

New Internationalist Africa lessons

1) Re-thinking (dis)ability

Speaking: In pairs or small groups, discuss:

- Why is the title of this lesson 'Re-thinking (dis)ability'? Re-thinking what? Why is 'dis' in brackets?
- How do people see disability in your community / country? Why?
- Have you seen the Paralympics? How 'able' are the Paralympians?

Prediction: What do you think are the biggest problems for people with disabilities?

- People looking at them and talking about them
- Not being able to do what they want to
- Fighting to convince others that they can do things

Reading: I have always felt independent. I need to follow my path in life. Sometimes we make mistakes and sometimes we fall over... especially if we have quadriplegic cerebral palsy. It is even difficult to find the right language to talk about disability. Is a disability something you 'have', 'suffer from' or 'were born with'? Are you 'different', 'special' or exactly the same as everyone else? But if you are a disabled person you don't have time to think about how to talk about it. You need all your effort to brush your teeth alone for the first time, or climb to the top of Machu Picchu in Peru.

When you are young, you dream about all the things you can do with your life; but when you have a disability people want to tell you what you can't do. My parents were the first to receive the 'bad news' that I would probably never walk, and I probably wouldn't talk very well. Fortunately, it wasn't 100 per cent true. I'm sure my mum would be happy if I talked a bit less. But my parents had the first of many challenges and a warning: you can't always accept everything. In 1994, disabled children didn't go to regular schools. My parents disagreed, and fought so that I could go to a regular school.

I went to school with my mother and my younger brother. I went on my special, steel green tricycle. It was too big to go through the garden gate at the back of our house, so every day my mum had to put it together outside. She put me on to the seat and put my feet into the pedals. She never thought of using a wheelchair. She encouraged me to be independent.

Another day, I was holding my dad's hand as we got on the bus. It was difficult for me to walk. Each step was slow, looking at my feet just like my dad always told me. 'Why don't you take your time,' the driver said quietly. He thought that no-one would hear. But my dad did hear him and minutes later he was trying to fight him through the plastic window by the driver seat. I think that having a disabled child must bring a mixture of joy at the challenges they overcome, anger at the discrimination of other people, and fear that one day they will have to face the prejudices alone.

1995 was important for disabled people living in Britain because the 1995 Disability Discrimination Act was the first government law to make discrimination against disabled people illegal. And in southern Africa, the disability rights movement developed a lot when two women disability leaders were elected to parliament, for the first time in the history of the area. In February, Maria Rantho was part of Nelson Mandela's ANC's national list of candidates. At the time, six million disabled people made up 12 per cent of South Africa's population.

'Little has been much said or done to protect the rights of people with disabilities,' said Maria Rantho, 'and we needed to be represented by our own people.' In April, Ronah Moyo entered Robert Mugabe's government in Zimbabwe, as head of the women's wing of the Zimbabwe Federation of Disabled People.

When I finished secondary school, most of my friends were choosing between university and working to save money. The only thing I wanted was to travel and see the world. In 2007, the UN

Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities was opened for signatures. I had been demanding my rights since I started to speak, but now I needed more independence. Some of my friends and family, even those who had seen me learning to balance and learning to walk, thought that going to South America for three months, alone, was impossible. But I really wanted to go. More than they didn't want me to go.

Disabled people have two different fights: the personal fight of overcoming problems or challenges, but also the fight to make other people think that they are able and have the right to do so.

Vocabulary: match these words/phrases with the definitions below: **quadriplegic, cerebral palsy, a pedal, discrimination, prejudice, an act, rights, to overcome problems**

- a) where you put your foot on a bike
- b) a negative feeling you have against someone, not based on reason or experience
- c) when both legs and both arms are paralysed (can't move)
- d) a law
- e) when you treat someone unjustly eg because of their sex, race or age
- f) caused by damage to the young brain, it affects muscles and movement
- g) to succeed when you have difficulties
- h) something you should have (morally or legally) or be able to do

Reading for detail – go back to the text above 1. Why is Jody in a wheelchair? 2. How well can he talk? 3. What sort of school did he go to? 4. How did he get to school? 5. Why was 1995 important? 6. Where did Jody want to travel to?

Find and correct the errors – 8 in each paragraph: 'You weren't *in wheelchair* in the photograph,' said Franklin, my Peruvian host in Cuzco, when we met *at the first time*. It was the kind of reaction I liked best. I didn't like peoples talking quietly about me and looking at me like when I am a child. When I travelled, I met people who were really surprising to see a person with my 'condition' so far away from home and lone. They asked me if I was Argentinean, Chilean, even Paraguayan. But any-one guessed where I was really from, probably because my disability.

A week after I arrived in South America, I went to Machu Picchu. I leaved my wheelchair at the bottom of steep steps going up to the entrance, I slowly began climb up to the ancient Mayan ruins. I haven't eaten or drunk anything that day and the hot sun made my t-shirt sweaty. Every step took a lots of effort, but I quickly got into a rhythm and only thought of get to the top. I felt so free when I get there. The fresh, clean air filled my lungs. I felt the cool breeze and looked at the beauty of the mountains. Was one more small victory in the inner struggle we all living with, if we are 'disabled' or not.

Pronouns / reference words: what do the words in red represent?: On another day, I'm holding my dad's hand as **we** (eg. **the writer and his dad**) get on to the bus, struggling to walk in my own way, taking each step with care and keeping my eyes focused on my feet just like **he** always told me to do. 'Why don't you take your time,' the driver muttered under **his** breath, thinking that no-one would hear. But my dad did hear **him** and minutes later **he** was trying to wrestle with **him** through the plastic window by the driver seat. I can only guess that having a disabled child must bring a mixture of joy at the challenges **they** overcome, anger at the discrimination of other people, and fear that one day **they** will have to face those prejudices on **their** own.

Action: What can we do to help change what people think about disability and support people with disabilities to do what they dream of?

- **make a poster** - **write a letter** - **write a tweet** - **create a social media post**

http://eewiki.newint.org/index.php/Rolling_towards_progress