higher education protects against unfair discrimination but also provides for the limitation of this right where such limitation is regarded as fair and reasonable. Similarly, as already reiterated above, the Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997) allows for institutions to set their own admissions criteria subject to the broader discrimination and redress concerns. From the findings discussed in the previous chapters and from the quotations already cited in this chapter, I surmised that what informed a determination of what was reasonable and fair under the circumstances, was strongly influenced by dominant understandings around disability and how they are interpreted within the higher education environment. Put another way, the attitudes and practices that dominate the academic environment and the values that underpin it, would once again feature as important variables in influencing access issues for disabled students.

These findings around my first question on admissions in the in-depth interviews helped to focus further questions and discussions around the acceptance and rejection of applications for admission by disabled students. The findings that emerged from probing the issue further with the interviewees are now presented. They are primarily drawn from the interviewees' experiences of being involved in the decision-making process around the admission of a disabled student. They are also drawn from instances where individual students had appealed to them as a disability unit/programme or responsible person after receiving a negative response from the institution. As the discussion below shows, some of the interviewees were frustrated with and critical of what was happening at their institution in this regard. Others were more supportive of what was happening and suggested once again that the issue revolved around managing the inherent tensions that confronted the institution when a disabled student applied to or was admitted into the institution.

In these discussions two central issues emerged that shed light on what forces are most important in informing the decisions that are made and, of course, whether the outcome can be regarded as justified and fair. The first issue, already alluded to, related to the *nature of the student's impairment* and whether such impairment would render them unable, in the opinion of the institution, to meet the requirements of the course or degree. These latter considerations brought to the fore, once again, what I have referred to throughout this thesis as the flexibility of the teaching and learning process. They also highlighted the role that the units/programmes and responsible people played in advising and encouraging students to make what were regarded as more feasible or 'realistic' choices. Moreover, as was evident in the previous chapter, these issues were strongly influenced by concerns around quality and excellence and the maintenance of academic standards. Similarly, these discussions highlighted the real concerns that confront students when declaring (or not) the existence of an impairment in their application to an institution.

The second area related, not unexpectedly, to considerations around the *perceived costs* that are involved for an institution in accommodating a disabled student. Discussions about this issue also brought to the fore considerations of how resources are allocated and managed within institutions, and how this influences decisions that are made regarding these perceived costs. The exploration of the cost issue in this way, added further depth to what I have discussed at the end of the previous chapter regarding the complexity of the resources issue as a factor influencing institutional responses. I have referred to these two concerns as the 'impairment factor' and the 'cost factor', to be discussed respectively in the two sections which follow (Sections 7.2.2 and 7.2.3).

Collectively, these two concerns come together in complex ways to establish the parameters of what seemed to be understood as the *reasonable responsibilities of the institution*. Although this notion of 'reasonableness' is not limited to the area of admissions, it dominated the findings of my exploration into this area. The findings into these two areas were to show that, the construction of 'reasonableness' within the academic environment is a critical factor affecting disabled students' access to higher education. Put another way, the construction and application of the concept of 'reasonableness' plays a central role in the effective discrimination of disabled students in their struggles to access higher education provision.

### **7.2.2 The impairment factor**

In my discussions with the interviewees I immediately became aware of the extent to which the student's impairment, and the physiological category into which it is seen to fit, becomes a central issue in considering their application for admission. The three quotations that follow present three different responses to this line of questioning. While each of the quotations highlights different concerns that come into play, and reflect different perspectives on the issues, the common denominator in all of them is *the importance of the*

*student's impairment in influencing the decision. The three interviewees explained the kind of thinking that takes place as follows:*

*In situations where it is justified, it can be justified in terms of where someone would be putting themselves in a seriously dangerous position, for example working in laboratories with certain kinds of chemicals, where that component of the course can't be excluded or done theoretically, so one would do quite a serious investigation to show that you can't exclude that part of the course and so on. There are situations that crop up from time to time, but very seldom. Largely that is used to exclude students without cause, in my book. ... We had a student that was refused admission to [name of course], on the basis of being partially sighted. The reason that was given was that she was unable to identify lab specimens, the ear and various bones. We in fact appealed against that and she in fact qualified. And there have been a couple more, largely in the Sciences again. (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*So what we are looking at here are what are the core courses of that curriculum, what are vital to that degree that cannot be changed and given the particular needs of the student will he or she manage with those core courses, so if for example there is a blind student that wants to study BSc and we find that he may not manage with Chemistry because it means working with chemicals etc, and it's vital to have your sight for that, we will discourage the student and say perhaps you need to understand why you will not be able to do this, let us look at something more feasible for you, but we will not tell the student outright, no you are not successful and we will not accept you, we will try and guide the student into something that may be a bit more*

*practical given the limitations, but it has to be proven that the student's disability will be a barrier to studying that degree (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*The university cannot include people who don't meet the basic requirements of performance; for example, we cannot be graduating people who are not graduate material. At the same time, we can't be prejudiced against people who have disabilities and cant perform in certain ways, but could perform should we change the teaching method. Those issues are the kind of hard issues that we have to decide upon (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

The first concern that emerges in all three of the quotations is the stated or implied references that are made to meeting the *academic requirements* of a course or degree. In other words, does the student's impairment impact in any way on them having the 'ability' to meet the academic requirements for the course or degree, or as one of the interviewees said, are they "graduate material"? It may be accepted that to have a legitimate right to study at the higher education level, a student needs to meet certain academic requirements and thus demonstrate their potential to meet particular academic standards (that is, to be able to graduate). The exploration by Williams' (1997:25) of discourses around access to higher education, and who effectively has a legitimate right to enter higher education, is useful here. She captures in her arguments what she refers to as the "academic traditionalists" who articulate arguments that resonate strongly with the notion of graduate material emphasised above. She argues that the discourse of the "academic traditionalists" is one where notions such as academic merit and academic standards are strongly articulated. Academics, as the custodians of what determines such merit and acceptable standards, set the parameters for what "is on offer" and thus who is likely to have the 'academic ability' to benefit from it. She therefore argues that, those students who are

seen to have a legitimate right to enter higher education are those “who can demonstrate in advance of entering that they have the capacity to benefit” (Williams, 1997:29).

The quotations above suggest that for disabled students *demonstrating such capacity is strongly linked to their impairment*. More specifically, it is linked to the perceptions that exist within the institution about the ‘limitations’ that the impairment (or the category into which their impairment fits) is perceived to create in meeting the academic requirements set out for a particular course or degree. Thus, academic ability for disabled students becomes as much about whether their impairment will render them able to ‘cope’ with the academic requirements of the course, which are largely regarded as objective (Borland and James, 1999). Since such requirements are ‘objective’ it is ‘reasonable’ and ‘fair’ to make such a determination based on the student’s impairment.

The first factor raised by the interviewees that appears to feature as part of the concerns around academic requirements is the issue of *safety*. In other words, it was argued that in some cases a student’s impairment renders them unable to complete certain requirements without their safety, and perhaps the safety of other students and staff, being compromised. The first and second quotations both cite the example of science courses where chemicals are used and suggest that, for example, for a student with a visual impairment, this may pose a safety risk. From the information available (and without the input of the students and lecturers concerned) it is difficult, however, to verify how real the safety threats are. In the first quotation, the interviewee’s comments: “Largely that is used to exclude students without cause, in my book”, suggests that the issue of safety is used as an excuse for excluding some disabled students. The second quotation implies a greater acceptance and acknowledgment of safety as a key factor that can be legitimately used at times to exclude a disabled student from a course.

In the context of this discussion, it is interesting to note an example given by the Disability Rights Commission (DRC) in the United Kingdom in their “Learning and Teaching and Good Practice Guide” for higher education institutions around the legislative provisions pertinent to the United Kingdom<sup>93</sup>. Within the framework of “Maintaining academic standards” they provide an example that speaks directly to the issue of safety noted above. They explain:

A programme specification required students to show “competence in handling particular chemicals”. This was an unnecessary barrier to students with manual dexterity problems who used assistants to undertake practical work under instruction. The specification was changed to refer to “understanding how to handle particular chemicals” (DRC, 2002:4).

Both the quotations cited above, and the DRC example given, allude to an additional issue that is of central importance to this discussion. They bring to the fore once again the area of *curriculum flexibility* and its importance in these deliberations. They highlight the curriculum concerns that come into play when the issue of safety is raised. The first quotation argues that, while safety issues may be a very real concern, what is equally important is whether such practical work can in fact be substituted by a course or component which is primarily theoretical and does not require this kind of laboratory work. The second quotation extends this issue by pointing to what are regarded as core courses. These are components of the course regarded as essential to meeting the requirements of that course or degree and thus obtaining the epistemological understanding that is needed in that area of knowledge acquisition.

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<sup>93</sup> This refers to Part 4 of The Disability Discrimination Act (1995), which was extended into the education sphere in September 2002 and thus has implications for higher education institutions.

For the first interviewee, such understanding may be reached through alternative methods of presenting such information or sharing such knowledge, that is, “done theoretically” without the practical component. In other words, he suggests that the emphasis should be on obtaining the requisite knowledge, which can be done through alternative teaching and learning methods. In this way, the attention shifts to *what changes can be made* so that the student is able, albeit via a different method of engagement with the curriculum, to meet the minimum knowledge requirements of the course or degree. Rather than making determinations of a student’s academic capabilities, based on whether they can engage with the curriculum and fulfil the programme requirements in ways regarded as ‘normal’, the focus shifts, once again, to the teaching and learning process and its ability to respond to the learning needs of different students.

However, for the second interviewee quoted, the student’s impairment and their “particular needs” had to be considered in relation to their perceived ability to meet the core courses of a programme. Thus, while the first quotation suggests that the methods of engagement with these core courses may be adapted, the second emphasises that the change has to happen with the student. The kind of change that is suggested, encouraging the student to change their programme of choice, brings into focus another important issue to arise from these concerns around the student’s ability to undertake the requirements of a particular course or programme of study. The second quotation suggests that, where a decision is made that the nature of a student’s impairment renders them unable to undertake a particular course of study, they may be advised to take what is regarded as a “more feasible” option. The determination of ‘feasibility’ is once again linked to the nature of the student’s impairment and what this is perceived to mean in relation to the course or degree requirements.

I also became aware that for some of the interviewees, students showed what they regarded as 'wisdom' and 'maturity' by accepting their 'limitations' in this regard and following the academic journey taken by other disabled students or by accepting the advice that is given. The following quotation from one of the interviewees captures these sentiments:

*Sometimes they are also very wise in their decisions. We haven't had a person up to now who said he wanted to study something that he really couldn't do. I don't know if it is the school system that tells them that or their parent's support or whatever, but they know that it is sometimes just not practical for them to study certain things. They usually go into Law, IT, even Personnel Management, Psychology, and they really excel. (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003)*

Another interviewee had a more ironic view of disabled students' choices and attitudes in this regard:

*Nice disabled students always have a better time than disabled students that aren't nice. That's hugely problematic because you shouldn't have to be nice to get places, but that is the reality (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

Thus being 'nice' and showing 'wisdom' may in fact mean settling for a course or degree that is not of the student's choosing. It may also mean being advised to undertake a course that is seen as being suitable for a disabled student, as the quotation on the wisdom of the students illustrates. These changes to the student's plans and aspirations may have a range of implications for their success in their studies and the work opportunities that may be available to them once they graduate. However, equally important is

what is alluded to above -that the validity of a student's choice may be questioned because of the nature of their impairment.

