

CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

CURRENT AND PROPER TERMINOLOGIES IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

Njideka Ifeoma Okoroikpa, Ph.D

Ebonyi State College of Education Ikwo

Terfa Ahon Adaka, Ph.D, FCILED

Federal University of Lafia

Introduction

Special education is full of terms that people constantly use in writing and in conversation, and it is important to know the current and proper use of the terms. Special education terminologies help readers quickly connect with the meaning of pivotal words and phrases. Merriam Webster dictionary defines terminology as a technical or special terms used in a business, art, science, or special subject. Special education has myriad of terminologies. There are varying preferences regarding disability terminology, and there are some terms which are not respectful of people with disabilities. Disability is part of the human experience, but most times people use phrases or words which are insensitive and do not promote dignity, understanding and respect for people with disabilities. Most often than not, this is not intentional, but is disrespectful.

Current and appropriate terminologies are suitable terminologies belonging to the present time used in describing people with disabilities. Disability is a complex concept and its terminology has evolved substantially over the years, particularly, following the adoption of the 2006 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). United States (US) National Library of Medicine defines Terminology as “work consisting of lists of the technical terms or expressions used in a specific field.” According to Collins English Dictionary (2014), terminology stands for “the body of specialized words relating to a particular subject.” In this instance, it refers to a body of specialized words or list of technical terms or expressions in special education. Myriad of terminologies have evolved, this makes it challenging for specialists in the field to stay abreast of the terminology, and even more daunting for school counselors and parents to do so (Trolley, Patti and Haas 2012). When speaking to or about someone with a disability, it is important to make note of which terms are offensive, outdated, and improper. Disability friendly terms are more appropriate in order not to demean people with disabilities.

Some languages many people try to use, which they think is disability-friendly, may actually be disrespectful to the disability community. People-first, disability-friendly terminology is language that does not promote outdated,

patronizing, or insulting views of people with disabilities. DisabilityInfo.org (2021) states that many well-meaning, dedicated people inadvertently hold attitudes that are paternalistic or condescending. Most people with disabilities embrace the independent living philosophy which views disability as an inevitable part of life, and views people with disabilities as a growing population of strong, independent, people with few differences from the rest of the population. Many inconveniences a person with a disability may experience are seen as the only real difference between people with and without disabilities.

Persons with disabilities or special needs as identified in the National Policy on Education (2015), are those with various forms of exceptionalities including: Visual Impairment, Hearing Impairment, Mental Retardation, (Intellectual Disability/Intellectual Developmental Disability) Physical and Health Impairment, Behavioural Disorders, Communication and Speech Impairment, Learning Disabilities, Multiple Disabilities, at Risk Children, Autism, Albinism and the Gifted and Talented. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) update, (as cited in Center for Parent Information and Resources (2017) categorized learners with special needs and disabilities into 14 as represented below: Autism, Deaf-blindness, Deafness, Developmental delay, Emotional disturbance, Hearing impairment, Intellectual disability, Multiple disabilities, Orthopedic impairment, Other health impairment, Specific learning disability, Speech or language impairment, Traumatic brain injury, Visual impairment and including blindness.

Special needs education is the type of education designed for the benefit of those who in one way or the other deviate from the norm. Special education encompasses the programs which serve students with mental, physical, emotional, and behavioral disabilities. The major law governing special education in the United States is the Federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, which guarantees a “free appropriate public education” to children with disabilities and mandates that, to the “maximum extent appropriate,” they be educated with their nondisabled peers in the “least restrictive environment.”

Stereotypes are overgeneralizations, or oversimplifications of particular characteristics of a group of people or things, in this instance people with disabilities. It is taking what is true of one or a few people and assigning it to the whole of the group. They are formed, typically, out of a place of one’s encounter with particular aspects of a group’s culture. Negative stereotypes and attitudes linked to people with disabilities have in no small way contributed to the derogatory terms used in describing them(Warren L. J. Parent to Parent (2015).

The thesis statement of this chapter is hinged include: Basis for terminologies in special needs education, Special needs education, Negative stereotypes, Disability Friendly terms and Offensive, outdated, and improper terms

Basis for terminologies in Special Needs Education

National Disabilities Rights Network (NDRN (2020), suggested some guidelines for writing, reporting, and speaking to or about people with disabilities. First and foremost, one is to refer to a person with a disability by their name. For many years, language used to describe people with disabilities emphasized or focused on their disability, rather than their personhood. A movement of advocates urged the adoption of language that focused on the person – person-first language, which uses possessive language to refer to disabilities (i.e. Ekene has a disability). Person-first language avoids putting a label or condition prior to an individual's name or title. Stated simply, person-first language places an individual prior to her or his disability (NDRN 2020).

