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# A framework of language use in reference to people with disabilities: People-first, disability-implicit, and disability-first language in a school setting

Lindsey Therese Back  
*DePaul University*, lback@depaul.edu

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A FRAMEWORK OF LANGUAGE USE IN REFERENCE TO PEOPLE WITH  
DISABILITIES: PEOPLE-FIRST, DISABILITY-IMPLICIT, AND  
DISABILITY-FIRST LANGUAGE IN A SCHOOL SETTING

A Thesis

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BY

LINDSEY THERESE BACK

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Department of Psychology

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

DePaul University

Chicago, Illinois

THESIS COMMITTEE

Chris Keys, Ph.D.

Chairperson

Susan McMahon, Ph.D.

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VITA

The author was born in Chicago, Illinois, on September 23, 1986. She graduated from Neuqua Valley High School in Naperville, Illinois, and continued on to the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. There she received a Bachelor of Arts degree in Psychology and Political Science in 2008. That same year, she entered DePaul University for graduate study in Community Psychology.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

According to the most recent census figures, 54.4 million people have a disability in the United States, which is about 17.7% of the population. These numbers make individuals with disabilities the largest minority group in the United States, and in much greater numbers than might be expected. Among that 54.4 million, about 35 million people, or nearly 12 percent of the total population of about 307,026,079 are classified as having a severe disability (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008).

These numbers raise concerns about how a minority group so large functions in society. As individuals with disabilities comprise such a meaningful portion of the population, it seems obvious and unavoidable that they should be included in all typical activities, notwithstanding their limitations. Unfortunately, their minority status often inhibits that inclusion: individuals with disabilities have experienced social oppression, marginalization, discrimination, and accompanying stigmatization (Baynton, 2001; Block-Lourie, Balcazar & Keys, 2001).

Given the prevalence of individuals with disabilities in the population, the federal government has taken a stance on preventing discrimination toward people with disabilities in order to facilitate their full participation in majority society. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 was a significant effort to make some aspects of society supported by the federal government accessible for individuals with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act “addresses discrimination, an

action. By making discriminatory actions towards the disabled illegal, the ADA broadens the scope of our [people with disabilities] civil rights” (Caras, 1994, p. 91).

The Americans with Disabilities Act, passed in 1990 and amended in 2008, defines disability functionally; that is, a physical or mental impairment that inhibits individuals from performing major life tasks, such as walking or eating. This impairment could result from a wide range of conditions such as muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, cancer, mental or emotional illness, schizophrenia, manic depression, controlled diabetes, arthritis, asthma, epilepsy, HIV, and alcoholism, among others (ADA, 2008). Because the terms “disability” and “major life tasks” as functionally defined by this legislation are purposely broad, a large portion of the population could be viewed as having some degree of disability. The Americans with Disabilities Act recognized that these individuals with various disability types and backgrounds compose a distinct minority who experience prejudice and are “subject to social discrimination” (Gill & Cross, 2009, p. 12) based on their disability, also known as ableism. Therefore, it is crucial to be aware of the experiences of individuals with disabilities and make it a goal to prevent their oppression in society. The sheer number of people affected by the Americans with Disabilities Act is large, but the impacts of ableism in society are even more troubling. These impacts include, but are not limited to, low educational attainment, low rates of employment, exclusion from community life, and the reinforcement of prejudices against disability (Hehir, 2002).

In 2004, the government made another attempt to prevent discrimination toward individuals with disabilities: Public Law 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Act, passed in 1975 and guaranteed a free, appropriate education to individuals with disabilities. The law was reauthorized and updated several times, most recently as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2004). This change reflected the newest preferred language and potentially a new position of individuals with disabilities in society, or at least in education.