Shevlin, Kenny and McNeela (2004) argue that a student's choices are called into question when the requirements of a course or programme may need to be altered slightly to meet the particular learning needs of the student. Thus, returning to the first set of quotations cited at the beginning of this section (Section 7.2.2), undertaking a particular aspect of the course through a theoretically orientated method rather than through practical work, such as in a laboratory, results in the student's choice of course being questioned. Or, put another way, the student has a problem because they have not chosen wisely in relation to their impairment. A physically disabled student quoted in the Shevlin et al study (2004:21) expressed these sentiments in relation to her participation in a field trip:

I did geography and it requires a field trip up the side of a mountain. The lecturer implied what was I doing geography for if I can't go on field trips.

In further discussions with the interviewees I became aware that once again the science programmes were highlighted as the most difficult to access. Conversely, courses in the humanities were seen as more accessible. Once again, the two quotations below suggest that these tendencies go beyond meeting the academic requirements for a course. While the first argues that greater prejudice exists in the sciences towards the admission of disabled students, the second goes back to what a student with a visual impairment is regarded as being able to cope with.

*It is easier to make the case for someone with a disability in Humanities than it is in the pure Sciences, with out a doubt. And one finds a lot more prejudice, a lot more open prejudice and clear dislike of inclusion of people with disabilities in the pure Sciences. Whether*

*that is a cultural thing, I don't know...in the Sciences, people don't like people with disabilities at all. I think it has something to do with the kind of problem-solving culture of scientists. They feel that somebody should be doing something about this (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

*The deaf student I was talking about was taking Science subjects, so working in a laboratory was not a problem, but the student who is blind is in the Humanities and there is probably a reason for that and that is that she can cope there (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003)*

In addition to the points that have already been raised, throughout the quotations cited in this section, a further concern is evident. This has to do with the extent to which the decision making process appears to be strongly influenced by perceptions around the category of impairment. In other words, the physiological category into which their impairment is seen to fit, influences most strongly the perceptions around whether they will be able to meet the academic requirements of the course – what they will be able to 'cope' with. Thus, for example, the categories of 'blindness' or 'deafness' are seen to bring with them inherent 'limitations' that define what a particular student is seen to be able to do or not do in relation to the course requirements.

In Chapter Two I argued that considering the learning needs of a student by merely looking at the category into which their impairment may fit was extremely limited. I argued that it failed to take into account the individual learning styles and methods of engagement with the curriculum by different disabled students whose impairments might be similar or fall into the same physiological category. Thus, drawing once again from Brown and Simpson (2004:70), the category of impairment "fosters only the illusion of meaning" in relation to a student's ability to meet the academic requirements of a

particular course. However, it would seem, from what the interviewees shared, that it becomes a key variable influencing the decision making process and, most importantly, therefore, a 'reasonable' and 'legitimate' basis for exclusion. As Poussu-Olli (1999:112) reports in her investigation into the experiences of two disabled students in higher education in Finland, there is an underlying perception that it is really all about common sense. She captured this in the sentiments expressed by one of the respondents at the universities she surveyed. They said:

There is a [the] use [of] common sense; a handless person has graduated as a doctor and a blind one as a judge, but if a dyslexic wants to be a chemist, there is reason to consider the matter.

The findings above collectively show that the nature of a student's impairment and the perceived limitations that it brings to the teaching and learning process is an important focus of the admissions process for a disabled student. Thus, making reasonable and fair determinations based on impairment, including the category into which the impairment is seen to fit, and its perceived implications for meeting the stated academic requirements of a course, becomes part of the common sense (Gramsci, 1971) around disabled students and higher education. In this way, the discrimination that takes place on the basis of disability is disguised, and remains unquestioned, within the 'legitimate' concerns around academic requirements and whether the student's impairment renders them able to meet these or not.

I was not surprised then that indicating that you are disabled in an institution's admissions form and/or specifying that you have a particular kind of impairment emerged as important to issues of access for disabled students. From the findings of the original survey questionnaire it was clear that most institutions request that a potential student indicates on the admission form if they 'have a disability'. In some cases this extends to asking that the nature of the student's 'disability' be specified. The

interviewees confirmed this trend and, as the inputs already cited show, emphasised that the institution regards such information as essential to its ability to respond to disabled students. However, it also became clear in the in-depth interviews that requesting such information was recognised to have important limitations to it. As already noted, a central concern expressed by the interviewees was that a number of disabled students are reluctant to make such a declaration in the admissions form. Such reluctance appears to stem directly from the student's fear of what the implications of such a declaration will mean for them. It is important to recognise that, as the quotations below indicate, students' fears extend from concerns around stigmatisation and labelling, and thus being treated differently to other students, to the very real fear that such a declaration will be used to exclude them from the institution or from the programme they wish to study. As the discussion above has shown, there is evidence to suggest from this study that such fears are certainly not unfounded. The quotations below capture some of the interviewees' perspectives on this issue:

*We realised that there must be more students, there could not only be 17. Out of the students who came forward with their disability, we asked perhaps one or two of them if they knew of other disabled students and they said that there were many students but students don't want to be labelled. (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, September 2003*

*There is a certain amount of branding [labelling] that goes with it, that is my own personal point of view (Interview with responsible person, historically disadvantaged institution, August 2003)*

*About three years ago, we had a deaf student who graduated, and I only got to know about this because I was (position in the institution) and in interaction with students I found out that they had a very*

*innovative way. He attended classes, and his friends would do a précis, summary for him. He would take all the notes, using his texts and so on and passed first time. From the person him or herself, they are reluctant to disclose this, because it might seem that they are looking for special treatment or pity, so there is the psychological part of it (Interview with responsible person, historically disadvantaged institution, August 2003).*

*Students value places at institutions like ours, they do not want to indicate their disabilities on any official forms (Interview with responsible person, historically disadvantaged institution, August 2003)*

*With our admissions forms, students with disabilities don't indicate, because they think it will be used against them (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003)*

It is important to notice from the above inputs that, the link between declaring a 'disability' and the fear of exclusion from the institution or a programme of choice, appears to be of greatest concern to students at the historically disadvantaged institutions. As discussed in Chapter Three the demographics of student enrolments in the system still suggest that the poorest students are concentrated at these institutions (Cooper & Subotzky, 2001). The inputs above suggest that for many disabled students access to higher education is influenced and controlled by considerations of poverty and the existence of an impairment. This conclusion was reinforced for me when one of the interviewees described the life situation of the majority of disabled students she works with. She said:

*Most of the students that I am working with depend on their social grants, their parents are unemployed or they don't have parents, so they struggle to come to [name of institution], it is a sacrifice for them to learn and when they reach here they are not included in any way (Interview with responsible person, historically disadvantaged institution, August 2003)*

In further discussions on this issue with the interviewees I became aware that some of them, in recognising why such a declaration was of concern to disabled students, had given some thought to rethinking this approach. From their responses two positions emerged. They either felt that there was no viable alternative to this approach or they suggested an alternative, which, in my opinion, failed to address the underlying fears around categorisation and labelling. The following quotation captures their recognition of the problem and some thoughts on an alternative.

*On our disability forms we want to describe more what we mean by disability. We want to explain so that the people are not threatened, that is something we want to do next year...I think you can even to some extent ask them to indicate whether they require special programmes perhaps (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

While the intention is to try and remove the potential threat for disabled students, the alternative of asking whether the student requires a special programme still serves to label that student. The label merely shifts from being a disabled student to being a student who requires a "special programme". Although an important shift is made towards trying to identify the student's support requirements, rather than merely knowing the existence and nature of their impairment, if the institution feels that they cannot offer the 'special programme' needed by the student, their application may be refused on this basis. This concern was reinforced when I explored more

carefully with the interviewees other considerations that come into play in the admissions process.

### **7.2.3 The cost factor**

The second key factor that emerged as important to considerations of when it was justified to refuse a disabled student admission to the institution or a course of study was, not unexpectedly, the issue of cost. Here the concept of 'cost' is used to refer to the expected costs to the institution that would be involved or the expenses that would be incurred in accommodating the disabled student. Thus, in the context of this discussion, it became clear that if the institution felt that they did not have the financial resources to support the participation of the student, it would be justified in rejecting their application. Once again I was aware that other studies that have looked at disabled students' access to higher education had noted how concerns around cost are often used as a "a reason for not being able to provide equally for disabled and non-disabled students" (Holloway, 2001:607; see also Hurst, 1993)

However, what was most illuminating from what the interviewees said when I pursued this issue with them, was how, once again, the issue is more complex than it initially seems. What influences a determination of what is or is not affordable for the institution, is linked to other, deeply political concerns, that reflect the complexities around resources and how they are allocated and distributed within higher education institutions. This is an area that becomes especially important in the South African context, where the inequalities of the past and the constraints of the present, strongly shape the choices that are made around the allocation of government and institutional resources. Similarly, any discrimination that arises from such determinations is disguised within these concerns and associated practices so it becomes difficult to identify and, therefore, confront.

A number of the concerns expressed around the cost factor arose out of the discussions I had with the interviewees about how they respond to applications from disabled students. One interviewee was very honest about how they would look at the situation:

*Our application forms ask, particularly the undergraduate one, whether they have any particular disabilities and if they answer 'yes' to that question, their application is referred to our Career Guidance and Counselling Unit. We indicate in our undergraduate prospectus that answering yes will in no way jeopardise their application, so it is not a factor that is taken into account when assessing the application. One of the Psychologists will probably get hold of the student and have a discussion about that student's disability, with a view to determining what kinds of difficulty the institution is going to face in the first instance. Obviously the student's situation will come into that looking at it from the student's perspective, but the primary responsibility there will be looking at it from the institution's perspective – can we cope. If there are some things that can be done easily, then we will point that out. At this stage we will indicate to the student that we can accept you, but these are the limits to the kind of service that we can offer you ...Another student from a disadvantaged background who was in a wheelchair, we really worked hard when we found out that he was a good student academically and all the rest of it –we really went out of our way to make things happen for him...so what I am saying is we have gone out of our way to assist students, now I imagine we would look at it, and if difficult but possible, we would do it. If it were practically impossible and ridiculously expensive, we probably will take legal advice and look for a way out if it ...in terms of our equity goals, we are going out of our way to attract students from a disadvantaged educational background. I must be honest; we are not going out of our way to find students with disabilities, that hasn't even been a question that we have considered...there is too much happening, so you've got*

*to pick your problems. To be quite frank, the students with disabilities is not a problem we picked. We are facing the mergers thing...now the whole of yesterday I was in [name of town] dealing with that (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

The above quotation illustrates starkly how an institution may view an application from a disabled student and what becomes central to the process of decision-making. However, what is equally important to recognise is that the determination of this central concern is not only dependent on what resources the institution has available. It is also about what they are willing to commit to supporting disabled students. As one interviewee said, it is often about deciding how far the institution's responsibilities should extend. He captured these 'dilemmas' in the following way:

*I think when you are providing accommodations for people with disabilities, there is a level of provision that you are prepared to go to. For instance, if someone needs adaptive or assistive technology and you are looking at reasonability, will the university be prepared to spend a half a million or whatever and in those kinds of situations you need to decide what sort of responsibility does the university have. Lets take someone who has serious learning disabilities. To what extent should the university be compensating for those disabilities, and to what extent should they require that person to perform in certain requirements? Those kinds of judgements are very difficult to make unless you have a firm policy that you can go back to and you can say that in this situation the university will provide this and wont provide that (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003)*

Taking into account the very different levels of resource capacity that exist across higher education institutions in South Africa, these considerations pose very different challenges for the different institutions<sup>94</sup>. It is interesting to note that the two quotations above reflect the perspective from two of the interviewees from historically advantaged institutions. While interviewees from the historically disadvantaged institutions expressed similar sentiments, the two quotations below from among the latter, are stark in the contrast they provide to the above sentiments.