The language (words and phrases) that people use about people with disability has an impact on the social narrative about people with disability and how they are perceived and treated by the general public. It also has an impact on their sense of self, how they feel about themselves, how they navigate society, and interact with other people. People with disability are often described in ways that discriminate and demean them. Expressions such as 'victim' or 'sufferer' may suggest they are unhappy about their lives, or that they wish they were 'normal'. Words like these contain an implicit, and deeply offensive, assumption that they are to be viewed as objects of pity. These negative words perpetuate harmful stereotypes.

People with disability lead meaningful lives. They work, have families and contribute to their communities in myriad ways. They are entitled to respect. Many of them are proud of being people with disability and want that identity to be affirmed in their private lives as well as in the public sphere. All too often, family members, service providers and academics speak on their behalf, or over them. 'Inspiration porn', emotive triumph-over-the-odds stories whose purpose is to inspire viewers to be grateful for their non-disabled lives, is rife in mainstream society. People with disabilities would want to tell their own stories in language they identify with. When people talk about them, they want them to be respectful.

There has long been controversy over the use of diagnostic labels, especially as they apply to children and youth. Concern arises over students being stereotyped and perceived as different and less than normal. Such fears extend beyond the social realm to the academic area. Parents fear their child receives a less than quality education, and that long term goals such as college may be negatively impacted. Educators are concerned that students are being appropriately identified and instructed. These concerns should not be taken lightly. However, if students are appropriately referred for assessment, the assessment tools are pertinent and comprehensive, classifications are assigned by qualified and credentialed professionals, communication of assessment results and classification categories are sensitively and clearly explained to parents and students, then this categorization system will benefit the students. Previously unknown problems may be identified, assisting all involved to better define needed educational

services. Psychologically, understanding that a disability exists and what it is may help alleviate anxiety and ambiguity, decrease feelings of being “crazy,” and correct misinterpretations that the students are simply lazy and unmotivated. Implicit in this classification system is the education of teachers, staff, administrators, parents, and students as to disabilities, as well as to sensitivity training (Trolley, Patti and Haas 2012).

Negative stereotypes

People with disabilities are first and foremost, individuals; people who have individual abilities, interests and needs. They are ordinary individuals, for the most part who seek to live ordinary lives. Individuals with disabilities are mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, friends, neighbours, colleagues, students and teachers. Their contributions enrich our families’ communities and society as they live and work. Historically, individuals with disabilities have been regarded as individuals to be pitied, feared or ignored. They have been portrayed as helpless victims, repulsive adversaries, and heroic individuals overcoming tragedy, and charity cases who must depend on others for their wellbeing and care (Warren: Parent to Parent (2015). The media frequently focus on heartwarming features and inspirational stories that reinforce stereotypes, patronize and underestimate their individual capabilities. Lately, much has changed, new laws and legislations, disability activism and expanded coverage of disability issues have altered public awareness and knowledge, eliminating the worst stereotypes and misrepresentations. Still, old attitudes, experiences and stereotypes die hard.

Disability Friendly terms

People with disabilities have continued to seek accurate portrayals that present a respectful, positive view of individuals as active participants of society, in regular social, work and home environments. Every individual regardless of sex, age, race or ability deserves to be treated with dignity and respect. As part of the effort to end discrimination and segregation in employment, education and the communities at large, it is important to eliminate prejudicial language.

The United Nations (UN) Office at Geneva prepared guidelines as part of the effort to implement the United Nations Disability Inclusion Strategy, launched in 2019. The strategy is a key framework for policy and action to mainstream disability inclusion at the United Nations. It is aimed at removing barriers and engaging persons with disabilities in all spheres of work and life in order to achieve sustainable and transformative progress on disability inclusion. Its indicator 15 on communication, in particular, requires that internal and external communications should be respectful of persons with disabilities. The document is based on an in-depth study of disability-inclusive language materials and a consultation process with a diverse range of experts, including persons with disabilities (United Nations 2021).

The language used in referring to persons with disabilities has an impact, as it shapes the perception of the world. This language has evolved over time, and terms that were commonly used some years ago are no longer acceptable. It is therefore important to raise awareness about language that is appropriate to use when talking to or about persons with disabilities. Inappropriate language can make persons with disabilities feel excluded or offend them and can be a barrier to full and meaningful participation. The use of derogatory or inappropriate language may amount to discrimination and impinge on the enjoyment of human rights. Adopting language that celebrates diversity, will contribute to strengthening the human rights model of disability.

