



The Learning Institute

Disabled?: Perceptions of disability

Overview

What does it mean to be disabled? The different ways this question can be answered has huge consequences both for individuals and for societies. One way of thinking about these different answers or perceptions is to group them in certain ways into what are termed **models of disability**. As practitioners, an understanding of these different models can help us reflect on and challenge our own views and those of others, which can in turn have a positive impact on our professional practice.

Target audience

Multi-disciplinary contexts

Duration

Approximately 1 hour

The Learning Institute provides opportunities for individuals and communities through high quality education, training and research programmes that challenge personal barriers and promote social inclusion. To find out more, please get in touch.

Introduction

What does it mean to be disabled? The different ways this question can be answered has huge consequences both for individuals and for societies.

Objectives

- explore the meaning of the term disability
- examine some of the different ways individuals and society think about disability and the consequences this has for disabled people.
- encourage you to consider, and perhaps challenge, your own perceptions of disability

Resources

Pen and paper for note taking

Internet access to following:

- Social model of disability [video], available at www.scope.org.uk/about-us/social-model-of-disability
- What do we mean by inclusive education? [CPD activity], available at <https://www.learninginstitute.co.uk/inclusioncpd>
- Why everything you know about autism is wrong [video], available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1AUdaH-EPM

Task 1: What does it mean to be dis-abled?

Spend some time reflecting on these questions:

- What does it mean to be 'able'?
- What does it mean to be 'dis-abled' (try to think about the breakdown of this word)
- Can you think of a time when you have been dis-abled by something or someone? Was this because of you or because of them or the situation? How did this experience make you feel?

Task 2: Different ways of seeing disability

The way that disability is perceived or defined, has huge consequences both for individuals and for societies. One way of thinking about these different perceptions is to group them in certain ways; these are known as models of disability.

As practitioners, an understanding of these different models can help us reflect on and challenge our own views and those of others, which can in turn have a positive impact on our professional practice.

The medical model

The medical model focuses on what a disabled person cannot do first and sees their impairment as the reason they are unable to access goods and services or to participate fully in society, for example “there is no point taking Sally to a library because she is blind” or “Jack will never be able to pass his GCSEs because of his dyslexia”.

This model focuses on what can be done to ‘fix’ the disabled person. Historically, this has been the most prevalent (common) model.

Can you think of other examples of this model in practice?

Can you think of any issues or problems with this model?

The social model

Access *Social model of disability*, available at www.scope.org.uk/about-us/social-model-of-disability. This video [approx. 3 minutes] has been produced by Scope, a disability equality charity in England and Wales.

As you watch, add to your list of issues/problems with the medical model identified by the speakers in the video.

Use the key words below to write a summary of what the social model is and how it is different from the medical model.

impairment disabled world barriers attitudes

blame liberating

change self-esteem equality

The speakers in the video identify disabling barriers such as physical access and negative attitudes. Can you think of other barriers that may ‘disable’ a person with an impairment? (For more on barriers, have a look at the CPD *What do we mean by inclusive education*, available at <https://www.learninginstitute.co.uk/inclusioncpd>)

What is your own response to your work on the social model? How far do you agree with what it proposes?

Task 3: Thinking differently about being different

Access *Why everything you know about autism is wrong*, available at www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1AUdaH-EPM. This 13 minute TEDx talk is by Dr Jac den Houting, an Australian researcher.

Check your own understanding of the medical and social models using Dr den Houting's explanations

What is your own response to her view that being autistic is a positive not a negative or 'tragic' experience?

How far do you think this could be applied to other 'impairments'?

Task 4: Reflection on learning

Note down your responses to the following questions:

- What knowledge did I already have that has been refreshed by this CPD?
- How has this CPD developed my knowledge and understanding?
- How can I apply what I now know to my practice?

Sources

Scope (2018) *Social Model of Disability*. Available at: <https://www.scope.org.uk/about-us/social-model-of-disability> (Accessed: 20 July 2020)

TEDx Talks (2019) *Why everything you know about autism is wrong | Jac den Houting | TEDxMacquarieUniversity*. 1 November. Available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A1AUdaH-EPM> (Accessed: 20 July 2020)

Further reading

Odell, E. (2019) *Special or Unique: young peoples' attitudes to disability*. Available at: <https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/sites/default/files/DR%20UK%20Special%20or%20Unique%20August%202019.pdf>

Mental Health Foundation (no date) *Social Models of Disability*. Available at <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/learning-disabilities/a-to-z/s/social-model-disability>

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