*When you do nothing about something and when there is an opportunity to do something, I class it as actually a refusal to grant access ... I would classify that as being a refusal... If you are not going to start it now, when are you ever going to start it? This is actually the time to come in with innovative practices, because I don't think it is a case of the amount or level of subsidy you get. It's more a case of how you utilise the subsidy you get to optimise it... I am going to get a small team together, with a student and union representative and an academic that is passionate about this. I will give them all the resources they need with a budget and they can then look at what is out there already and take it and internalise it, and then run it by the various groupings. Those three stakeholders would represent almost everyone in the institution (Interview with responsible person, historically disadvantaged institution, August 2003).*

*We decided we had to know who the students were with disabilities, so we called a meeting with a group of them. People that were involved were [name of person], that is the assistant to the Vice-Chancellor, and [name of person] who is heading a change*

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<sup>94</sup> The background to this assertion in the South African context is provided in Chapter Three.

*management and policy unit, and [name of person] who is the librarian. So we met with them to see how we could assist them... We decided that when we had developed our plan, for our next meeting we were going to invite everybody including other universities so that we can see how we can work together... for [name of his/her university] it would be costly, but if we can work closely with the others, we can share the resources... After we met with this group last year, when we had our orientation early this year, we invited students with disabilities to come and share with us their difficulties. It also helped in sensitising the other students and the existence of other students with different needs. We put them in the programme and they participated themselves... we are trying to identify a desk for them and we are doing that together with the student's representative council (SRC). We are also trying to find an office from which they can operate, together with the SRC. (Interview with responsible person, historically disadvantaged institution, August 2003).*

Thus it would seem that the issue of cost is more complex than just what the expected costs would be for an institution to accommodate a particular student. What may be "ridiculously expensive" for one institution, may involve limited expense for another institution. This would be especially evident where there are very different levels of support provision already in place at the institutions. One of the interviewees emphasised that, for them, the 'cost factor' really boils down to how institutional resources are allocated and spent, what influences such decisions and thus who benefits. He argued, therefore, that how much money goes towards accommodating disabled students becomes a highly politicised issue around competing claims, which are inherently subject to a range of influences and struggles taking place within the institution at any point in time. In discussing this challenge for his institution he argued:

*Where that money is put and where that money is budgeted, there is a whole kind of political issue that goes down around that. The university is very quick to align itself with the ideals and the mission of people with disabilities, but when it comes to those kinds of deliveries, things become a bit hazy, and that is really where the work starts ...operationalising it, that is the challenge and that is where the resistance begins, because if you want resources for this, then you are impinging on other resources, that is the way budgeting works, and you have to make this a higher education priority, so then you start to find very erudite intellectuals coming up with very erudite arguments and eloquent arguments about why disability is in fact not a priority, and you have to counter those. So it's not always easy to wave the flag and get the budget (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

Another interviewee expressed her frustration in dealing with these struggles:

*We are told that we all depend on the campus budget and at times with the campus budget, it is first come first served, if I apply for the campus budget and I am told that PR [public relations] requested R12 000 yesterday and there is nothing left, so that is how it is, so at times I don't even know if it's because people are not happy with what I am doing, people are not happy that I challenged the idea of them accommodating blind students (Interview with responsible person, historically disadvantaged institution, August 2003)*

The issue of the costs that are involved in admitting and accommodating disabled students is a contested issue subject to a range of influences. While it appears to be linked to what are perceived as institutional expenses that will be involved in accommodating a particular disabled student, the determination, in fact, appears to be more strongly influenced by competing interests within the institution. Since, as has already been argued in the

previous chapter, support for disabled students in their studies is strongly shaped by attitudes and practices that dominate within the institution, the issue of power once again comes to the fore. In this instance it appears to be about the power that the units/responsible people have to shift resources towards such provision. Hurst (1993:367) captures these concerns very well:

The question then becomes one of decisions about the allocation of resources from a limited pool. Alongside this must be set perceptions of and attitudes towards disability. The focus is on the distribution of power in relation to decision-making.

Thus, as the above quotations from the interviewees already suggest, considerations of the potential costs to the institution further inform the notion of 'reasonableness' or what can reasonably be expected from the institution. So deliberations of what can reasonably be expected from the institution are strongly influenced by both academic considerations and cost factors. However, as already argued, determinations around both these concerns appear to be largely made from the institution's perspective and they both appear to depend on relatively discretionary processes of decision-making. Or, put another way, decisions are reached through processes of decision making that are shaped by a range of interests and concerns that have little to do with meeting the learning needs of a disabled student. As Holloway (2001:607) points out, to achieve the latter "need not cost money". Rather, for her, they "require changes in departmental procedure, and the practice of individual members of staff, both academic and administrative".

Thus, once again, like the preoccupation with the nature of a student's impairment, the perceived costs that are involved in accepting a disabled student also turn the attention away from what really needs to be considered. This is, what changes may need to be made to the teaching and learning environment, especially at the 'micro' level, to ensure that the learning needs of all students are met and they therefore have fair chances for success.

Moreover, to affect such changes may require relatively few financial resources but greater levels of political will from the institution's leadership.

In considering the importance of these issues for disabled students' access to higher education in South Africa, it is important to contextualise this discussion within the context of the funding contribution or lack thereof presently made by the government in this area. In Chapter Three I argued that the symbolic commitments made in the policy framework to increase access for disabled students, currently receive very limited financial backing from government. As explained, what funding is made available comes through the provision of bursaries to individual disabled students administered through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS)<sup>95</sup>. This factor on its own adds weight to the argument of institutions, especially the historically disadvantaged ones, that the potential costs involved in accepting and accommodating disabled students has to be taken into consideration and may be regarded as a reasonable basis for exclusion. The lack of government funding support, therefore, reinforces the 'reasonableness' of such decisions from the institution's perspective. It also reinforces the extent to which institutional discretion, based largely on perceptions around the student's impairment, and what it means for accepting and accommodating the disabled student, becomes central to disabled students' gaining access to higher education. Moreover, as the sentiments expressed in the quotation below emphasise, the lack of dedicated government funding towards the provision of support for disabled students, opens this area up to the struggles around resources at the institutional level. Thus, through these limitations in funding provision, the government's role in this area tends to be one that reinforces the status quo, rather than one that leverages the changes expressed in the policy

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<sup>95</sup> See footnote No. 73 for an explanation of the NSFAS.

framework for the transformation of the higher education system<sup>96</sup>. One of the interviewees expressed these concerns in the following way:

*I think that the level of financial commitment from government is insufficient currently. One of the reasons that units like mine have such a terrible challenge in terms of promoting access to people with disabilities is the financial issue, the fact that the university has to budget for disability, and that there is no specific provision, no subsidy is tagged from government level. If a certain subsidy was tagged from government level, I think a lot of that would go away, because the money then would have to be spent on disability. There wouldn't be a choice. I would like to see a proportion of the university subsidy specified for this function, because it would remove the debate at the university level. When it comes to financial resources, the competition is fierce (Interview with responsible person, historically advantaged institution, August 2003).*

### **7.3 Discussion and conclusions: The effective discrimination of disabled students**

My intention in this chapter has been to describe those findings from the study that provide insight into what shapes and impacts on disabled students' admission to the higher education institutions explored in this study and into programmes of their choice. This chapter therefore, addressed concerns around disabled students' formal access to higher education (Morrow, 1993) and, thus, the *access imperative* of the equity framework outlined in Chapter Two. However, as I emphasised at the beginning of this chapter, I have addressed this concern by considering what appears, from the evidence collected in this study, to influence the decision making process in institutions when disabled students apply to be admitted to the institution, and most

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<sup>96</sup> This framework is discussed in some detail in Chapter Three.

importantly, into a programme of their choice. Although this chapter, therefore, moves away from issues of participation and success within the institution, to what happens to disabled students at the interface between the institution and the broader society, there are a number of ways in which the findings here resonate strongly with those in the previous chapters. Once again, therefore, this final section builds on some of the conclusions that have already been reached in the previous two chapters.

My overarching concern throughout this chapter has been to understand what the findings say about disabled students' *right to access higher education without discrimination*, which, as described in Chapter Three, is formally protected through various policy and legislative mechanisms. It is this concern around freedom from discrimination in gaining access to higher education that is central to the conclusions I have reached. I have been most concerned with the extent to which the attitudes and institutional practices described in this chapter, and thus the forces which inform and shape them, may lead to the *effective discrimination* of disabled students in their efforts to gain access to existing public higher education provision. However, what is equally important to consider, and forms the central thrust of this final section of the chapter, is how such discrimination can, firstly, take place within the parameters of what is arguably a progressive legislative framework in place to protect disabled people from unfair discrimination; and, secondly, be regarded as legitimate and fair, and thus, remain largely unquestioned. To answer these questions, this final section discusses two important areas that the findings explored earlier in this chapter draw attention to. These are:

- (i) The *nature and functioning of the academic environment* and how the particular set of forces that shape this social setting (Barton, 1996) impact on the realisation of disabled students' right to access higher education without discrimination and;

- (ii) The *weaknesses in the policy and legislative framework* that create the parameters within which this right may be 'legitimately' restricted.

Essentially, these two components deepen the conclusions already reached, around the extent to which existing institutional responses to disabled students' entry into higher education take forward or undermine the equity concerns that have been so central to this study.

In Section 7.2.2 of this chapter I reported on those findings that showed how disabled students' access to higher education institutions, and in particular, to a programme of their choice, is strongly linked to the existence of an impairment. In many ways this was not surprising. It reflected, once again, the extent to which the dominant hegemony of disability (Oliver, 1990), explored in Chapter Two, permeates the area of admissions and, in this way, becomes part of the common sense (Gramsci, 1977) around disabled students and access to higher education. By explaining how the existence of an impairment, or the physiological category into which it is seen to fit, is *central to the decision making process* around a disabled student's application, I demonstrated the many ways that the options open to disabled students are restricted and, thus, the discrimination that is evident. These findings, therefore, confirm Abberley's (1997:164) assertion that it is the existence of an impairment that "forms the bedrock upon which justificatory oppressive theories are based". However, what is so important to the concerns of this study, are how these practices can legitimately take place and be regarded as 'reasonable' and 'fair', and are therefore justified, within higher education institutions and within an, arguably, progressive legislative framework.