Like other minorities, the disability community has developed preferred terminology - People First Language. People First Language is an objective way of acknowledging, communicating and reporting on disabilities. It eliminates generalizations, assumptions and stereotypes by focusing on the person rather than the disability. As the term implies, People First Language refers to the individual first and the disability second (Warren, L. J. (pxp2p 2015, UN 2021). For example, one can use expressions such as “children with albinism”, “students with dyslexia”, “women with intellectual disabilities” and, of course, “persons with disabilities”.

However, the people-first rule does not necessarily apply to all types of disabilities. There are some exceptions. For example, when referring to persons who are blind, one can say either “blind persons” or “persons who are blind”, and the same applies to deaf or deaf blind persons. If in doubt, one should ask the person or group how they choose to be identified. While some people may not use preferred terminology, it is important not to repeat negative terms that stereotype, devalue or discriminate. Equally important, is to ask oneself, if the disability is even relevant and needs to be mentioned when referring to individuals.

According to the UN (2021) document, inclusive language is a key tool in combating ableism and its entrenched manifestations. Ableism is a misguided and biased understanding of disability that leads to the assumption that the lives of persons with disabilities are not worth living. Ableism can take many forms, including harmful language.

Offensive, outdated, and improper terms

Some demeaning attitudes or terminology may be found in both medical and educational domain. The medical model may promote the image of people with disabilities as needing health care or as “sick”. Many people with disabilities do have a predisposition for certain medical conditions, this does not mean they are always sick. In the educational model, some professionals assume the role of “helpful” teacher or parent around people with disabilities. Many seem to underestimate the potential of people with disabilities to function without supports.

People With Disability Australia (PWDA, 2021) made lists of commonly used stereotypes in relation to disability. These lists contain examples of outdated

or offensive language and phrases that should not be used, alongside their appropriate and respectful alternatives. Below are some outdated terms alongside the current terms:

People with disability

What not to say	What to say
People living with disability, the disabled	People/women/children with disability
Suffers from, victim of, afflicted by, crippled by, incapacitated by	Jide has a chronic health condition
Paraplegic (which describes the person as their impairment) Confined to a wheelchair, wheelchair-bound	Vanessa has paraplegia/quadriplegia
wheelchair* person	Odo uses a wheelchair or mobility device

*Wheelchairs are liberating to a person who can't walk. 'Bedbound' and 'housebound' are acceptable because they describe limitations.

People with cognitive/intellectual disability

What not to say	What to say
Disability/intellectual disability Intellectually challenged, mentally retarded, mentally disabled, mentally defective, handicapped, simple, special needs*	Joe has a cognitive disability
Downy, mongoloid	Sarah has Down syndrome
Demented	Maria has dementia
Brain-damaged, brain impaired	Grace has acquired brain injury

*People with disability have rights not needs

Some people on the autism spectrum identify as autistic/Autistic. They consider autism to be a cultural identity beyond the medical diagnosis and may or may not identify as having disability.

What not to say	What to say
Aspy/aspie, profoundly autistic, mild autism spectrum	Kate has autism, or Karim is on the autism
High functioning/low functioning	Sue is autistic/Autistic (if she identifies that way)
Mental	Luke is neuroatypical/neurodiverse/neurodivergent
Hyper/hyperactive, space cadet	Mary has ADHD
Slow learner, stupid	Florence has a learning disability

People with psychosocial disability

Psychosocial disability arises when someone with a mental health condition encounters social barriers that prevent them from participating equally in society. Psychosocial disability may restrict a person’s ability to concentrate, to cope with multiple tasks, to interact with others, to accept constructive feedback, and/or to manage stress.

What not to say	What to say
Crazy, insane, mad, manic, mentally ill, mentally unstable, loony, nuts, psycho(tic), psychopath(ic)	Ngozi has psychosocial disability/a mental health condition
Benjamin is schizophrenic (which describes the person as their illness), schizo	
Jolene is borderline	Jolene has borderline personality disorder
Depressive	Van has depression
People with sensory disability	Sensory disability, or sensory impairment, affects one or more of a person’s senses (touch, hearing, sight, taste, smell, spatial awareness.)
Martin is deaf as a doorpost, Martin is a deafie	Martin is d/Deaf, hard of hearing (HOH)
The blind, person without sight, blind as a bat, blindie	Mina is blind, has a vision impairment, Mina is a person with low vision
Mute, dumb	Frances is non-verbal

People without disability

What not to say	What to say
Able-bodied*, abled*, healthy, hearing,	Person without disability, non-disabled person

*Some people with disability reject the term ‘able-bodied’ because it implies people with disability lack able bodies. People with disability who use identity-first language, however, tend use ‘abled’ to describe people without disability, and ‘able-bodied’ to describe people without physical or mobility-related disability for the purposes of consistency.

