

~~One Woman's~~ ^{MY} journey through the Trials and Triumphs of Disability

Helen Laas
DPI World Conference

"LIFE IS DIFFICULT.

This is a great truth, one of the greatest truths. It is a great truth because once we truly see this truth, we **transcend it**. Once we truly know that life is difficult--once we truly understand and accept it--then life is no longer difficult. Because once it is **accepted**, the fact that life is difficult **no longer matters."**

M. Scott Peck from The Road Less Traveled

Chapter 1

2

Chapter 1: Start from the very beginning

It's a very good place to start!

"There are two **primary choices** in life: to **accept conditions** as they exist, or **accept the responsibility for changing** them."

Denis Waitley

Chapter 1

4

I believe that by **knowing our limits**, we can learn to **push the boundaries**.



Chapter 1



5

"The art of teaching is the art of assisting discovery. "

Mark Van Doren



Chapter 1



6

Teachers touch the future.

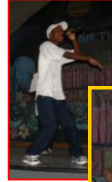
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Chapter 1

7

... and go the extra 100 miles.



Chapter 1

8

Chapter 2: Fragility

My "ALIVE"
day...

26 May 2011



... the day
we
survived.

10

...A chance
to give
back...



My class came to the hospital to visit me!

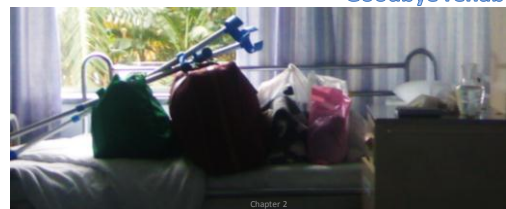
Chapter 2

11

Fears of facing the world
outside



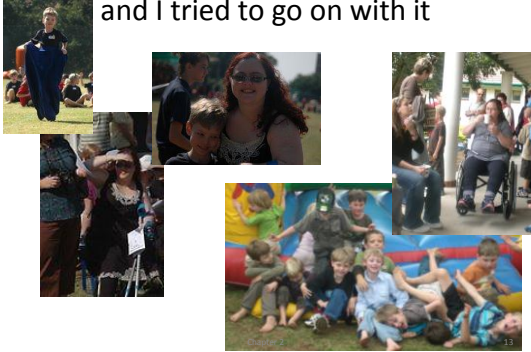
Goodbye rehab



Chapter 2

12

Life goes on...
and I tried to go on with it



Logan is
my
bestest
ever
helper



At my lowest moments,
my family has always
been there...



Darrion
brings
us great
joy



My "friendfamily"

...more than friends but not legally family



It takes
a
village
to raise
a child
African proverb

15

Professional support

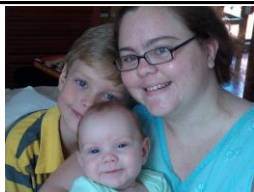
Acupuncture Medication
Physiotherapy
Occupational therapy Assistive devices
Psychology
Chiropractic Hydro therapy
Orthotics

Chapter 2

16



16
NOVEMBER
2009



Having a baby
was made all
the harder
when my
husband left



Chapter 2

How to cope with a baby from a wheelchair
was something nobody could tell me.



A sling to keep
my hands free

Mags so little
fingers do not
get caught in
spokes

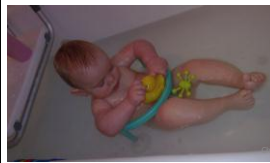


A "bumbo"
on a table

A stable
pram that can
double as a walking
frame



A bath ring



A
harness
so I can
catch
him

18

As a mother, I try to do all that I expect of myself ... but I am very hard to please!



Chapter 2

Out and about



Chapter 2

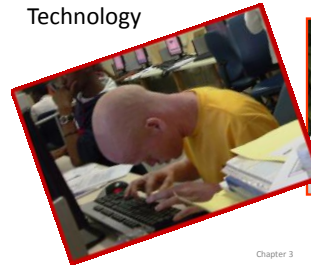
20

Chapter 3: One of us...

... the disabled culture in SA, our apartheid legacy

Back to work

Not being able to move easily, I moved into teaching in the high school. First Maths and Maths Literacy, then Computer Applications Technology



Chapter 3

22

BOUNCE BACK

McGrath & Noble (2003)



Chapter 3

23

Bad times don't last. Things always get better. Stay optimistic.

Other people can help you if you talk to them. Get a reality check.

Unhelpful thinking makes you feel more upset.

Nobody is perfect, not you and not others.

Concentrate on the positive bits no matter how small and use laughter.

Everybody experiences sadness, hurt, failure, rejection and setbacks sometimes, not just you.



Chapter 3

24

Blame fairly – how much of what happened was due to you, how much due to others and how much due to bad luck or circumstances?

Acept things you can't change (but try to change what you can change first).

Catastrophising exaggerates your worries. Don't believe the worst possible picture.

Keept things in perspective. It's only one part of your life.



Chapter 3

25

I can and I will



Chapter 3

26

Question:

Do you think my having a disability influenced my teaching ability?



An informal open-ended questionnaire, carried out through **facebook** messages with past students, yielded the following comments:

Chapter 3

27

"You having a disability was a huge thumbs up ... you allowed some of us to be ourselves around you and you always showed that you cared and we could see you knew where we come from because you are also one of us"

Dylan, grade 12: 2010



28

"Your disability motivated us to look beyond ignorance and to realise that, as a person, you will face an obstacle in life that makes you unique yet the same so you became an unchanged yet even better teacher."

