

“We are not blind researchers”: Entering and negotiating power and privilege in schools for the blind as sighted researchers



By Lindokuhle Deyi Ubisi, University of South Africa (UNISA), South Africa, Risenga, R.R. (UNISA), Tsabedze, W.F. (UNISA), Mathabela, T. (UNISA), Mabena, K. (UNISA), Mnguni, M. (UNISA), Masinga, N. (UNISA), Mdlolo, B. (UNISA), Genqese, N. (UNISA), Nkuna, M. (UNISA), Mathebula, A., Morake, E. (UNISA), Mabona, N. (UNISA), Thwala, T. (UNISA), Ajuwon, P.M., Missouri State University, Springfield, Missouri, U.S.A.

Abstract

Our community engagement project aimed to capacitate secondary school teachers of visually impaired learners to use anatomically correct models during their comprehensive sexuality education lessons. Given that the beneficiaries of this project were ultimately visually impaired learners, as sighted researchers, we approached entry into schools for the blind with the need to acknowledge our privilege as able-bodied researchers. With the principle of “nothing about us, without us”, we further relied on two blind professors both locally and internationally as experts to guide our community praxis (i.e., how to position ourselves and manage possible resistance due to being outsiders). However, upon entering this space, we not only found that most staff (e.g., teachers) working with visually impaired learners were sighted. More importantly, our engagement within this space led us to realize that preoccupation with privilege tended to essentialize the powerlessness of people with disabilities (PwDs) more broadly. Moving from the decolonial project, we found that seeing ourselves as ‘privileged’ reproduced a charity model where PwDs are viewed as objects of pity, reliant on their able-bodied counterparts to be included in society. We found that the acknowledgement of power was a catharsis for us with limited benefit methodologically but with its own caveats.

Key words: catharsis; charity model; community engagement; people with disabilities; power; privilege

Introduction

Myths and misconceptions about the sexuality of people with disabilities (PwDs) are deeply rooted in societal prejudices (Bolarinwa, Odimegwu and Adebisi 2024; Chappell 2019; Neille, McEwen, and de Andrade 2024). These misconceptions often lead to the sexual needs and rights of PwDs being overlooked, both in South Africa and globally. PwDs are frequently perceived as either asexual or overly sexualized, resulting in their exclusion from comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) (Davis et al. 2024; Kumar 2014; McRuer 2006). Despite the integral role of CSE in school curricula (Chappell 2015, 2016, 2019; Davies et al. 2024; Hanass-Hancock et al. 2018a, 2018b), teachers often struggle to deliver this content effectively and confidently (Kelly and Kapperman 2021; Rohleder et al. 2009; Wild et al. 2019). This challenge is particularly acute in schools for children with disabilities (CwDs). This includes where teachers encountering barriers such as personal discomfort, cultural and religious beliefs, and potential opposition from parents (Kapperman and Kelly 2014; Krupa and Esmail 2010; Author-Anonymous 2021a, 2021b, 2023a, 2023b). Additionally, the lack of specialized teacher education and appropriate classroom resources further hampers the delivery of accessible and meaningful CSE for CwDs (Kelly and Kapperman 2021; Rohleder et al. 2009; Wild et al. 2019).

Kapperman and Kelly (2021), Krupa and Esmail (2010), as well as Author-Anonymous (2021a, 2021b, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c) have for example demonstrated that learners with visual impairments (LVI) often lack accurate knowledge about anatomy. For instance, Hicks (1980) described a blind boy who mistakenly believed that the vagina was located underneath the breast. This gap in anatomical understanding can lead to misinformation about their own bodies and potentially result in unwanted or uninformed sexual practices (Kapperman and Kelly 2013). LVI require tactile resources that they can touch and feel to effectively grasp and connect with the information presented. In this case, verbal explanations alone are insufficient (Krupa and Esmail 2010). To address this need, scholars recommend integrating anatomically correct

“

This gap in anatomical understanding can lead to misinformation about their own bodies and potentially result in unwanted or uninformed sexual practices (Kapperman and Kelly 2013).

