



*Equipping Career Development Practitioners*

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PROGRAMME DIRECTOR: Prof Maximus Sefotho is an Associate Professor in the Department of Educational Psychology with specialisation or focus on career guidance and disability at the University of Johannesburg. His research and teaching work focus on career choice, construction within the sphere of contemporary careers. His early work in career and disability started during his post-graduate studies at the University of Botswana, which he continued during his Master's Degree at LA University in Mexico. Prof was the first registered member of the South African Career Development Association which he serves as a board member up to this day. In his quest for more knowledge about career development, he visited CEDEFOP, a European centre for career guidance in Greece and Universidad De Coruna in Spain and Morelia in Mexico. Welcome sir. Can we give him a round of applause.

PROF SEFOTHO: Ladies and gentlemen, I've got... Morning. Is it morning still? Thank you very much for the opportunity. I am not like an eagle that flies solo. With me I have my student, who is doing her Masters with me at the University of Johannesburg and I would like to invite her to the podium to start off the talk for us. Yes Madam.

LEO BLUMENTHAL: Career development is mostly about the knowledge and understanding of a person's situation in context. If you are guiding a differently abled person, you have to be able to guide them and step into his or her shoes, in order to assist them effectively. I was born profoundly deaf. I'm a bilateral cochlear-implant recipient. I got the first cochlear-implant when I was 6 years old and the second one when I was 11. I was 18<sup>th</sup> in South Africa to receive a cochlear-implant and the first in the country to receive two.

Career development of differently abled persons is becoming more relevant than ever before. Because of the growing trend of inclusivity, more and more differently abled persons are entering the mainstream system, as well as in the workplace. It is therefore a battle to be able to understand their experiences and perspectives.



I am currently basing my educational psychology master's research on cochlear-implant recipients and the challenges they face academically in the mainstream schools. Research has shown that hearing impairment can be referred to as the invisible disability. Very often you cannot distinguish whether a person is hearing impaired or not. Technology has become so advanced, that most hearing impaired persons speak and hear almost as well as a normally hearing person. You almost forget that the person is hearing impaired. But it does not mean they function as well as normally hearing people.

For example, hearing impaired persons still rely heavily on coping mechanisms, such as lip reading. Another example is the exhaustion that comes with the disability. The hearing sense does not come naturally to a person with hearing impairment. Therefore, it requires a lot of concentration, extra work and extra effort in order to keep up. This may lead to fatigue and even concentration difficulties.

When I was mainstreamed at the age of 6 years old, there was very little knowledge about my disability and how to educate me. The dedication of my educators, health professionals and family, was immeasurable, but I myself was not aware of the challenges I would face learning alongside my hearing peers.

One has to remember that hearing impaired persons, despite the technological advances and sophistication, still cannot hear with the same ease as normally hearing persons. When working with cochlear-implant recipients in the mainstream schools, one has to understand the implications of the disabilities. One has to understand the background, as well as what these students face in the classroom.

This is no different to career development. When guiding a differently abled person in their career paths, one must be able to comprehend the challenges that they face in their daily activities in order to guide them. The task of career development for this disability, is to provide support and most importantly, the knowledge. By knowledge I mean, researching and providing information for these people coming into career paths and workplaces and also the possible challenges they may face in their careers paths.

For example, by encouraging hearing impaired persons that there will be gaps in their understanding and grasping of large group conversations and meetings. When a phone call or video is played or when the background is noisy, they can understand that hearing no content, may be compromised. So what can be done? Once the hearing impaired person is aware of the possible challenges, he or she can find solutions to these obstacles and that is where career development comes in, assisting hearing impaired persons in finding ways to overcome these career barriers. For example, ensuring that colleagues are aware of the specific limitations and even receiving comprehensive minutes from meetings and conversations that have occurred within the work.

One has to conduct research on the disability in order to be able to guide a differently abled person. A lot of these disabilities are misunderstood and not much or enough is known about them. The challenge is to ensure that differently abled persons are not only competent in their careers, but that they are enabled to excel and flourish as professionals as well as people. Thank you.

PROF SEFOTHO: Thank you again. Ladies and gentlemen, in the field of psychology, when we look around, we'll find that very few of us specialise on issues of disability. We are making clarion call today and we want to say we appreciate very much Ms Alice, what you have said this morning about going in-depth into research, because in the field of disability, there is so much, but very little is being done and understood. And we would like to hold hands with you to take this forward.

Prof Maree, we are actually changing the long way just as you have encouraged. So we are joining the discourse that says we are looking at people as now differently abled, not necessarily disabled, because disability is a negation of ability and yet we want to dig deeper into the being of every one of us and say, is there an ability that can be nourished? This is where the field of psychology can play a great role.