The findings presented showed that for disabled students, many of the 'ordinary' and 'legitimate' criteria that academic institutions may use to select and admit students, are interpreted in relation to perceptions that exist

around the nature of the student's impairment. For example, I showed how the assessment of a disabled student's capacity to meet the academic requirements of a programme is often based on what the impairment is perceived to mean for; (i) how the programme is taught; (ii) the selection of those courses regarded as core to the programme; (iii) how the student's knowledge is assessed, and (iv), the safety of the staff and students involved. Where the impairment is seen to restrict the student's ability to participate in the teaching and learning process and all its different aspects, in a manner regarded as 'normal' or, equally importantly, in the manner it has been offered in the past, the student is regarded as being unable to meet the academic requirements of the course. They may, therefore, be excluded for being seen as 'unable' to meet the academic requirements of the programme rather than because they have an impairment. Their admission or acceptance into a particular programme is not being rejected on the basis of 'disability', but because the nature of their impairment renders them unable, *in the opinion of the institutional personnel involved*, to meet the academic requirements of the course. Moreover, the findings also show that, where this lack of flexibility or the assumed appropriateness of these academic requirements are called into question, concerns around issues of quality and academic standards once again come to the fore. As has already been shown in the previous chapter, these latter arguments are reinforced through the power relations that are endemic to the academic environment.

The findings also showed that various competing interests and, thus, political forces at play within the institution, also influence determinations around the perceived costs involved for an institution in admitting a disabled student and supporting their participation. Such determinations are strongly shaped by those practices and relations of power within institutions, which influence and determine how resources are allocated and distributed across its various components, and therefore between the competing interests.

What becomes clear therefore, from my exploration of both the 'impairment factor' and the 'cost factor', is the following: That the attitudes and practices, which dominate within the academic environment, and which are regarded as legitimate to the undertaking of its core business (for example, maintaining academic standards or managing its limited budget), serve to 'disguise' the discrimination that disabled students may face in accessing higher education. The right of disabled students to access higher education without discrimination is, therefore, compromised and undermined when *this right is interpreted and given meaning within the academic environment* with its inherent inequalities and relations of power within academia. In this way, the higher education environment becomes a particular kind of disabling environment, but its disabling features are regarded as 'legitimate', 'reasonable' and 'fair', and, therefore, seldom called into question.

If these disabling barriers within the higher education environment are acknowledged and recognised, then it forces us to turn our attention back to the second area of focus which the findings of this chapter draw attention to. This is, *the policy and legislative framework* that has been put in place to protect the right of disabled students to access higher education without discrimination. The findings from this chapter do, in my opinion, point to some important problems with this policy and legislative framework, despite it being informed, if viewed internationally, by a very progressive constitutional framework. These problems weaken the potential for disabled students to be protected from discrimination in their efforts to gain access to higher education institutions and to programmes of their choice. Moreover, they render the policy and legislative framework limited in its ability to leverage the kind of changes necessary to address those disabling barriers within the academic environment, which, as I have argued, are so important to the process of admission. These weaknesses, therefore, impact on the achievement of the equity concerns that have been so central to this study.

In Chapter Three, through a discussion on the higher education policy framework as it relates to access to higher education for disabled students, I introduced into this thesis the notion of 'reasonableness' as a basis for limiting various rights provided for and protected in the Constitution (Act No. 101 of 1996) and associated higher education legislation. I therefore showed how various rights, including the right to access higher education, may be restricted if it is regarded as reasonable to do so. This chapter has shown that, with regard to the admission of disabled students to higher education, interpretations of 'reasonableness' are, firstly, made at the institutional level, and, secondly, are informed by the dominant attitudes and practices I have already described.

Such interpretation of key concepts, provisions and goals contained in a policy text, within the "context of practice" (in this instance, the institutional environment), are inherent to the struggles and compromises of any policy process (Bowe and Ball with Gold, 1992:15). Similarly, as Ball (1994:17) argues, policies always "enter existing patterns of inequality" and in so doing are "affected, inflected and deflected" by these inequalities and the practices they perpetuate. It is not surprising, therefore, that within the context of higher education institutions, the imperative towards 'reasonableness' will be interpreted and applied towards disabled students in the ways I have described. However, while such interpretations may be inevitable, they are also made possible because the policy framework has failed to provide any direction or clarity around how this could or should be interpreted within institutions to prevent the kinds of discrimination this chapter has reported on. Drawing from Jansen's (2001; 2002) arguments around the post 1994 education policy framework, which I discussed in Chapter Three, the findings from this chapter resonate strongly with a number of the weaknesses he associates with the "politics of symbolism" that he argues has characterised the development of this policy (Jansen, 2002:2001). One of the central arguments he makes is that the government, in seeking "social validation" for its policy goals through symbolic commitments that have strong political

legitimacy, has failed, certainly in the education arena, to sufficiently consider and address the complexities involved in the *process of implementation* (Jansen, 2002:205). The commitments that are made to protecting disabled students from unfair discrimination have strong political legitimacy. However, these symbolic commitments are inadequate in preventing the forms of discrimination discussed in this chapter from taking place.

Although it may be possible to argue that an overarching policy, which speaks to the overall governance and management of the higher education system, is unable to provide such direction, it is interesting here to consider what has been taken forward in the Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998)<sup>97</sup>. This Act, among other provisions, aims to promote the creation of equal opportunities for disabled people in the workplace and redress the inequalities of the past in this regard. However, towards the realisation of these goals, the Act's implementation is formally guided and supported by a Code of Good Practice- Disability in the Workplace (Department of Labour, 2001). This document explains and thus gives direction to what is expected from employers towards the 'reasonable accommodation' of disabled employees. It therefore, to some extent, gives meaning to the concept of 'reasonableness' as it relates to the participation of disabled people in the workplace, and in so doing, goes some way to further protecting their right to freedom from discrimination in this area. Most importantly, however, such additions to the policy and legislative framework, helps to minimise determinations of 'reasonableness' from being shaped through the struggles between competing interests in any workplace, and from dominant attitudes towards disabled people that permeate such environments.

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<sup>97</sup> The Employment Equity Act (No. 55 of 1998) is aimed at the creation of equity in the workplace. Central to its provisions are the prevention of unfair discrimination and affirmative action measures to redress past inequalities. In the Act, disabled people, together with women and black people, are recognised as 'designated groups' who have been discriminated against in the past and should therefore be targeted for affirmative action measures. All designated employers in the Act have to comply with a number of measures including developing and submitting regular employment equity plans.

The findings presented in this chapter suggest that such direction also needs to form part of the higher education policy framework, if disabled students are to be more effectively protected from discrimination in their efforts to gain entry to higher education institutions and into programmes of their choice. However, in making this assertion, it is also important to introduce a note of caution here. Such direction cannot come from merely reproducing existing guidelines, such as those referred to above in relation to the workplace, and using them within the academic environment. My concern is that any guidelines or initiatives, which aim to provide greater protection for disabled students' access to and participation in higher education, have to be developed within this very specific social setting (Barton, 1996). They must therefore speak to *those disabling barriers that characterise the academic environment*. Similarly, they need to reflect the experiences of disabled students themselves, as it is *this 'voice' that becomes central* to how we understand and give meaning to what is reasonable and fair for disabled students in higher education.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CONCLUSION

#### 8.1 Introduction

My intention in this final chapter is to conclude the analysis of the research by drawing together the various threads of the study, both conceptual and empirical. It begins by describing the primary investigative and theoretical tasks undertaken and the central findings that emerged from the various lines of enquiry that were explored. The chapter summarises the conclusions reached and considers the implications of the findings for the strategies and practices of institutions, in responding to disabled students within a broader process of transformation in higher education. Finally, some of the limitations of the research are considered and areas for future research that have emerged out of this study are identified.

#### 8.2 Overview of the thesis

##### 8.2.1 Research aims and objectives

This thesis explored how 11 public universities in South Africa are responding to the admission of disabled students and their participation once they are part of the student body. It considered how appropriate and adequate the responses of institutions are for ensuring that disabled students have equitable access to higher education and its benefits. This evaluative component to the study strongly influenced the analytical framework from which the findings were considered and conclusions drawn, and was, therefore, central to the academic contribution which this thesis endeavours to make.

The research reported on in this thesis was influenced and shaped by two central premises. These were, firstly, that engagement with disability and the

concerns of disabled students at the higher education level in South Africa have been extremely limited and substantially under-theorised in the past. My contention was that while this weakness could, on the one hand, be attributed to the high levels of exclusion of disabled people from South African higher education in the past, it was also reflective of a deeper conceptual problem within mainstream sociological enquiry in South Africa. This problem had to do with the largely unquestioned acceptance, of disability as a non-sociological concern (Barton, 1996), which, in turn, rendered it immune from critical interrogation in South Africa, where race, class and gender have been much more substantially interrogated. .

This weakness and omission informed the second premise regarding the research. This was that, where access to higher education for disabled students was considered, the nature and functioning of the higher education environment itself received little attention. My contention was that the higher education terrain and its associated set of institutions perpetuate a distinctive set of structural and ideological barriers for disabled people that largely remain unexplored and thus unquestioned. I concluded, therefore, that the creation of an equitable and just higher education system for disabled people, must involve a more careful and rigorous process of sociological enquiry into how these barriers emerge and are reproduced within institutions.

My intention in the research process, therefore, was to achieve three overarching objectives. These were:

- (i) To bring together lines of sociological enquiry that I believed were essential to *understanding what equity means for disabled students in higher education* and thus what factors undermine such a project.
- (ii) To explore *what was happening within higher education institutions*. My intention was to investigate the strategies and

practices that higher education institutions employ in responding to an application for admission by a disabled student; *and* the nature and organisation of the support provision, if any, that is in place to support disabled students in their academic studies once they are part of the student body. I regarded these two areas of concern, and thus the attitudes and understandings that shape them, as constituting the essence of an institution's response to disabled students.

- (iii) To *analyse the findings* that emerged from investigation of institutions by using the *conceptualisation of equity developed* and, in this way, to understand the implications of the findings for the creation of an equitable and just higher education system for disabled students.

### **8.2.2 Methodology**

The empirical inquiry of this research involved the collection and analysis of data from an initial system wide survey questionnaire sent to the 35 public higher educations in place in South Africa in June 2003. This survey questionnaire was developed and administered as part of a project for the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in which I was one of the principal researchers for the project. The aim of the project was to investigate what was happening across the public higher education system with regard to equity of access and opportunity for disabled students (Council for Higher Education, 2005). I obtained permission from the CHE to use the data from the survey and to undertake follow-up in-depth interviews with 11 of the institutions who had returned their questionnaires. Following an initial analysis of the survey questionnaire data, I undertook the in-depth interviews, which elicited the primary source of data used in this thesis. In selecting the 11 institutions for the in-depth interviews I used various criteria, which I regarded as important in capturing institutional differences across the public higher education system at the time. The in-depth interviews were

undertaken with those individuals at the 11 institutions who had been identified through the survey questionnaire as being responsible for the provision of teaching and learning support for disabled students at their institution. My intention in the in-depth interviews was to explore more fully with the interviewees various issues that had emerged from the initial survey questionnaire and which I regarded as important to answering my central research questions. After an initial analysis of the in-depth interview findings, I used the conceptual and contextual frameworks I had begun to develop to consider the findings more carefully and analyse their meaning in relation to the research questions. As this analysis progressed I reflected back on the initial survey questionnaire data at times, triangulating this with the findings from the in-depth interviews to deepen my insights into what was happening within the 11 institutions.

