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Obstacles and opportunities for students with disabilities in entering and in preparation to graduate into professions in higher learning: the case of a University in South Africa

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how obstacles are confronted, and opportunities presented to students with disabilities to enter and be professionalised into Medicine, Law and Education, at an institution of higher learning in South Africa. The argument for the thesis is that policies of non-discrimination, same entry requirements and individual accommodations, makes it appears as if students with disabilities have an equal opportunity of access, professionalisation and completing the programmes within the minimum stipulated time. However, the Institution and the work settings for integrated learning are not totally transformed and there is a lack of radical inclusion, to allow all diverse students to be included. As such, students with disabilities confront inequitable structures and practices at entry and professional learning, resulting in them taking longer to complete the specific programmes. Through the mixed method research, the main finding of the study is that the same entry level requirements for all students, a lack of understanding of the prior disadvantage of attending special schools, and the nature of specific professions, limit students with disabilities' entry into Medicine and Law. Access to Education is limited, particularly by the inaccessible built environment of the School of Education. Exclusionary teaching practices present a major barrier to professional learning. At the work setting for integrated learning, the built environment is inaccessible, and attitudes are negative. Individual accommodations at the Institution are not necessarily extended to field practice. Thus, despite the level of institutional transformation and individual accommodations, professionalisation both at the Institution and at the work settings for integrated learning, is limited. Change and improvement is hence recommended. The unique theoretical contribution lies in the application of Decolonial Theory to a disability study. It makes visible the invisible underlying reasons for oppression, unconsciousness, resistance to change, and reason to privilege suppressed voices, including those of persons with disabilities.