”

models (ACMs) into CSE lessons (Kapperman and Kelly 2013; Krupa and Esmail 2010; Ubisi and Tsabedze 2024). ACMs are three-dimensional educational tools that accurately represent human genitalia and are specifically designed for teaching purposes (Kapperman and Kelly 2013; Krupa and Esmail 2010; Author-Anonymous 2021a, 2021b, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c). Unlike dildos, vibrators, and masturbators, which are primarily intended for personal sexual pleasure, ACMs are used solely for educational purposes (Naphtali et al. 2009; Peta 2018; Taylor 2011).

Our community engagement project aimed to evaluate the readiness and train secondary¹ schoolteachers of LVI to use ACMs in their CSE lessons across four secondary SFB. Inspired by reflexivity literature, we sought to be mindful and reflective researchers, carefully balancing our personal and professional positionalities while addressing potential resistance (Idahosa and Bradbury 2020; Le Bourdon 2022; Sultana 2007). As Le Bourdon (2022) notes, reflexivity is essential when working with groups to which one does not belong personally or has personal connections. This includes our role as academics engaging with teachers in SFB. We aimed to use our reflections to critically assess how our sighted and professional positions influenced power dynamics, research

methods, interpretations, as well as the knowledge production process (Sultana 2007). Guided by the principle of “Nothing about us, without us,” we strived to ensure that our approach was inclusive, advocative, and representative of PwDs. This includes acknowledging our multiple privileges as able-bodied researchers.

The paper starts off by exploring the activist slogan on, “Nothing about us, without us” and its implication on disability studies work. The paper traces the socio-cultural and medical discourses about the sexuality of people with disabilities globally and locally. This is to provide a historical background of the intersection of disability and sexuality. The paper further discusses South African teachers’ views of teaching comprehensive sexuality education to children with disabilities to contextualize the potential impact of our community engagement project. Then, the methodology, process of data collection, data analysis, study findings, and practical implications and recommendations for future research are discussed.

The “Nothing about us, without us” slogan

As allies in Disability Studies, we initially reviewed literature on the slogan “Nothing about us, without us” to understand and address our positionality. This slogan, adopted by the disability rights movement, asserts that no policy or practice affecting PwDs should exist without their direct involvement in decision-making (Barbour 2024; Stiker 2019; Withers 2024). It emphasizes the necessity for self-representation and autonomy for PwDs, rejecting paternalistic approaches that exclude their input and guidance (Barbour 2024; Stiker 2019; Withers 2024). Charlton (1998) argues that this slogan shifts the perception of disability from a purely medical issue to a political and social identity. This includes compelling systems to integrate the voices and experiences of disabled individuals into decision-making processes. Inckle, Brighton, and Sparkes (2023) highlight the slogan’s political origins, noting its emergence from activism by PwDs and its focus on control and voice in resisting oppression. Therefore, “Nothing about us, without us” signifies a move from a charity model to a social and rights-based model. This includes tracing oppression and exclusion of disability as a societal phenomenon instead of a result of an individual disability. From this framework, PwDs assert their right to equal

participation and recognition across all areas of life, including the negotiation of sexual rights and needs (Barbour 2024; Stiker 2019; Withers 2024).

Socio-cultural and medical discourses about the sexuality of people with disabilities

Children and adolescents with disabilities, like all individuals, undergo sexual development as they mature into adulthood (Author-Anonymous 2020). Sexuality is a fundamental aspect of human identity, evolving through interactions with the social environment, with elements such as age, gender, and race being relatively fixed while personal qualities are shaped through these interactions (Chappell 2015). However, negative assumptions about the sexuality of PwDs often lead to the suppression and marginalization of their sexual experiences (Bolarinwa et al. 2024; Chappell 2019; Neille et al. 2024). Societal myths frequently portray PwDs as either asexual or incapable of controlling their sexual desires (Chappell 2019; Davies et al. 2024; Hanass-Hancock et al. 2018a, 2018b).

“

This lack of appropriate education heightens their vulnerability to sexual assault, sexually transmitted infections, and unplanned pregnancies, contributing to anxiety and hindering the development of positive sexual identities (Ubisi and Tsabedze 2024).