### **8.2.3 A summary of the conceptualisation of equity for disabled students in higher education**

As noted above, a central research task of this thesis was the development of a theoretical framework for the study, which would provide *conceptual clarity* around what equity for disabled students means within higher education and thus a *set of tools* for analysing the research findings. To do this, I drew selectively from three domains of knowledge. Broadly speaking, these speak to disability and disablement, inclusive education, and the worldwide trend to increase access to and widen participation in higher education systems. I regarded these as areas of sociological enquiry that were important for bringing together understandings of disability and the construction and positioning of disabled learners in the education sphere, with the dynamics and challenges of higher education systems in transition. This process of exploration drew attention to important criticisms that have been raised around dominant conceptualisations of disability and education provision for disabled learners. These provide valuable insights into the ideological and structural forces that shape the educational inequalities

experienced by disabled people, and how these are perpetuated and given legitimacy within the education context. How such dominant perceptions and understandings of disability are given legitimacy in particular settings, such as the academic environment, emerged as especially important to this analysis. The exploration of these critiques also highlighted alternative ways of looking at these concerns and, in this way, provided a new set of tools for understanding the nature of the educational inequalities experienced by disabled students in higher education.

The conceptual framework was deepened by looking more carefully at the South African higher education context with its particular history of inequality. In this exploration of the context, which positions the research, a number of issues were explored that I regarded as especially important to the concerns of the thesis. Firstly, the educational inequalities experienced by disabled learners in South Africa in the past, and what this has meant for their ability to access higher education provision, were discussed. This was followed by an overview of the policy and legislative framework now in place in South Africa, which sets the parameters for disabled students' access to and participation in the public higher education system. I then explored some of the key concerns that emerged out of a particular South African higher education initiative, which we now know as Academic Development (AD). I regarded these concerns as central to issues of equity for disabled students in higher education. However, I was also aware, and therefore drew attention to the fact, that the concerns of disabled students have never featured in any kind of meaningful way in analyses of, and reflections on, the AD project. I regarded this as an important omission that needed to be considered and foregrounded in this study.

Drawing from these various lines of enquiry, the following emerged as the framework I used to understand what equity for disabled students means in higher education:

- The creation of an equitable and just higher education system for disabled students involves recognising the equal importance of two central threads. These are: the *access imperative*, or the ability to gain entry into higher education institutions and programmes of choice without discrimination; and the *participation and success imperative*, which is concerned with ensuring that disabled students are able to participate equitably in the process of teaching and learning and thus have fair chances of success. If the equity project in higher education is taken to include these two central threads, then each must be examined to identify, understand and address the barriers that are particular to those aspects of the equity agenda.
- Similarly, it is valuable in the context of these discussions to conceive of the teaching and learning environment as having two levels that support the participation of students in their academic studies. On the one hand there is what is recognised in this thesis to be the 'macro' level or the broader institutional level. This is where various institutional mechanisms and processes are in place centrally, to effectively *organise, support and monitor the process of teaching and learning* within institutions. Below this is the 'micro' level of the teaching and learning environment. This is the classroom, department or faculty level where the *curriculum is delivered and engaged with* and, thus, where the essential and critical elements of the teaching and learning process take place.
- With regard to the *access imperative*, equity in higher education for disabled students must involve removing those barriers, which restrict and limit their ability to gain entry into higher education institutions and the programmes offered. This means a higher education system where the existence of an impairment, and associated perceptions around it, is not used as a criteria to refuse a student access to the institution or to a programme of their choice.

- With regard to the concerns of *equitable participation and fair chances of success*, equity in higher education involves recognising that educational inequalities experienced by disabled students arise primarily because the institution is unable to respond to the differences that learners bring to the teaching and learning process. This includes different styles and methods of engagement with the curriculum that may be related to the existence of an impairment. I conceptualised these different styles and methods of engagement with the curriculum as the different *learning needs* of students.
- It follows then that any institutional strategies and practices that seek to address these inequalities and create opportunities for equitable participation must be *directed at the system* rather than the learner (a systemic paradigm). They must therefore aim to build the capacity of the system, including its various parts, to respond to these different styles and methods of engagement with the curriculum.
- However, they need to be directed at that *part of the system where engagement with the curriculum takes place* and which is, therefore, primary to students gaining access to the knowledge that is transferred, shared and produced within the university – that is, gaining epistemological access to the university and its benefits (Morrow, 1993). This part of the system is recognised to be the *process of teaching and learning taking place within institutions at the classroom, department and faculty level* - what is recognised in this thesis to be the 'micro' level of the teaching and learning environment.
- The process of teaching and learning at the 'micro' level must be flexible enough in the organisation, delivery and assessment of the curriculum to be able to respond to different styles and methods of engagement. This may be conceived of as a *responsive teaching and learning process*, which is strongly dependent on the *attitudes and practices of the academic staff* and the provision of *appropriate teaching and learning support services* within the institution.

- It follows therefore that the provision of teaching and learning support for disabled students must be structured and organised so as to be able to *influence, support and impact on pedagogical practice* across the institution, especially at the 'micro' level. This means that such provision must be able not only to provide disabled students with specific forms of additional support that they may need to access the curriculum. It must also be able to operate at a '*system-micro*' level to develop the institution's overall capacity to respond to the differences disabled students may bring to the teaching and learning process. In this thesis such an approach to teaching and learning support for disabled students is therefore recognised as a *strong pedagogical approach that is primarily orientated to systemic change (building systemic capacity) at the 'micro' level of the institution.*

### **8.3 Central findings and conclusions**

The central findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the thesis are now summarised according to the two central imperatives of the equity framework discussed above – that is, access without discrimination and equitable opportunities for participation and success. It is important to note here that in reporting on the research findings in the body of the thesis, I made a conscious decision to describe firstly those findings that spoke to the 'participation and success' imperative, and to follow this with the 'access' related findings. This is how the research findings are organised and presented in Chapters Five, Six and Seven of the thesis. I argued that my motivation for doing this was because this organisation of the findings reflected more effectively the exploration of the issues as they emerged from my initial analysis of the survey questionnaire data and then in the in-depth interviews. However, it also reflected what I regarded as a central concern of this thesis. That is, ensuring that disabled students have epistemological access to higher education and its benefits (Morrow, 1993). I have, however, in summarising the conclusions reached in this thesis, returned to the

framework outlined, which logically begins with ensuring entry into the system and then ensuring opportunities for participation and success.

In this discussion on the central findings of the thesis, where these findings have implications for the policy and practices of institutions or for government policy, these implications are highlighted in the text.

### **8.3.1 Access**

The conclusions discussed below emerged from those findings that provided insight into what shapes and impacts on disabled students' admission to the institutions explored in this study and into programmes of their choice. My objective in pursuing this line of enquiry was to consider what appears to be important in influencing the decision making process within institutions towards an application from a disabled student. My overarching concern here was to consider what the findings said about the *right of disabled students to access higher education without discrimination*. In Chapter Three of the thesis I explained how this right is formally protected through various policy and legislative mechanisms, from the country's constitution (Act No. 108 of 1996) to those directly governing the public higher education system. It was this concern, around freedom from discrimination in gaining access to higher education that was central to the conclusions I reached.

The findings showed clearly that two factors were most important in informing the decision making process around a disabled student's application. The first had to do with the *nature of a student's impairment* and/or the physiological category into which it is seen to fit, and whether such impairment would render them unable, in the opinion of the institution, to meet the academic requirements of a course or degree. The second factor, related to the perceived costs that are involved for an institution in accommodating a disabled student. It was evident that these two factors came together in complex ways within the institutional environment to

influence and shape decisions that are made around the admission and accommodation of disabled students. Most importantly, however, the findings showed that, from the perspective of the institution, such decisions, even if they restrict the student's ability to gain access to the institution and, especially to a programme of their choice, could be regarded as reasonable and fair, and, therefore justified. Through such processes of decision making, disabled students are effectively discriminated against in their efforts to gain access to higher education institutions and to programmes of their choice. In analysing these central findings my concern was to understand how such practices could legitimately take place and be regarded as reasonable and fair within the parameters of what is, arguably, a progressive legislative and policy framework. I reached the following conclusions.

The attitudes and practices, which dominate within the academic environment, and which are regarded as legitimate to the undertaking of its core business (for example, maintaining academic standards or managing its limited budget), serve to 'disguise' the discrimination that disabled students may face in accessing higher education. The right of disabled students to access higher education without discrimination is, therefore, compromised and undermined when this right is interpreted and given meaning within the academic environment with its inherent inequalities. In this way, the higher education environment becomes a particular kind of disabling environment, but its disabling features are regarded as legitimate, reasonable and fair, and, therefore, seldom called into question.

If these disabling barriers within the higher education environment are acknowledged and recognised, then the policy and legislative framework presently in place is limited in its ability to leverage the kind of changes necessary to address these barriers. These limitations arise from gaps and weaknesses in the framework, which allow for this right to be interpreted and given meaning at the institutional level, which in turn renders its interpretation subject to the disabling forces I have described.

These conclusions suggest that attention needs to be given to strategies and initiatives that seek to reinterpret and give new meaning to what is reasonable and fair in the admission of disabled students. A strategy adopted in some countries has been the development of **guidelines for institutions**, sometimes called a code of good practice, which aim to interpret the relevant legal and policy parameters within the context of the practices and priorities of higher education institutions. However, while the development of guidelines of this nature will be of use to institutions, it is really from within the institutions themselves that such strategies and initiatives need to come. If this is acknowledged and institutions take responsibility for addressing these concerns, then it is the **voice and experiences of disabled students themselves that should shape the development of such strategies and initiatives**. Put another way, it is disabled students who need to give meaning to how we understand what is reasonable and fair.

### **8.3.2 Participation and success**

The findings from the research that provide insight into the participation and success imperative emerged when I investigated and analysed how the disabled students at the eleven institutions are supported in their academic studies. The focus in the research, therefore, was on the nature and organisation of the provision that is presently in place. This included investigating how support services that are in place are organised and function, the roles and responsibilities assumed by the disability units/programmes and responsible people and therefore their perceptions, experiences and understandings of their work, and the challenges they face. In line with the parameters of the equity framework developed, this exploration was directed towards understanding what was happening at both the 'macro' and 'micro' levels of the teaching and learning environment (Chapters Five and Six).

The exploration into the nature and organisation of existing support services showed that, overall, the kind of support services offered provide an important enabling mechanism for individual disabled students in their academic studies. The findings suggested that without the provision of the minimum levels of support provided at the institutions investigated, it is likely that few disabled students would be able to participate with any degree of confidence and independence in their academic studies.

However, while recognising the importance of such institutional provision for individual disabled students in the present context, the findings also highlighted other issues that became equally important to consider. In many ways, these findings turn the attention away from the individual disabled student and their ability to cope in the present context. They shift attention to what underpins and influences the nature of the provision that is provided and the importance of this orientation to the creation of equity for disabled students. Through this deeper analysis of the findings, the thesis drew attention to two important concerns in this regard. These were:

- i) The separation and categorisation of disabled students, and
- ii) The dominance of a weak pedagogical approach.

### **8.3.2.1 The separation and categorisation of disabled students**

The findings into the roles and responsibilities of the existing disability units/programmes and responsible people showed that, at the 'macro' level of the institution's functioning, a clear separation exists between the various forms of teaching and learning support that are provided for disabled students and those that are in place for other students on the campuses. So, while the services provided are able to assist individual disabled students to cope within the existing academic environment, it was also clear that through the *orientation, organisation and delivery of the services* explored, the recipients of these services are responded to within the institution as a *separate group of students*. Chapter Five outlined a number of ways in

which the units/programmes and responsible people, albeit not always willingly, assume responsibility within the institution for a range of core academic related services to disabled students. For the other, non-disabled students on the campus, such services are provided through existing mainstream services in the institution.

