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## **Disability and a good life MOOCs**

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## Disability and a good life MOOCs

### Abstract

In mid 2014 a team of disability studies scholars and educational developers at UNSW embarked on producing two Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) called Disability and a Good Life: Thinking through disability and Disability and a Good Life: Working with disability. Both courses have since run twice on the FutureLearn platform, reaching 17 000 learners from countries as diverse as Papua New Guinea, Botswana, Slovenia and Italy.

### Keywords

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**Louisa Smith**

In mid 2014 a team of disability studies scholars and educational developers at UNSW embarked on producing two Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) called *Disability and a Good Life: Thinking through disability* and *Disability and a Good Life: Working with disability*. Both courses have since run twice on the FutureLearn platform, reaching 17 000 learners from countries as diverse as Papua New Guinea, Botswana, Slovenia and Italy.

Both MOOCs offer a foundation to understanding disability in a contemporary context. As such, they are grounded in a social understanding of disability and a human rights based approach. The first MOOC, *Thinking Through Disability*, introduces how our ideas about disability can have a significant impact on how people with disabilities can live their lives. We unpack the difference between disability and impairment, what counts as disability and the diverse experiences of disability depending on age, socio-economic status, gender, race and sexuality. The second MOOC, *Working with Disability*, continues to question and challenge big ideas often used in relation to people with disabilities. These include human rights, access, contribution and activism and advocacy.

In developing the materials, we aimed to be inclusive. We employed an Advisory Group of people with disabilities and their allies to advise us from the outset of course development. Through consultation and collaboration with this group we developed a curriculum and resources that reflected their concerns and stories.

# Disability and a Good Life MOOCs

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The core resources for the MOOC emerged from collaboration with people with disabilities. We employed Taste Creative, an inclusive production company, to work with us in producing fourteen short films about the lives of people with disabilities. We also made short films of interviews with disability activists, academics and advocates from around the world. These core resources enliven the theoretical materials and text that surrounds them, and enable different learners to access the materials in different ways.

This idea that courses need to accommodate different learners and different learning needs is central to the MOOCs. We adopted a Universal Design for Learning (UDL) framework to ensure that the resources were accessible to a diversity of learners. This means that not only are all resources available in different formats, but that all learners can choose how they engage with the learning.

While one of the participants in the Advisory Group identifies as having a cognitive disability, the MOOCs are not always accessible to people with cognitive disability without support. As educators we struggled with making this decision. While the basic levels of the material are often in plain English, the clearly labelled extension and expansion steps are not always cognitively accessible. There have been learners with cognitive disability who have done the courses with a support worker and this contribution has been valuable.

The majority of the MOOC learners do the MOOCs for personal or professional development. Many comment on how the MOOCs have guided them through a transformational process, where they come out the other end understanding themselves and society differently.

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