”

These stereotypes infantilize PwDs, portraying them as needing constant protection due to a fear of stigma. Barriers such as discrimination and inaccessibility further complicate access to healthcare and communication about sexual health needs. This lack of appropriate education heightens their vulnerability to sexual assault, sexually transmitted infections, and unplanned pregnancies, contributing to anxiety and hindering the development of positive sexual identities (Ubisi and Tsabedze 2024). To counter these issues, a proactive approach to sexuality education and fostering a sense of autonomy are crucial for PwDs to experience their bodies as capable of sexual expression (Chappell 2019; Davies et al. 2024; Hanass-Hancock et al. 2018a, 2018b). Empowering teachers to deliver CSE effectively and confidently is essential for supporting the sexual development of both children and adults with disabilities (Chappell 2019).

South African teachers' views of teaching comprehensive sexuality education to children with disabilities

Education is a crucial means of empowering individuals within any society. CSE is designed to provide young people with the skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values necessary to promote their health, well-being, and dignity (Kelly and Kapperman 2021; Rohleder et al. 2009; Wild et al. 2019). Teachers play a central role in using CSE to enhance sexual health access for CwDs (Chappell 2019; Davies et al. 2024; Hanass-Hancock et al. 2018a, 2018b). However, teachers require thorough professional preparation and ongoing training in CSE. This includes acquiring the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources to teach CSE (Author-Anonymous 2021a, 2021b, 2023a, 2023b, 2023c). For instance, a review by Author-Anonymous (2023c) highlighted the lack of literature in South Africa confirming that teachers of LVI receive training to use ACMs in their CSE lessons. This gap suggests that practical, meaningful demonstrations—such as illustrating the difference between a flaccid and erect penis using ACMs—are often overlooked (Ubisi and Tsabedze 2024). Furthermore, South Africa's diverse racial, cultural, and religious landscape presents additional challenges. Teachers who wish to promote CSE may face resistance from religious and cultural groups who argue that CSE 'sexualizes'

learners (Chappell 2019; Davies et al. 2024; Hanass-Hancock et al. 2018a, 2018b). Such resistance can undermine teachers' confidence and competence in delivering CSE. Despite this, it is important for dissenting parents and organizations to recognize that sexuality is an integral part of young people's identities. CSE aims to equip all learners, including LVI, with the information needed to make informed, healthy choices about their growing psychosexual development (Chappell 2019; Davies et al. 2024; Hanass-Hancock et al. 2018a, 2018b).

Research methodology

Project description

This paper forms part of a larger funded project to develop a CSE curriculum for LVI. The project members consisted of academics from various departments such as psychology, psychology of education, development studies, health studies, and industrial engineering with one administrative staff member from the University of South Africa. We consulted both a local and international blind professor to build awareness of our bias and manage potential resistance from the schools. Official permission to conduct research in schools was obtained from 3 Heads of Provincial Education Departments. Soon after, ethical clearance was obtained from the University of South Africa's Research Ethics Committee with clearance number: 22/04/13/90352025/02/AM in agreement to abide to written informed consent, ensuring privacy of identifying information, voluntary participation, as well as no negative consequences following decline to participate in the study at any time. No financial incentive was offered to participate in this study.

Sampling

Teachers were conveniently sampling, with a total of 30 teachers (2 males and 28 females) from 5 South African SFB. The principal investigator sent an invitation email to school principals, which included the following attachments: permission letters from Heads of Provincial Education Departments, institutional ethical clearance documents, participant information sheets, informed consent forms, and a set of interview questions for teachers interested in the study. In response, the school principals provided a list of teachers who expressed interest in participating, categorized by their teaching

or personal experience in Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE). The teachers were listed according to their educational phase: foundation (Grades R-3), intermediate (Grades 4-6), senior (Grades 7-9), and further education (Grades 10-12). Below, Table 1 below for participants' characteristics.