While the intention may not be to separate out disabled students in this way, what is important about this finding is what it reflects about how disabled students and their participation within higher education are viewed, understood, and therefore responded to. My contention in this thesis is that it reflects a structural manifestation within the institution of a particular attitude towards disabled students and their learning needs. Put simply, disabled students are seen as different to the other 'normal' students, and therefore their participation must be supported separately, and in a different way, to the rest of the student body. So while individual disabled students may have access to particular forms of support, as a group they are positioned within the institution as students who are 'not normal'. While such ways of understanding the participation of disabled students underpins the nature of the support that is provided, such understandings are in turn, reinforced and given legitimacy through the way these services are organised and operate. It becomes part of the common sense (Gramsci, 1971) about how disabled students should be supported in their academic studies.

This separation and categorisation of disabled students resonated strongly with key arguments I explored in Chapter Two of the study around the dominant hegemony of disability (Oliver, 1990) and how critical this hegemony is in reproducing the inequalities and oppression experienced by disabled people. Central to this hegemony are the assumptions that are made about normality and, more specifically, that disabled people are 'not normal' (Abberley, 1987). My overarching concern, therefore, is that in the higher education environment, separating and categorising disabled students in this way, however well meaning and effective for individual students in the

present context, fails to address, and may in fact reinforce, a dominant ideology that sees disabled people as different, not 'normal' and thus part of 'the other' (Shakespeare, 1994).

At the institutional level this has important consequences for how the institution as a whole, including the senior management, *understands and views their responsibilities* towards disabled students. Moreover, it has consequences for the *kind of institutional changes* that are regarded as important for creating a more equitable and just higher education system for disabled students. The separation and categorisation of disabled students through the ways discussed in this thesis serves to turn the attention away from the institution as the focus for change. By placing responsibility for supporting disabled students' participation on the units/programmes and responsible people rather than the institution as a whole, a 'solution' is provided to the 'problems' that disabled students may present to the academic environment. Especially the 'problems' that arise through the differences they may bring to the teaching and learning process and the 'problems' this may pose for the academic staff or the institution as a whole. Such 'solutions' are argued and justified as being in the best interests of the students concerned. However, no reciprocal responsibility is placed on the institution, especially the teaching and learning environment, to change in any way. Since disabled students are not seen to be part of the 'normal' student body, the 'normal' mainstream institutional teaching and learning support systems, and existing teaching and learning practices for the 'normal' students, are not called into question in any way.

### **8.3.2.2 A weak pedagogical approach**

In the equity framework developed in this thesis it was explained that the nature of the teaching and learning environment could be conceptualised as having two levels to it: a 'macro' and a 'micro' level. The conclusions discussed above were evident from my exploration into the nature and

organisation of support provided to disabled students at the 'macro' level of the institution. The research process, however, was aimed at exploring how disabled students are supported at both these levels of the teaching and learning environment.

It was during my attempts to understand how disabled students are supported at the 'micro' level of the institution, that is, the classroom, faculty and department level where the curriculum is delivered and engaged with, that the second area of important findings emerged. These related to and derived from my exploration into the challenges posed by the academic staff towards the participation of disabled students in their classes and, therefore, for the work of the disability units/programmes and responsible people. It became clear that the attitudes, behaviour and pedagogical practices of the academic staff are critical to the ability of disabled students to access the curriculum, and therefore to their success in their academic studies. Similarly, the findings showed, in my opinion, that changing those attitudes, behaviour and pedagogical practices among academic staff, which restrict or undermine disabled students effective participation, poses one of the most important, but most difficult, challenges for the creation of equity for disabled students. These challenges need to be considered and understood on the very real stresses that South African academics now face as a result of the national transformation imperatives and international pressures discussed in Chapter Three. Chapter Six of the thesis presents and discusses the findings that emerged around these lines of enquiry. It discusses: the roles and responsibilities assumed by the units/programmes and responsible people in mediating disabled students' engagement with the teaching and learning process at this level; the trends that are evident in the attitudes and behaviour of academics; and work that is being done in the present climate with academics as a key stakeholder group within institutions.

While the findings from this exploration into the 'micro' level are important in and of themselves, it was when I considered them in relation to what the

'macro' level analysis had showed, that the most important findings for the equity concerns of this study emerged. In the equity framework that was developed in this thesis, I argued that essential to disabled students' ability to participate equitably in the process of teaching and learning and thus have fair chances of success, was the provision of teaching and learning support that is informed by, organised around, and orientated towards a *strong pedagogical approach*. This was an approach that is primarily orientated to systemic change (building systemic capacity) at the 'micro' level of the institution. In doing this, teaching and learning support provision for disabled students must be structured and organised so as to *influence, support and impact on pedagogical practice at the 'micro' level as its most important focus and domain of practice*.

The findings from Chapter Six, especially when they were considered in relation to what had been evident at the 'macro' level in Chapter Five, collectively suggest, in my opinion, the dominance of a *weak pedagogical approach to the provision of teaching and learning support for disabled students* in the institutions explored. Three important findings led me to this conclusion.

Firstly, I noted from the evidence collected, the dominance of a *strong individual approach* by the units/programmes and responsible people *towards engaging with the academic staff* on behalf of individual disabled students. While this approach seemed to dominate, the findings also provided strong evidence of the inherent limitations of such an approach in the academic environment. My contention, therefore, is that once again, while the individual mediation role may be important to assisting individual disabled students on a daily basis, it is limited in its ability to build a more responsive teaching and learning environment. ***It is therefore inadequate and, arguably inappropriate as well, to addressing the complex challenge, which the attitudes, behaviour and pedagogical practice of***

***academics clearly present for disabled students' effective participation in the teaching and learning process.***

The second finding that was important to my overarching conclusion of a weak pedagogical approach had to do with the domain of practice or level within the institutions that appeared to be the *primary domain of practice*. That is, the level of the teaching and learning environment that is given most attention by the units/programmes and responsible people, and, therefore, the institution. From the findings I noted that, the teaching and learning support services that operate at the 'macro' level of the institution appear to be more visible and are given greater attention than activities undertaken at the 'micro' level of the institution. It is at this level, where the curriculum is delivered and engaged with, that pedagogical practice can be best influenced and shaped. The 'macro' level on the other hand is orientated more directly to offering technical support and providing particular services to individual disabled students to complement and add value to what is happening in the classroom (Mandew, Maboe-Phike, Jappie, Bodibe and Hlophe, 2003). If this trend is considered in the light of the strong pedagogical approach argued for, then ***the emphasis on the 'macro' level, as the most important domain of practice, is incorrect or inappropriate for the delivery of a strong pedagogical approach. This trend suggests that the primacy of the teaching and learning process in the creation of equity in higher education (Scott, 1995) is insufficiently recognised when it comes to disabled students.***

The dominance of the 'macro' level as the primary domain of practice also served, in my opinion, to direct attention towards those constraints and challenges that appear to impact most directly on what is provided at the 'macro' level. It follows then that these 'macro' level constraints are seen as the *most important constraints* to supporting disabled students. This finding has very important implications for the way in which *institutional resources* are considered and their importance for an equity project for disabled

students. I have regarded these findings from the study as especially important to institutions in the current, resource-constrained context of higher education in South Africa.

The exploration into the nature and organisation of existing support provision within institutions at the macro level (presented in Chapter Five) showed clearly that those institutions with the greatest level of resources, the historically advantaged institutions, were substantially better equipped to provide the kind of technical support and specific services that were evident at the 'macro' level. The resources that the institution has available to allocate to such services, therefore become central to the quality and extent of the provision that exists in this domain of practice. Since this 'macro' level is seen as the most important domain of practice, it is not surprising that resources also become *seen as the most important variable impacting on and restricting disabled students' equitable participation in higher education.*

While the level of institutional resources available is of central concern to any process of change within institutions, and should not be dismissed, the findings suggest that this issue is more complex. Having 'more resources' does not automatically translate into the provision of 'the best kind' of support for disabled students. My concern is that the greater emphasis on the 'macro' level directs attention towards resource constraints and away from pedagogical practice, which reinforces a weak pedagogical approach. Put another way, directing more resources towards 'macro' level teaching and learning support does not necessarily mean a more responsive teaching and learning environment for disabled students. The equity framework argued for in this thesis suggests that ***it is where and how these resources are allocated and thus the conceptualisations of teaching and learning support that underpin these decisions that become most important.*** Moreover, if such resources are used to merely improve such support provision at the 'macro' level, where improvement implies 'more of the same thing', there is little incentive or pressure to move towards developing the

kind of 'systemic-micro' capacity argued for earlier. Thus, ***having more resources does not necessarily mean a stronger pedagogical approach or the commitment to facilitating such forms of institutional change at the 'micro' level.***

While this has important implications for institutions themselves, it also has ***important implications for any government funding directed towards supporting the participation of disabled students in higher education.***

While the study shows conclusively that greater levels of resources from government are required to make real their commitments to disabled students (Matshediso, 2005), ***government resources need to be appropriately directed. They should be directed towards facilitating and leveraging the kind of teaching and learning support I have argued for. That is, services that are driven and orientated towards a strong pedagogical approach.*** In fact, government funding directed in this way becomes an important leverage mechanism for change at the institutional level.

The third finding, which contributed to my assessment of a weak pedagogical approach, had to do with the *dominant organisational form and location in the institution of the existing disability units/programmes and responsible people.* In Chapter Five of the thesis I presented the data which showed that across the institutions investigated the dominant organisational form and institutional location of existing teaching and learning support for disabled students was the following: a distinct or specialised disability unit/programme with associated responsible people, located in the Student Services division on campuses<sup>98</sup>. At the end of Chapter Six some attention is given to what the area of Student Services is taken to mean within the South African context and thus what the focus and orientation is of these services within institutions. What is important about this orientation in the context of this

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<sup>98</sup> In discussing these findings in the thesis I explain that I have used Student Services generically to capture those student support and development divisions that are sometimes referred as Student Affairs or Student Development in institutions.

study is that Student Services are generally those units and departments that provide support and welfare services to students to enhance their learning experience at university by complementing what happens at the classroom level (Mandew et al, 2003). Services such as counselling and careers, health care, accommodation and financial assistance are examples of units most often located within the division of Student Services. It is within this orbit of services, therefore, that the disability units/programmes and responsible people are most often located.

This means that within institutions they are structurally located and form part of that division and its associated services that are orientated to supporting students *outside the classroom*. Moreover, they are located within a set of services in the institution that are specifically conceptualised and organised to operate primarily at the 'macro' level of the institution. Such services are, in fact, designed to *complement* what happens at the classroom level, that is, at the 'micro' level where the curriculum is delivered and engage with. In this way the dominant location of the units/programmes and responsible people shapes and legitimises an *orientation away from that domain* within the institution that is *most important to a strong pedagogical approach*. Similarly, it reinforces an approach that is designed to complement rather than to substantially influence or change the attitudes and practices of the academic staff at the classroom, department and faculty level.