Thoko, grade 12: 2010



29

"Yes because your being disabled as a teacher made you understand what we go through everyday and how much help we need and you care 4 what we go through and you know what we can do and can't so I think it made you a best teacher for us."

Grant, grade 12: 2010



Chapter 3

30

"No it didn't you have always been a great teacher b4 and after the accident and understanding when it comes 2 people living with disabilities at school"

Zwanani, grade 12: 2010



Chapter 3

31

"TO ME HER DISABILITY IMPROVED THE WAY SHE TAUGHT BECAUSE WE ALL UNDERSTOOD EACH OTHER IN MORE THAN ONE LEVEL."

Hilda, Grade 12: 2010



32

"You having a disability helped you to understand how we feel and to see where we come from as disabled students. You were also able to accommodate us better because you now had a better understanding of our needs. I think it also made you stronger as a teacher and a person. You were also able to be a little more sensitive towards your students."

Nosipho, grade 12: 2010



Chapter 3

33

My thoughts on what my grade 12 learners said:

At the end of the day, my school learners were looking for people who are understanding of their disabilities and show empathy.

While they definitely provided me with a source of identity, I don't think it made me more understanding, but rather that they saw a *connection* and felt more comfortable to talk with me.

Chapter 3

34

Chapter 4: Rolling on with life



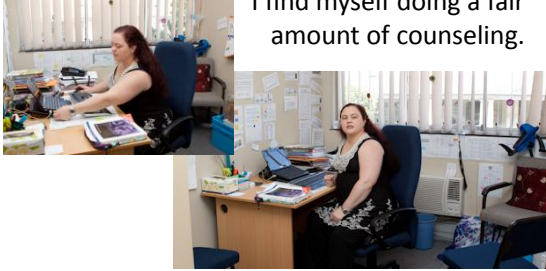
My daily struggle



37



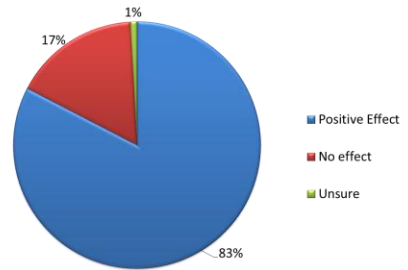
I don't do little brown boxes ...
so my office is welcoming to everyone and
I find myself doing a fair
amount of counseling.



From teaching and to disability, learning to dyslexia, HIV/AIDS to break-ups
Chapter 4 43

Student response to Question 1:

Do you think my having a disability has had any impact of the effectiveness of my lecturing in Inclusive Education?

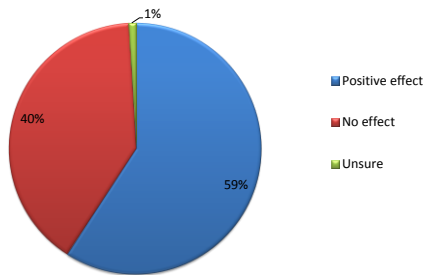


Chapter 4

44

Student Response to Question 2:

Has my disability affected your attitude/ feelings
towards people with disabilities?

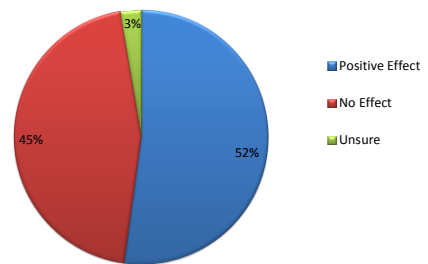


Chapter 4

45

Student response to Question 3:

Has my having a disability and lecturing you in Inclusive
education affected your teaching practice in any way?



Chapter 4

46



Chapter 4

47

**"I have learned that you can be
highly capable and have a
positive influence
even with a disability"**

3rd Year DBE student

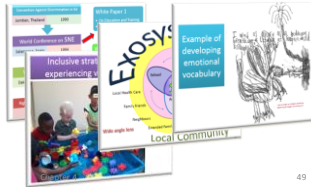


Chapter 4

48

"I have become more **observant** of minor learning barriers and see that some children look "normal" but **struggle** in some way"

3rd Year Full Time Student



49

"I think that as a lecturer, you **challenge us** to question our preconceived ideas about physical disabilities

Also, by having practical examples/experiences it puts things into a **real-life context.**"

3rd Year Full Time Student

Chapter 4

50

"I think you are able to **RELATE** to what you are lecturing which I appreciate because you provide us with **GOOD ADVICE.**"

2nd Year Full Time Student



Chapter 4

51

"I have become more **aware** and have **accepted** people in any way. What you have lectured us has **changed me as a person**"

3rd year DBE student



Chapter 4

52

From Roald Dahl, I adopted this as my motto:

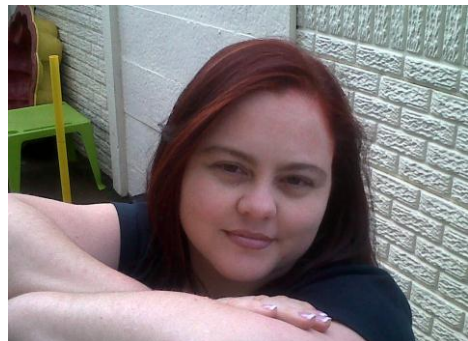
**My candle burns at both ends;
It will not last the night;
But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends—
It gives a lovely light!**

St Vincent Millay (1920)

Chapter 4

53

Here's to the future!



Chapter 4

54