Table 1: Teachers' characteristics

Type of school	Number of teachers	Male	Female	School phase
SFB1 (Primary & Secondary)	4		4	1 Foundation phase, 2 Intermediate phase, 1 Senior phase
SFB2 (Primary)	6	2	4	5 Foundation phase, 1 Intermediate phase
SFB3 (Secondary)	5		5	5 Senior phase
SFB4 (Primary)	8		8	6 Foundation phase, 2 Intermediate phase
SFB5 (Primary & Secondary)	7		7	2 Foundation phase, 3 Intermediate phase, 2 Senior phase
Total	30 teachers	2 males	28 females	

Data collection methods

The study employed a qualitative, exploratory, multiple case study design for data generation and analysis (Babbie and Mouton 2001). Data were collected through focus group discussions (FGDs) facilitated by an unstructured interview guide. Each FGD lasted between 1 and 2 hours, with breaks provided as necessary. In total, 5 FGDs were conducted, accommodating both English and participants' preferred languages. The development of the interview guide was informed by findings from the broader project and a review of relevant local and international literature (Babbie and Mouton 2001).

Data management and analysis

Audio recordings from the FGDs were transcribed to ensure accuracy (Babbie and Mouton 2001). The raw data, including these audio recordings, were stored in a Google Drive folder with restricted access limited to the principal investigator and the research team involved in the broader project. In this study however, we rely on our fieldnotes as a rich data source for researcher reflexivity (Babbie and Mouton 2001). In accordance with the

<contains author identifying information> Research Ethics Committee guidelines, these recordings will be destroyed after 3-5 years. Participants were assigned codes to safeguard their identities. Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis was utilised to analyse the data: (1) Reading and re-reading the data to immerse oneself in it; (2) Generating emerging codes; (3) Identifying potential themes; (4) Reviewing themes in relation to research question and existing literature; (5) Defining and explaining these themes; and (6) Writing up the report.

Engaging with our community praxis

We chose teachers as participants for this project because our focus was on enhancing teaching methodologies and resources, directly impacting the educators rather than the LVI themselves. However, our next phase will prioritize incorporating the voices of LVI. Initially guided by decolonial principles, we aimed to critically re-examine our practices and be mindful of the intersections between disability and sexuality, particularly how sexuality is often marginalized for PwDs. Below, we reflect on our journey from our initial entry as sighted researchers into SFB to our evolved understanding and perspectives upon leaving.

Reflections on ethics

Ethics are fundamental in research, especially when engaging with visually impaired individuals and other gatekeepers. In our study, we needed to collaborate with key figures—such as school principals, teachers, and Heads of Provincial Education Departments—to access visually impaired learners (LVI). We carefully considered privacy dynamics and the potential impact of the research on participants' daily lives. For instance, we scheduled the study to avoid disrupting teachers' classes, conducting it towards the end of the term break when there was no teaching.

Creating a safe and trusting environment was crucial, as teachers relied on the protection of their personal information and job security. Teachers expressed interest in participating by responding to an invitation email sent by their school principal. Recognizing the power differentials involved, we were concerned that the principal's role might influence voluntary participation. To address this, we ensured that principals did not participate in focus group discussions (FGDs). The principal investigator spoke with each principal before the study began, emphasizing that no teacher should feel pressured to participate.

During the FGDs, I clearly communicated to teachers that their anonymity could not be fully guaranteed. Prior to the discussions, I explained the study's purpose, voluntariness, risks, benefits, and data usage in their preferred language. I assured participants that they were free to decline or withdraw from the study at any time without repercussions or disclosure to the school principal. I also requested that teachers refrain from sharing any information revealed during the FGDs outside the discussions, especially if it could be traced back to individuals or specific schools. To further protect participants' identities, we used codes to anonymize their data and ensure confidentiality.

Reflections about entering schools for the blind as sighted researchers

Our reflections began with an examination of our own identities and the perspectives we brought to the research process. These discussions took place during our weekly meetings, where we shared our fears, hopes, and potential challenges. Initially, we naively believed that conducting research in SFB

required a unique understanding of blindness, or that our commitment to the subject might be questioned because none of us had severe visual impairments or lived with someone who does. For example, one project member expressed concern, saying, "I have never had a conversation with a blind person... What would we need to do to fit in? We are not blind researchers" (Thanda). This discomfort highlighted our awareness of the privilege of being sighted individuals. Feeling this growing apprehension, we decided to delve into these feelings by asking ourselves several critical questions: What are our perceptions and expectations of teachers of LVI? How do these perceptions differ from those of teachers in special needs or mainstream schools? Through this process, we sought to better understand and address our discomfort, aiming to engage more thoughtfully and sensitively with our research context.