It was also clear from the findings that this dominant location of the units/programmes and responsible people impacts on the power that they have to work with and influence the attitudes and practices of the academic staff. The findings presented and discussed in Chapter Six show how important relations of power, and how such power is exercised and given legitimacy in the academic environment, are to disabled students' participation and success. The dominant institutional location of the disability units/programmes and responsible people means that *they are located outside the realm of the institution (i.e. at the department or faculty level)*

*where they would be seen to have a legitimate right, and therefore the power, to influence attitudes and practices at the 'micro' level.*

I regarded this finding as especially important to the South African higher education context. As explained earlier in this conclusion, in Chapter Three of the thesis I explored the historical development of Academic Development (AD) initiatives in higher education in South Africa. I argued here that these initiatives have been extremely important in linking equity concerns to teaching and learning in higher education institutions. They have emphasised influencing pedagogical practice to ensure that all students have the epistemological access to higher education (Morrow, 1993) I have argued for. The primary domain of practice of the Academic Development project is therefore the classroom, department and faculty level – the 'micro' level of the institution. However, as I emphasised in Chapter Three, the learning needs of disabled students have largely been ignored in the historical development of these initiatives. Very little appears to have changed in this regard.

My conclusion from the findings of this study is that the primary location for teaching and learning support that presently exists for disabled students appears to reinforce this historical omission. In doing this the potential for initiatives such as Academic Development, or those that are similarly organised and orientated towards the 'micro' level of the institution, to support the participation of disabled students, remains largely unexplored. Rather, it reinforces the notion that teaching and learning support for disabled students is different and separate from other forms of teaching and learning support. It is more strongly orientated towards meeting the psycho-social needs of disabled students and helping them to 'cope' in the mainstream academic environment. This suggests, therefore, that: ***the institutional location of any services, programmes or initiatives that are orientated towards supporting disabled students' participation must be within that division or set of programmes that are orientated towards supporting***

***teaching and learning within the institution and whose primary domain of practice, therefore, is the classroom, department and faculty level.***

#### **8.4 The limitations of the research**

This thesis has explored the responses of universities to disabled students admission and participation by capturing and analysing the experiences and perspectives of those individuals who are responsible within their institution for the provision of teaching and learning support to disabled students. In a number of places in the thesis it is recognised and acknowledged that to develop an holistic picture of what is happening within institutions there are other 'voices' which also need to be captured and integrated into the analysis. Uppermost in this regard must be the perspectives and experiences of disabled students themselves. The absence of this voice within the research is recognised as a limitation to this study. Similarly, while the voice of disabled students is most important here, this limitation also relates to other voices within the institutions. The perspectives of senior management personnel as well as the academic staff are especially important in this regard.

It is also recognised that this research process carries with it the limitations of having to rely on data sent in by the 24 institutions that returned the survey questionnaires and from the 13 people who were interviewed. Similarly, although the sample of institutions for the in-depth interviews were stratified to provide as representative a group as possible, a small sample always brings with it inherent limitations as to what can be generalised across the system as a whole. The intention of this thesis was not to profile broadly and superficially what was happening across the system, but to develop a deeper perspective on key issues of concern and importance to the creation of equity for disabled students in higher education.

## 8.5 Further research

The limitations of this research also provide a starting point for identifying important areas for further research that can effectively address the gaps that have been identified above. They suggest that capturing the concerns and experiences of disabled students who are presently completing their academic studies, as well as those who have completed their studies, is extremely important and necessary research. In addition to these perspectives, it is also important to develop further insight into the nature of the barriers at the schooling level, which continue to impact on the ability of disabled students to access higher education.

The findings of this thesis and the limitations identified draw attention to the academic staff as key to understanding and addressing the nature of the barriers that are so important for disabled students at the classroom, department and faculty level. Their opinions, experiences and perspectives also need to be captured through further research. Research that is able to capture and explore their experiences and make meaning of these within the changing higher education landscape in South Africa, has value not only for addressing the challenges posed by this thesis, but also for other transformation imperatives that do and will affect them. Similarly, the leadership and organisational challenges involved in integrating and taking forward the kinds of equity concerns addressed in this thesis, from the perspective of the senior management personnel, is equally important for further research.

Central to the conclusions reached in this thesis are concerns around the forms of separation that exist between the provision of teaching and learning support for disabled students and that which is in place for the other, non-disabled students. Similarly, the thesis has argued for an approach to teaching and learning support, which is orientated to building the capacity of the system at the 'micro' level to respond to the differences that students

bring to the teaching and learning process. How to go about building such capacity within institutions provides another important focus for future research. In this regard, it would be valuable to begin to document and reflect on existing initiatives and strategies within institutions that are driven by such an approach.

This thesis shows, in my opinion, the value and importance of qualitative research that seeks to understand more clearly what is happening within higher education institutions in South Africa. Such research, which is able to move beyond quantitative indicators of progress, is critical to taking forward the equity goals that are central to the transformation of the South African higher education system. This research has shown how vital such in-depth explorations are into understanding the nature of the academic environment as a particular disabling environment for disabled students in their efforts to gain access to higher education and its benefits. Similarly, it has shown how this environment is influenced and shaped by forces external to the institution, which, in the South African context, have arisen out of a particular history of inequality and injustice – which now needs to be redressed. Moreover, the issues which the thesis raises, around how these barriers arise, how they are reproduced, and most importantly, how they are given legitimacy within the institutions explored in this study, are not only relevant to the equity concerns of disabled students. They are important to understanding the nature and form of the inequalities that many students experience within the South African higher education context, especially those who have been excluded from accessing higher education provision in the past. This suggests that any further research that seeks to explore the South African higher education context in this way will be valuable to taking forward these equity concerns.

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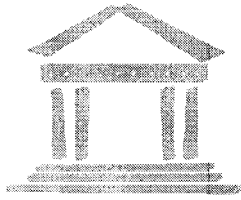
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University of Cape Town

## APPENDIX A

### Copy of survey questionnaire

University of Cape Town



EDUCATION POLICY UNIT  
University of the Western Cape

**PROVISION OF  
TEACHING AND LEARNING SUPPORT  
FOR  
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES  
IN SOUTH AFRICAN  
HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS**

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## **INSTRUCTIONS**

1. Please answer all the questions as fully as possible
2. If you are unable to answer any question please indicate this by writing 'N/A' next to the question
3. Where the question requires you to choose a particular option (e.g. yes or no) please tick the appropriate box next to the answer of your choice (not in the margin on the right-hand side which is for office use only)
4. If you would prefer to complete the questionnaire in electronic form please contact us and we will e-mail you a copy. A copy of the questionnaire is also available on the *Notice Board* of the EPU website ([www.epu.uwc.ac.za](http://www.epu.uwc.ac.za)). This version can be downloaded from the website, completed and then returned via e-mail or through the post to the EPU.
5. Should you have any queries regarding the questionnaire please feel free to contact us.
6. We would be grateful if you could complete and return the questionnaire to us by **Friday 27 June 2003**. A self-addressed envelope for this purpose is enclosed for your convenience.
7. All queries, requests for electronic copies of the questionnaire or returned copies via e-mail can be directed to:

Colleen Howell  
Education Policy Unit  
University of the Western Cape  
[chowell@uwc.ac.za](mailto:chowell@uwc.ac.za)  
Phone: 021 959 2580  
Fax: 021 959 3278

**Thank you very much for your assistance**

**SECTION A: PROFILE OF INSTITUTION**

*For  
office*

A1. Name and address of institution.

Name	
Postal address	

A2. Name and position of person completing questionnaire.

Name		
Job title		
Department/ Unit		
Contact details:	Telephone:	
	Fax:	
	E-mail address:	

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University of Cape Town

**SECTION B: INSTITUTIONAL POLICY**

B1. Do you have any policies/guidelines in place to assist you in providing support to students with disabilities?

|     |                          |
|-----|--------------------------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

B2. If **Yes**, please indicate what kind of policy/guidelines you make use of.  
(please tick the appropriate box or boxes if more than one answer is appropriate)

|                                                                                                                           |                          |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| The institution has a formal policy/guidelines on providing support to students with disabilities                         | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| We make use of informal policy/guidelines on providing support to students with disabilities                              | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| We make use of other institutional guidelines around general student support in the institution                           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| We make use of guidelines provided by organisations outside the institution around support for students with disabilities | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other guidelines (please explain)                                                                                         | <input type="checkbox"/> |

*(If you have a formal policy/guidelines and it is not available on your Website please send us a copy by post or e-mail.)*

B3. If you answered **No** to Question B1, do you feel that a policy/guidelines on providing support to students with disabilities would assist you in your work?

|     |                          |
|-----|--------------------------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

B4. Please explain why you feel a policy/guidelines would or would not be of assistance in your work.

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B5. Using the following scale, please indicate in the table below how familiar you are with these policy documents.

- 1= I have read the policy and am familiar with its content
- 2= I have seen the document but am not really familiar with its content
- 3= I have heard about the document but have not seen it or read it
- 4= Have never heard of the policy

|                                                                                                              |   |   |   |   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| The Integrated National Disability Strategy (1997)                                                           | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Education White Paper 6: Special Needs Education: Building an Inclusive Education and Training System (2001) | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| The National Plan for Higher Education (2001)                                                                | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |



**SECTION C: PROFILE OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES AT YOUR INSTITUTION**

C1. In the table below, please provide details (*if possible*) of the students with disabilities who are presently enrolled at your institution.

|                                      | African | Coloured | Indian | White |                     |
|--------------------------------------|---------|----------|--------|-------|---------------------|
| Number of students with disabilities |         |          |        |       | Male                |
|                                      |         |          |        |       | Female              |
| Sub total                            |         |          |        |       | <b>Total number</b> |

*(if you are unable to provide details according to race and gender, please just fill in the total number)*

C2. If you were able to answer Question C1, please indicate from what source you obtained this information. (please tick the appropriate box or boxes if more than one answer is appropriate)

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                   |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Admissions form requests students to indicate whether they have a disability                                                                                                                                              | <input type="checkbox"/>                          |
| Admissions form requests students to indicate whether they will require any assistance associated with a disability from support systems in the institution (e.g. disability unit, student affairs office etc)            | <input type="checkbox"/>                          |
| Information has been collected from tracking the number of students who have sought assistance in relation to their disability from support systems in the institution (e.g. disability unit, student affairs office etc) | <input type="checkbox"/>                          |
| Other:                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |

C3. If you were able to answer Question C1, please indicate (if possible) the number of students with disabilities in each of the categories listed below.

|                                                                           |                              | <i>number</i>                                     |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Undergraduate students enrolled in contact teaching programme (on campus) |                              | <input type="checkbox"/>                          |
| Postgraduate students enrolled in contact teaching programme (on campus)  | Postgraduate diploma/honours | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                                                                           | Masters                      | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                                                                           | PHD                          | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Undergraduate students enrolled in distance education programme           |                              | <input type="checkbox"/>                          |
| Postgraduate students enrolled in distance education programme            | Postgraduate diploma/honours | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                                                                           | Masters                      | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
|                                                                           | PHD                          | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other:                                                                    |                              | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |

C4. If you obtained the information around students with disabilities from your admissions form, please indicate (or attach a copy of the question) how this information is requested in the form.

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**SECTION D: NATURE AND STRUCTURE OF SUPPORT SERVICES OFFERED**

D1. Does your institution provide any teaching and learning support services to students with disabilities?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

***If you answered Yes to Question D1, please now answer questions D2 to D15.***

***If you answered No to Question D1, please go directly to question D16***

D2. In the table below please indicate what kind of teaching and learning support services you offer to students with disabilities on campus. (*please tick the appropriate box or boxes if you offer more than one kind of service*) Please briefly describe (*if possible*) the nature of the service offered in the section below the identified service).