Neurotypical people

When referring to someone who is not neurodiverse or does not have an intellectual, psychosocial, or cognitive disability:

What not to say	What to say
Normal, of sound mind	Victoria is neurotypical

Disability euphemisms

Euphemisms are at best condescending; at worst, they are offensive; be respectful but be direct.

Terms to avoid include:

Diffability, differently abled, handicap(ped), handicapable, special needs with different abilities.

What not to say	What to say
Dwarf midget	Person of short stature
Intellectually challenged, mental defective	Person with cognitive disability
mentally retarded, mentally disabled, simple moron, retard, retarded, imbecile, cretin	Person with intellectual Disability
Downy, mongol(oid)	Person with Down syndrome

What not to say	What to say
learning disability, Slow, slow learner, retarded, special needs	Person with learning disability
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), hyper, hyperactive	Person with ADHD
brain injury, brain-damaged, brain-impaired	Person with a brain injury
Aspy/aspie, autistic high functioning, profoundly autistic, autistic person.	Person with autism, person on the autism spectrum

Equal Dreams (2021), came up with items on this table among others

Terms generally discouraged	Terms generally encouraged
Retarded, slow, idiot	People with disabilities
Crazy, psycho, weirdo, mentally sick/ill	Person with intellectual/cognitive/developmental disability
Deaf and mute, hearing-impaired	have hearing loss
Person suffering from, person afflicted with, a victim of...	Deaf or hard of hearing
Handicapped/disabled facilities such as parking lots and toilets	Accessible facilities such as parking lots and toilets
Normal, abled-bodied	non-disabled
Retarded, Slow, BrainDamaged, "Special ed"	Learning disability, Cognitive disability, Person with a learning or cognitive disability
Hyper-sensitive, Psycho,	Person with a psychiatric

Crazy, Insane, Wacko, Nuts	disability, Person with a mental health disability
Handicapped, Physically Challenged, "Special," Deformed, Cripple, Gimp, Spastic, Spaz, Wheelchairbound,	Wheelchair user, Physically disabled, Person with a mobility or physical disability
Retard, Mentally retarded, "Special ed"	Cognitively/Developmentally disabled, Person with a cognitive/developmental disability
Victim, Someone "stricken with" a disability (i.e. "Someone stricken with cancer" or "an AIDS victim")	Survivor, Someone "living with" a specific disability (i.e. "Someone living with cancer or AIDS")

American with Disability Act's (ADA) Disability Language and Etiquette has the following:

Terms generally discouraged	Terms generally recommended
Handicap	Disability
Hearing impaired	Person who is deaf or hard of hearing
Mental illness, mental disorder, crazy, insane	Psychiatric disability
Epileptic	Person who has epilepsy; person who has seizures
Fits, spells, attacks	Seizures
Brain damaged	People with brain injuries
Diabetics	People who have diabetes

The list is not exhausted, there are differences and similarities according to the writers.

Summary/Conclusion:

People with disabilities should decide how their disability should be stated. Some may choose people first language, while others use identity first language. At this time, people-first language is recommended for use by anyone who does not have a disability and for professionals who are writing or speaking about people with disabilities. People-first language is based on the idea that the person is not identified by their disability. An example of this is "People who are blind" instead of "Blind people. While Identity-first language means that the person feels that the disability is a strong part of who they are and they are proud of their disability. For example "Disabled person," versus "person who has a disability." Different people may have their own preferences in how they describe or refer to their disabilities. Where possible, it is best to check with the individual for their

preference. Some argue that people-first language separates the disability from a person's identity, suggesting that disability is inherently negative and undermining the social model of disability.

Implications of the discussion to People with Disabilities and Special needs Education:

The intention of disability-identity-first language (such as Deaf student and autistic person) is to acknowledge the individual or community's desire to embrace disability as part of one's self/community identity and, in some cases, to express pride in and ownership of such an identity. The Deaf community for instance, considers itself a linguistic minority with a unique language and culture, hence members of the community prefer the term Deaf (with capital D). However, there are also individuals who prefer not to adopt an identity associated with their disability. It is important to acknowledge that not every person will agree with or adopt such terms, and individual preferences that differ are to be respected. In cases where a collective reference has to be made without the opportunity to ascertain the particular community's preferences (such as in a publication), a caveat explaining this should be made. Regardless of the approach employed, the language used should respect the individuals and their communities.

Suggestions:

The following suggestions are made:

- People with disabilities have suffered over the years due to insensitivity of the general public, therefore, efforts should be made among the stakeholders to accord people with disability full respect in order to decrease discrimination and strengthen human rights model of disability.
- Since new terms evolve as the years roll by, government, parents, teachers, students, professionals and the media should be constantly abreast of emerging terminologies.

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