Reflections on the dynamics of interaction

We had a series of FGDs in different schools. Because of the noted discomfort, we took great care to make sure that our praxis was to lessen possible resistance resulting from our outsider status. For instance, one of the comments from one of the project members from the first FGDs was, "I am not sure if I consistently used the politically correct term of people with disabilities instead of disabled people" (Muzi). Our reflections focused more on how we can negotiate and mitigate these dynamics and interpersonal reflections on our experience. These observations of protocol made us reflect on our outsider status. As an example, when we went to the first SFB, we noticed that some teachers were not fully comfortable forming a partnership with us. During our reflection sessions, we came to the mutual conclusion that teachers and principals in schools for the blind might be very protective. One of the reasons for this was how one of the joint school for deaf and blind learners we visited was previously in the news for the wrong reasons such as learners receiving poor nutrition (Matlhabe 2021a), sexual misconduct involving educators (South African Government News Agency 2012), and learners demanding that sexual abuse be taken seriously within the school (Matlhabe 2021b).

However, our encounters with the teachers revealed a deeper layer of complexity, such as

“

“I thought that we would
actually find more blind
teachers in these schools...

I mean isn't that what you
would expect?”

”

what is the difference between us and them as most teachers and staff in most SFB were also sighted? We acknowledged that they have a much closer relation to the LVI and understanding of how visual impairment affects various aspects of their lives, including their growing psychosexual development. It troubled our preconceptions about the kind of space we had imagined and emphasized diverse experiences within the community. With our engagements with teachers in this setting, our encounters led us to question our preoccupation of power and able-bodiedness within this context were given that we came where there were already other sighted individuals occupying this space (i.e., teachers, school managers, hostel caretakers, cooks, cleaners, school administrators, and security guards). For instance, one of the project members commented after meeting the one and only blind teacher we encountered during data collection that, “I thought that we would actually find more blind teachers in these schools...I mean isn't that what you would expect?” Matimu said during the interview.

Upon further reflection, we became aware of the need and implication of our constant acknowledgement of our privilege. As the principal researcher stated, “If most of the individuals in these learners' daily interactions are like us (sighted individuals), why should we feel any different in their space?” It brought into sharp reflection the subtle aspects of special education and the multitudinous gazes on issues around inclusion and empowerment. We recognized that

this positionality reinforced the charity model where PwDs are often placed as passive subjects of philanthropy, rather than active change-makers (Chappell 2019). It was a point of realization to reframe our approach from one of relationship rather than hierarchy. That is, acknowledging our privilege as sighted researchers was cathartic for attempting to deal with our bias, and underscored that we need deeper, broader, system-level change in how we pursue research. Our assertion perhaps results from the fact that the study did not engage with visually impaired learners directly, but their teachers. We felt no need to take active steps to blend in. Speaking to the insiders made us feel closer to the person of enquiry, although the focus of this study was to improve the teaching and learning of CSE for teachers of LVI, and not on the psychosexual experiences of people with visual impairment.

Essentializing the powerlessness of people with disabilities more broadly

At the same time, we became increasingly aware of the cautionary advice from disability scholars such as Barbour (2024), Chappell (2019), and Withers (2024), who warn against overlooking the inclusion of PwDs in disability research. By focusing on teachers rather than the LVI, who are the ultimate beneficiaries of this community engagement project, we risk neglecting a crucial aspect of PwDs' experiences and perspectives. This approach, while practical, misses the essential narrative and voice of those directly affected by the issues at hand. As one of the project members noted in her journal: “are we assuming that they (LVI) cannot speak for themselves? Why? Because we are authority figures? Very presumptive and othering” (Nonhlanhla).

This reflection led us to address why LVI were not included in our project thus far. Although our research involved sensitive topics—such as discussions about sexuality, sexual anatomy, and related issues—we recognized the importance of including LVI in our study. Engaging them with age-appropriate questions about their needs in CSE could have provided invaluable insights. We, however, agreed that our decision to exclude LVI stemmed partly from ethical concerns and our apprehensions about conducting research with children. Ethical review boards rigorously scrutinize

research involving vulnerable populations, such as children, to ensure their protection, which is crucial. We collectively agreed that conducting research with children presents complex challenges and preferred to prioritize safety in our approach.