Assistance in making <u>print material</u> (e.g. lecture notes, library materials) <u>accessible</u> to students with disabilities (e.g. braille of lecture notes, putting information on tapes)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Nature of service:</i>	
<u>Sign Language</u> interpretation facilities	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Nature of service:</i>	
Providing <u>personal assistants</u> to student with disabilities to enable them to participate in lectures/seminars/tutorials (e.g. note takers)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Nature of service:</i>	
Direct provision of <u>information communication technology (ICTs)</u> (e.g. computers with voice recognition software, adapted computer hardware)	<input type="checkbox"/>
<i>Nature of service:</i>	

Organisation or undertaking of <u>specific academic activities</u> to accommodate students with disabilities (e.g organisation and administration of extra time during exams, organisation of additional tutorial assistance)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Nature of service:	
Other services:	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

For  
office

D3. Please explain how the support services that you offer are organised at your institution. *(please tick the appropriate box or boxes if more than one answer is appropriate)*

The support services are offered directly through a <u>disability unit/disability programme</u> on campus	<input type="checkbox"/>
The support services are offered through the <u>student affairs</u> division on campus	<input type="checkbox"/>
<u>Each faculty/department</u> offers services directly to students with disabilities within the faculty/department	<input type="checkbox"/>
The support services are offered through <u>another learning support unit/programme</u> on campus (e.g. academic development centre)	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other:	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>

D4: Are any of the support services that your institution offers to students with disabilities (as indicated above) provided through an external agency/organisation? (e.g. material is brailled by an off-campus braille service)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

D5: If **Yes**, please explain.

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D6. In the table below, please provide the following information for all staff members who are presently employed in a formal capacity to provide support to students with disabilities on your campus. Please fill in your own details in the first row.

Job title	Job description (main responsibilities)	Nature of contract	
		Permanent contract (two years or more)	<input type="checkbox"/>
		One year renewable contract	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Contract for less than one year	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Permanent contract (two years or more)	<input type="checkbox"/>
		One year renewable contract	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Contract for less than one year	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Permanent contract (two years or more)	<input type="checkbox"/>
		One year renewable contract	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Contract for less than one year	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Permanent contract (two years or more)	<input type="checkbox"/>
		One year renewable contract	<input type="checkbox"/>
		Contract for less than one year	<input type="checkbox"/>

D7. If your services are offered directly through a disability unit/disability programme on campus, do you have contact with/collaborate with any other learning support units on campus? (e.g. academic development programme, writing centre etc)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

D8. If **Yes**, please explain how you collaborate with other learning support units/programmes on campus.

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D9. Do students pay any additional costs to use the services you provide?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

D10. If **Yes**, please explain.

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D11. Do you make use of volunteers in the provision of support to students with disabilities on your campus?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

D12. If **Yes**, please explain the kind of work which the volunteers do.

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D13. If you answered **Yes** to **Question D11**, please indicate whether the volunteers receive any kind of payment for their services.

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

D14: Do you provide any other services for students with disabilities that are not related to the direct provision of teaching and learning support? (e.g. assisting with the provision of residential accommodation for students with disabilities, acting in an advisory capacity to institution's management around disability related issues)

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

D15: If **Yes**, please explain.

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***If you have answered Questions D2 to D15, please proceed now to Section E***

D16. If you answered **No** to **Question D1**, please explain how students with disabilities on your campus are supported in their studies.

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D17: If you presently have no provision to support students with disabilities in their studies, do you have any plans in place to develop any support systems in the future?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

D18: If **Yes**, please explain what plans are in place.

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**SECTION E: CURRICULUM FLEXIBILITY/RESPONSIVENESS**

For  
office

E1. Do you undertake any work with the academic staff in supporting them/assisting them to ensure that students with disabilities are able to participate more effectively in their lectures/tutorials/seminars? (e.g using various kinds of teaching methods, different forms of assessment, organising the classroom in new ways etc)

|     |                          |
|-----|--------------------------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

E2. If **Yes**, please explain what kind of work you do with the academic staff.

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E3. If **No**, what has stopped you from working with the academic staff around curriculum flexibility issues? *(please tick the appropriate box or boxes if more than one answer is appropriate)*

|                                                                                    |                          |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|
| There is insufficient capacity (human or financial) to undertake this kind of work | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| This kind of work will not benefit students with disabilities                      | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Academic staff are resistant to being supported in this way                        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Do not have sufficient management support to undertake this kind of work           | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other:                                                                             | <input type="checkbox"/> |

E4: If you have filled in the table above (E3), do you have any plans in place to work more directly with the academic staff?

|     |                          |
|-----|--------------------------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

E5: If **Yes**, please explain what plans you have in place.

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E6: If **No**, please comment.

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**SECTION F: FUNDING OF SUPPORT SERVICES**

F1: Does most of the funding for the services you offer (more than 50%) come directly from internal sources (within the institution) (e.g. student affairs budget), or external sources (outside the institution) (e.g. donor funding)?  
*(please tick the appropriate box)*

Internal sources	<input type="checkbox"/>
External sources	<input type="checkbox"/>
Approximately half comes from internal sources and half from external sources	<input type="checkbox"/>
Unsure	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other source (please explain):	<input type="checkbox"/>

F2: If you receive money from internal sources (within the institution), please describe where your funding comes from.

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F3: If you receive money from external sources (outside the institution), please describe where your funding comes from.

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**SECTION G: NETWORKING**

G1. Do you collaborate with any other higher education institutions around teaching and learning support for students with disabilities? (e.g sharing information, sharing assistive devices, joint projects etc)

|     |                          |
|-----|--------------------------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

G2: If **Yes**, please explain the nature of your collaboration.

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G3: If **No**, do you think that collaboration between higher institutions in your region would improve the provision of support services to students with disabilities in your institution?

|     |                          |
|-----|--------------------------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

G4: Do you collaborate with any other organisations (e.g NGOs) regarding teaching and learning support for students with disabilities? (e.g sharing information, joint projects etc)

|     |                          |
|-----|--------------------------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

G4: If **Yes**, please explain the nature of your collaboration.

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G5: If **No**, do you think that collaboration between your institution and other organisations in your region would improve the provision of support services to students with disabilities in your institution?

|     |                          |
|-----|--------------------------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

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**SECTION H: CONSTRAINTS**

For  
off.

H1: Indicate in order of priority the three most important constraints to providing effective teaching and learning support to students with disabilities on your campus. *(indicate your choice by using the numbers from the list below)*

1	Insufficient funding
2	Lack of support from senior management in the institution
3	Resistance from academics in the institution
4	Students with disabilities are reluctant to ask for assistance
5	Insufficient staff to provide an effective service

Choice 1 (most important): \_\_\_\_\_

Choice 2 (2<sup>nd</sup> most important): \_\_\_\_\_

Choice 3 (3<sup>rd</sup> most important): \_\_\_\_\_

H2: Are there any other constraints that you feel are important to providing effective teaching and learning support to students with disabilities on your campus? Please explain.

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**SECTION I: FUTURE PLANS**

For  
office

I1. Do you have any plans in place to improve the provision of teaching and learning support to students with disabilities on your campus in the future?

|     |  |
|-----|--|
| Yes |  |
| No  |  |

I2. If **Yes**, please describe your plans for the future.

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**SECTION J: OTHER**

J1. Please feel free to comment on any issue that you think the questionnaire has not covered or make any other comments about this questionnaire.

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## APPENDIX B

### Interview schedule used in in-depth interviews

University of Cape Town

## **General questions arising from survey questionnaire to be probed in in-depth interview (for all interviewees)**

### **POLICY**

#### Question B2:

Policy – nature of policy and get copy

How did policy come about

Is policy part of institutional plan/strategic plan, is there a link

#### Question B5

Familiarity with three policy documents

### **DATA**

#### Question C1 & C2

Sourcing of data, difficulties in getting data, how accurate, plans for the future in this area

Race and gender

Career pathing

### **SUPPORT SERVICES**

#### Question D2 and D3

Go through the kind of services that they offer, pick on specific initiatives/kinds of support offered by different institutions, how practically organised and operate, how effective etc.

Plans for the future – ideal, what possible, constraints etc

### **CURRICULUM**

Where no link with academic staff – probe why this is so – probe any link/if not why not with AD initiatives on campus – how see connection with AD

Probe where specific initiatives are mentioned in questionnaire about links with staff eg. Diversity training

What are main challenges in this area

Thoughts about this area for the future

### **FUNDING**

#### Questions F2 and F3

Probe sources of funding, important issues around funding

## **NETWORKING**

How important do they think this is?

How do they feel about a model of additional support provision which is based on regional collaboration?

## **CONSTRAINTS and FUTURE**

Explore in more depth the constraints that they have identified and link this to priorities for the future

## **OTHER**

Pick up on any other issues which they have raised in the questionnaire. Ask if would like to raise any further issues or ask any questions.

University of Cape Town

Research process (key focus areas)		
Name of institution:		
Focus area	In-depth interview question	Issues arising from information in returned questionnaire
Paradigm shift (discursive/conceptual link) (mainly about deficit to systemic and valuing of diversity/difference)		
Curriculum flexibility/responsiveness		
Teaching and learning support		
Other		

## APPENDIX C

Copy of table from CHE research report

University of Cape Town

**Table 9:** Overview of the kinds of technical teaching and learning services offered to disabled students across the responding institutions

Type of service	Details of specific services offered or activities undertaken
<b>Provision of learning materials in alternative formats</b>	<p>Learning materials used by students are converted through facilities on the campus or through the use of external services into formats other than the printed material normally used in classrooms.</p> <p>Alternative formats offered include Brailled material, audio cassette tapes, printed material in larger fonts, video footage, and various electronic formats that can be accessed through existing ICT (information communication technology) facilities on campus.</p> <p>Learning materials include course outlines, lecture notes, study guides, course readers and various forms of library material that students may require for assignment purposes.</p>
<b>Alternative or supported assessment measures</b>	<p>Assessment materials such as examination papers and assignment outlines are converted into the alternative formats listed above.</p> <p>Administration (organisation and invigilation) of additional time allocation for tests and examinations</p> <p>Administration (organisation and invigilation) of alternative venues for tests and examinations</p> <p>Evaluation, advice, negotiation and follow-up regarding alternative assessment methods where necessary, such as oral examinations</p> <p>Designated personnel such as scribes or additional invigilators to help students in examinations</p>
<b>Personal assistance</b>	<p>Various mentoring programmes (orientation and ongoing support)</p> <p>Note taker/scribe/amanuensis and other providers of personal assistance in the classroom situation (e.g. assistance with laboratory work, and for examination purposes)</p> <p>Additional tutoring where required in specific subjects and general academic skills such as study methods, essay writing etc.</p> <p>Advice forums and various counselling and support services</p> <p>Information material (e.g. information booklets about available services) and appropriate signage on campus</p>
<b>Information communication technology</b>	<p>Adaptive ICT facilities (hardware and software) to enable students to access information (e.g. Internet access, Braille conversion and printing), communicate electronically (e.g. e-mail and information sharing via campus network) and undertake assessment tasks (e.g. essay preparation)</p> <p>Computer literacy training</p> <p>Adaptive ICT facilities on campus and in residences</p>
<b>Sign language provision</b>	<p>Sign language interpreters for classroom situation and during examinations where necessary</p> <p>Training of staff in South African Sign Language (SASL) to help students where necessary</p>

From: Council on Higher Education (2005). South African Higher Education Responses to Students with Disabilities. Higher Education Monitor, No. 3, September 2005. Pretoria: CHE.