I will rush ladies and gentlemen, because normally I don't want to waste people's time. I think my student has already said a lot. I will just stamp on what she has said. There are traditional notions of disability that we are used to and we are saying that we are concerned that negativity still goes on. One of the speakers here, alluded to the fact that

there's no need to change the language towards a positive kind of language. Language in itself is never going to be precise. It changes with times as we go, but we need to use language that encourages instead of discouraging.

I'm going to base my presentation on the love of my life. I know that Prof Mark Watson always says to me, you young man, but I like him because he encouraged me earlier on to say, these issue of philosophy may be important and those scholars who are in here, I'm again appealing to you that let's not discourage our students to be innovative and delve into issues of philosophy, in order to enable them to dig deeper and enlighten what we are researching.

I'm looking at the aspect of being differently abled, from the perspective of a paradigm called post modernism, which says we have to agree that there is diversity and in that diversity, we learn that there may be different voices which should be allowed, not the positivistic way of looking at things that says the only truth is this. This is why, in disability, what is important, is that the traditional labels that were there and categories, are beginning to lose relevance and therefore leaving us to the new way of looking at issues. We are again saying, people less likely to follow rigid ideologies, must be allowed to speak their minds and greater pluralism be allowed in our modern world.

I would like to say that the concept of being differently abled, speaks to the issue of human rights, which in fact is the foundation of including, of bringing people who are differently abled, into the mainstream of society and in the forefront we have Prof Martha Nussbaum who has been working in this area. And here ladies and gentlemen, we are breaking the chains that are there, to say that the models that used to capture people, should be done away with. And I'm borrowing from one Jacques Rousseau who said that man is born free. Well, that was the language of those days, but everywhere is in change. And we want to say that there is need now to break those chains, not only the metaphorical ones, but even the chains of parents who still chain their children on the legs of beds and all other places where children are found to be locked down. Allow them the space to go and express themselves and find their space in the world.

I'm going to skip a lot of people who have done work already in terms of promoting the concept of differently abled and go to one of the most important aspects that we always overlook, which is borrowing from our own indigenous knowledge systems, where some of the programs say to us, disability should not be looked at negatively, but positively, so that we allow people to express themselves in a transformative way that encourages them to look at their abilities and optimise those.

I'm sharing this from the indigenous ontologies, from my own background as a Mosotho. As Basotho Ma'am Marie McMahon is going to translate this for you guys. We say that [*ethnic language*]. Thank you very much. This is a very deep philosophical meaning that says to a mother, that child with a disability will never be discarded. You don't even forget that you have that child. Your life is tied to that child.

We can see that in front of us, it's a family that is trying to encourage this young lady to actually do something about herself. We can assume that she has difficulties in walking, but the family is prodding her on to say, do something about yourself. This is what we are missing in the field of psychology and we would like that to be encouraged.

My work is based on some of the proliferous researches in the field of career development. One gentleman, Soresee and Notta, Ferrari and Solebeck, who have done a lot of work in saying that we need to be beginning to discard traditional conceptualisations of disability, so that we look at the new conceptualisations that encourage, that bring into the centre of the discussion and whatever is going on, differently abled persons so that their personal interests can be taken into consideration, as well as designing career guidance programs facilitating work inclusion. This is a challenge for us colleagues, career practitioners, because there is a great gap in this. Our training has not prepared us to do this. In as much as when education for all was introduced, teachers were not prepared, we are equally under prepared to accommodate learners who are differently abled.

And designing a career, here it says that we need therefore to concentrate on training practitioners in designing effective career guidance that accommodates differently abled persons, so that they are at the end of the day, prepared to be included into the world of work.

A few days ago I was at Johannesburg in one of the homes that deals with adults with autism, to try and encourage them, once again, to be able to participate into the world of work and what I learnt there, the owner of the place told me that there is a lot of anxiety, even after we have prepared them. For them to go alone therefore into the shops to buy and do this and that, there's a lot of... This is where my friend from Labour, your work is so important, again to come and enforce with us, to say how then do we go into research and that research inform practice in terms of issues such as this one and then therefore, working towards building support and networks. Alone we cannot do it, but also for themselves, they can speak a language that they understand one another and we have to encourage those networks to allow them the space to work towards what we again lack in South Africa, the issue of developing transition programs.

Ladies and gentlemen, how many of us know children who are differently abled, who have been into school and we don't know where they end up at the end of the day? There is lack in terms of transition programs. I'm glad that Prof Maree has begun in a little way to begin to talk about that and Prof, this is very, very much necessary, because we need education in this sense.

I came across a young man somewhere in the USA, who encouraged me. He has autism. He served us tea and coffee. I liked cappuccino that came from him. One thing that he said to me, was the following, that I am working and I need not be counted as a person who does not contribute to my own livelihood and to the livelihood of the rest of the society. Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your attention.

PROGRAM DIRECTOR: I am worthy. Nothing about us without us. Thank you Prof for sharing the experience of the young lady with us. Because sometimes we speak for them and not allow them to speak for themselves. Thank you very much. Can you give Prof another round of applause.