Ultimately, despite our initial fears, we recognized the necessity of conducting this research. Our concerns about being able-bodied researchers and the implications of researcher privilege offered us valuable insights that we wish to share with others undertaking research in spaces where their characteristics differ from those of their participants. We found that blending into this unfamiliar environment was facilitated by identifying commonalities with other sighted individuals working there. We learned that it is not essential to be a member of the community being studied, but allyship is crucial. Our preoccupation with researcher privilege initially seemed to reinforce the perceived powerlessness of PwDs, as viewing ourselves as powerful inadvertently diminished the perceived agency of the other (i.e. PwDs). However, by diligently acknowledging our researcher privilege, we gained deeper insights into the power dynamics at play. This reflection allowed us to continue the decolonial project by uncovering and addressing hidden power structures in sensitive research contexts, particularly those involving subjects who are indirectly affected by the research.

On becoming, and contributions to the decolonial project

The implications of our study are multi-dimensional. Primarily, it underscores the critical importance of including the voices of PwDs at every stage of the research process, in line with the principle: “Nothing about us, without us.” This approach is not only ethical but essential for ensuring the validity and relevance of research findings. Engaging with PwDs directly enhances the empirical value of the research and reflects their lived experiences more accurately. Our project also highlights the necessity of ongoing reflection and adaptation in community engagement projects, especially when navigating spaces with significant power imbalances. Addressing these power imbalances is crucial for tackling systemic issues that contribute to the marginalization of PwDs. Recognizing privilege is an important first step, but meaningful progress requires concrete actions to dismantle

the structures that perpetuate it. This includes advocating for policy changes that promote inclusive practices and ensuring that research outcomes translate into tangible benefits for the communities involved.

Le Bourdon (2022) argues that decolonizing the field of learning requires ongoing reflection and adaptation, achieved through conversation, writing, and taking actionable steps. Our study aligns with this view, revealing how discrimination and exclusion operate at structural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal levels. We echo the sentiments of Idahosa and Bradbury (2020), Le Bourdon (2022), and Sultana (2007), who assert that addressing these factors is a shared responsibility. Adhering to the principle “Nothing about us, without us” helps in identifying and addressing the complex dynamics of power and privilege that perpetuate the invisibility and powerlessness of marginalized groups such as PwDs. This approach ensures that the voices of those directly affected are integral to the research and policy-making processes. Moreover, while reflexivity can be a personal, challenging, and often uncomfortable process, it is essential for effective community engagement. It provides valuable insights and contributes significantly to the decolonial project by helping to move marginalized voices closer to the center of discourse. The continuous cycle of learning, unlearning, reflecting, and listening ultimately fosters a more inclusive and equitable approach to research and practice (Idahosa and Bradbury 2020; Le Bourdon 2022; Sultana 2007).

Conclusion

In conclusion, our community engagement project highlighted the complexities of working within spaces dedicated to visually impaired learners while navigating our own positionality as sighted, able-bodied researchers. Initially, our approach was guided by an awareness of our privilege and the principle of “Nothing about us, without us,” involving blind experts to shape our praxis. However, our experience revealed that this focus on privilege could inadvertently perpetuate a charity model, where people with disabilities are seen as passive recipients of support rather than active participants in their own empowerment. This realization underscored the need to move beyond simplistic notions of privilege and power,

emphasizing a more nuanced understanding that recognizes the agency of visually impaired individuals while avoiding the pitfalls of tokenism and essentialization. Our reflection on power dynamics proved cathartic and informative, though it also highlighted the limitations and potential drawbacks of such an approach in methodological terms. One of the immediate limitations of this study is having no engagement with visually impaired learners. Direct engagement with visually impaired learners may have limited our understanding of their specific needs and

preferences in sexuality education. We suggest that future research is needed, including and by PwDs themselves, to account for their own needs in sexuality education. We further encourage curriculum developers, training institutions, as well as school managers to invest in teacher training to empower teachers with knowledge, skills, and resources such as the use of anatomically correct in their CSE lessons. Furthermore, perhaps more longitudinal studies within these contexts would better provide comparative and detailed findings for monitoring and evaluation.

