

Nelson Mandela University

Learning and Teaching Week – Abstract Submission

Innovation with Impact: Humanising Teaching for Transformative Higher Education.

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Designation and full name:

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Affiliated University / Institution:

The Central University of Technology, Free State

Title:

Beyond Accommodation: Towards Humanising and Epistemological Access for Deaf Students in South African Higher Education

Sub-theme:

Equity, Access, and Inclusion

Format:

Paper Presentation

Abstract:

South African higher education institutions have made significant strides towards disability inclusion through the provision of accommodations such as South African Sign Language (SASL) interpreting and academic support services. However, for many Deaf students, formal accommodation does not necessarily translate into meaningful participation, belonging, or epistemological access within the learning environment. This paper critically reflects on the limitations of accommodation-centred approaches to inclusion and argues for a more humanising and student-centred understanding of access in higher education.

Drawing from professional practice within disability support in higher education, the paper explores how Deaf students continue to encounter systemic and relational barriers despite institutional commitments to inclusion. These barriers include communication inequalities, inaccessible pedagogical practices, limited institutional understanding of Deafness and Deaf identity, challenges within digitally mediated learning spaces, and the ongoing positioning of accessibility as reactive support rather than an embedded pedagogical responsibility.

Framed through the concepts of humanising pedagogy, epistemological access, and ethics of care, this presentation argues that meaningful inclusion requires more than compliance-driven accommodation processes. Instead, higher education institutions must critically reconsider how teaching, learning, communication, and institutional culture either enable or constrain the full participation of Deaf students.

The paper contributes to broader conversations on equity, inclusion, and transformation in South African higher education by foregrounding Deaf students' access not only as a disability issue, but as a matter of dignity, belonging, language justice, and educational transformation.