Acknowledgements

Funding: This work is based on the research supported wholly by the National Research Foundation of South Africa Competitive Support for Unrated Researchers grant (Grant Number: CSUR240418214721).

Declaration of interest statement: the authors declare no conflict of interest.

Compliance with Ethical Standards: The study obtained ethical clearance from the University of South Africa's Ethics Review Committee. Ethical clearance number: 22/04/13/90352025/02/AM.

References

- Babbie, E., and Mouton, J. (2001). *The practice of social science research*. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
- Barbour, V. (2024). Nothing about us without us. *The medical journal of Australia*, 220(8), pp. 391-391.
- Bolarinwa, O. A., Odimegwu, C., and Adebisi, Y. A. (2024). Leaving no one behind: addressing the sexuality of people with disabilities. *International journal for equity in health* [online], 23(1), p.129. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12939-024-02219-y> [accessed 11 June 2025].
- Chappell, P. (2015). Queering the social emergence of disabled sexual identities: linking queer theory with disability studies in the South African context. *Agenda* [online], 29(1), pp.54-62. Available from: doi:10.1080/10130950.2015.1012860 [accessed 11 June 2025].
- Chappell, P. (2016). (Re) thinking sexual access for adolescents with disabilities in South Africa: balancing rights and protection. *African disability rights*, 4, p.124.
- Chappell, P. (2019). Situating disabled sexual voices in the global south. In: Chappell, P. and De Beer, M., eds. *Diverse voices of disabled sexualities in the Global South*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 1-25.
- Charlton, J. I. (1998). *Nothing about us without us: disability oppression and empowerment*. California: University of California Press.
- Davies, A., O'Leary, S., Prioletta, J., Shay, B., Bryan, M., and Neustifter, O. (2024). Sexuality education for disabled children and youth in Ontario, Canada: addressing epistemic injustice through school-based sexuality education. *Children & society* [online], 00, pp.1-18. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/chso.12843> [accessed 11 June 2025].
- Hanass-Hancock, J., Chappell, P., Johns, R., and Nene, S. (2018a). Breaking the silence through delivering comprehensive sexuality education to learners with disabilities in South Africa: Educators experiences. *Sexuality and disability* [online], 36, pp.105-121. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11195-018-9525-0> [accessed 11 June 2025].
- Hanass-Hancock, J., Nene, S., Johns, R., and Chappell, P. (2018b). The impact of contextual factors on comprehensive sexuality education for learners with intellectual disabilities in South Africa. *Sexuality and disability* [online], 36, pp.123-140. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11195-018-9526-z> [accessed 11 June 2025].
- Hicks, S. (1980). Relationship and sexual problems of the visually handicapped. *Sexuality and disability*, 3, p.165.
- Idahosa, G., and Bradbury, V. (2020). Challenging the way we know the world: Overcoming paralysis and utilising discomfort through critical reflexive thought. *Acta academia* [online], 52(1), pp.31-53. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.18820/24150479/aa52i1/SP3> [accessed 11 June 2025].

- Inckle, K., Brighton, J., and Sparkes, A. C. (2023). Who is “us” in “nothing about us without us”? rethinking the politics of disability research. *Disability studies quarterly* [online], 42, pp.3-4. Available from: <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/371518688> [accessed 11 June 2025].
- Kapperman, G. and Kelly, S. (2014). Accessible sex education resources for students who are visually impaired: assistive technology is required. *Division on visual impairments quarterly*, 59(2), pp.59-64.
- Kelly, K., Ntlabati, P., Oyosi, S., Van der Riet, M. and Parker, W. (2002). *Making HIV/AIDS our problem: young people and the development challenge in South Africa*. London: Save the children.
- Kapperman, G., and Kelly, S. M. (2013). Sex education instruction for students who are visually impaired: recommendations to guide practitioners. *Journal of visual impairment & blindness* [online], 107(3), pp.226-230. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1177/0145482X1310700307> [accessed 11 June 2025].
- Kelly, S. and Kapperman, G. (2021). *Strategies for effective lifelong health education for learners of all ages with visual impairments* [online]. Available from: <https://familyconnect.org/education/tips-for-families/strategies-for-effective-lifelong-health-education-for-learners-of-all-ages-with-visual-impairments/> [accessed 11 June 2025].
- Krupa, C. & Esmail, S. (2010). Sexual health education for children with visual impairments: Talking about sex is not enough. *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness*, 104(6): 327-337. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0145482X1010400603>.
- Kumar, N. A. (2014). Corponormativity and marking apart: the body of people with disabilities as a site of social and psychological discrimination and oppression in India. *Italian journal of disability studies*, 2(1), pp.64-79.
- Le Bourdon, M. (2022). Confronting the discomfort: a critical analysis of privilege and positionality in development. *International journal of qualitative methods*, 21,p. 16094069221081362.
- McRuer, R. (2006). *Crip theory: cultural signs of queerness and disability*. New York: NYU Press.
- Matlhabe, G. (2021a). Soshanguve’s Filadelfia Secondary School learners claim they are fed poor quality food. *Independent Online News* [online]. Available from: <https://www.iol.co.za/pretoria-news/news/soshanguves-filadelfia-secondary-school-learners-claim-they-are-fed-poor-quality-food-88915a2a-c548-475d-bc4a-f1741f9d0a79> [accessed 11 June 2025].
- Matlhabe, G. (2021b). Learners demand ‘sexual abuse at Soshanguve special needs school be taken seriously’. *Independent Online News* [online]. Available from: <https://www.iol.co.za/pretoria-news/news/learners-demand-sexual-abuse-at-soshanguve-special-needs-school-be-taken-seriously-7cc0a228-7daa-487a-b126-d33c27941a1a> [accessed 11 June 2025].
- Naphtali, K., MacHattie, E., Krassioukov, A., and Elliott, S. L. (2009). *Pleasure ABLE: sexual device manual for persons with disabilities*. San Francisco: Disabilities Health Research Network.
- Neille, J., McEwen, H., and de Andrade, V. (2024). An exploration into people with disabilities’ access to sex, sexuality, and sex education in South Africa. *Sexuality and disability* [online], 42(1), pp.101-117. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11195-023-09827-6> [accessed 11 June 2025].
- Peta, C. (2018). Deafening silence on a vital issue: the World Health Organization has ignored the sexuality of persons with disabilities. *African journal of disability*, 7(1), pp.1-3. Available from: <https://hdl.handle.net/10520/EJC-10334cb323> [accessed 11 June 2025].
- Rohleder, P., Braathen, S. H., Swartz, L., and Eide, A. H. (2009). HIV/AIDS and disability in Southern Africa: a review of relevant literature. *Disability and rehabilitation*, 31(1), pp.51-59. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09638280802280585> [accessed 11 June 2025].
- South African Government News Agency. (2012). *Govt to develop strategy to curb abuse at Filadelfia school*. Available from: <https://allafrica.com/stories/201206040444.html> [accessed 11 June 2025].
- Sultana, F. (2007). Reflexivity, positionality and participatory ethics: Negotiating fieldwork dilemmas in international research. *ACME: An international e-journal for critical geographies*, 6(3), pp.374-3.
- Stiker, H. J. (2019). *A history of disability*. University of Michigan Press.
- Taylor, B. (2011). The impact of assistive equipment on intimacy and sexual expression. *British journal of occupational therapy*, 74(9), pp.435-442. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.4276/030802211X13153015305637> [accessed 11 June 2025].
- Withers, A. J. (2024). *Disability politics and theory*. Fernwood Publishing.
- Wild, T.A., Kelly, S.M, and Kapperman, G., eds. (2019). *Health education for students with visual impairments: a guidebook for teachers*. Louisville, KY: American Printing House for the Blind.

Endnote

- 1 We focused on teachers of visually impaired learners in Grades 10-12, ages 16-18 because literature in South Africa suggests that the sexual debut of most visually impaired is 16 (Grade 10) and in some cases even lesser than 16 (Kelly et al., 2002). It should also be stated that most visually impaired learners start school at a much later age, in some cases a 20-year-old learner could be in for example Grade 10 (Kelly et al., 2002).