### History

The position of individuals with disabilities in society has isolated them from fully participating in everyday life. They have been seen as a “dysfunctional sector of the general population, defined by deviant biology” (Gill & Cross, 2009, p. 13). A report made to the legislature of Massachusetts on “idiocy”, in 1848, claimed that segregated settings for individuals with disabilities were more humane than those which were integrated, and proposed the first special schools for children with intellectual disabilities (Howe, 1848). Because students with disabilities had previously not been receiving any education, special schools were considered a step forward, but they ultimately contributed to the isolation of people with disabilities. When society is homogeneous, integration may be simple; however, integration and inclusion are more difficult goals when differences based on disability, ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, religion and other dimensions for categorizing humans are emphasized as ways of valuing some and devaluing others.

Special schools and special education classes, as well as residential institutions, have allowed individuals with disabilities to be part of the large portion of the population excluded from fully participating in everyday life in the United States (Harley, Alston, & Middleton, 2007). For example, those with intellectual disabilities who had been institutionalized endured poor conditions and rejection in isolated settings until institutionalized populations peaked in the 1960's. Subsequently, individuals with disabilities were more likely to be placed in community settings where they often continued to experience isolation and rejection from society (Lusthaus, 1991). Although institutions were initially created as a way to protect individuals with disabilities from society, they actually fostered their isolation. That isolation, coupled with rising costs and increasing numbers, eventually led the institutions to devolve into dehumanizing places. Institutions ultimately became places that protected society from the individuals with disabilities and failed to provide the constructive support that may have been offered to these individuals (Wolfensburger, 1976). Individuals with disabilities have been "hidden from society, which meant the rest of the people did not have the opportunity to understand the disabilities and more important to see them as people first and recognize the abilities of this population" (Blaska, 1993, p. 25). Individuals with disabilities who were not institutionalized still experienced similar isolation by holding a lower-level position in society. Students who were deaf or blind were often placed in special schools or classrooms. Although they may not have been completely hidden from people without disabilities, as recently as 2003, students with physical disabilities occupied a "secondary", excluded

position in high schools. They were not able to fully participate in school or social activities, and did not receive the same resources available to students without disabilities (Doubt, 2003). They were verbally included but non-verbally excluded, meaning that schools and staff made efforts to vocalize the importance of inclusion, but in actuality students with disabilities experienced segregation. Students experienced exclusion resulting from structural inequalities, lack of access, and lack of opportunity (Braithwaite, 1990).

Individuals with disabilities are not only isolated from the majority culture. They also experience a lack of subculture around their disabilities. Most minority group members, although still marginalized, at least experience “a recognized subculture and thus develop certain norms and expectations” (Zola, 1993, p. 167). This experience has not been the case for individuals with disabilities until the last generation. Individuals with disabilities experienced all the negatives of being part of a minority group, but none of what might be considered positive. The “nature of their experience has been toward isolation” (Zola, 1993, p. 167), even from other individuals with disabilities. Other minority groups, such as women or racial minorities, experienced revolutions and civil rights struggles. These allowed them to identify with other members of their particular minority group in an effort to overcome the marginalization of their experiences. In contrast, individuals with disabilities have had few opportunities to interact with other members of their minority group to enable the transmission of positive identity (Gill & Cross, 2009). In a particularly poignant description of

the differences between individuals with disabilities and other minority groups, Zola (1993) posits that:

“...with the rise of black power, a derogatory label became a rallying cry, ‘Black is beautiful’. And when women saw their strength in numbers, they shouted ‘Sisterhood is powerful.’ But what about those with a chronic illness or disability? Could they yell, ‘long live cancer’, ‘up with multiple sclerosis’, ‘I’m glad I had polio!’, ‘Don’t you wish you were blind?’ Thus, the traditional reversing of the stigma will not so easily provide a basis for a common positive identity.” (p. 168)

Although this statement is not currently as relevant as when Zola wrote it, there is still a valid basis for his argument. Indeed, an exploratory study by Gilson, Tusler, & Gill (1997) described the emergence of a positive disability identity only when individuals with disabilities are given the opportunity to discuss their experiences in a supportive environment. Individuals with disabilities, particularly mental disabilities, have historically had difficulty unifying for a common purpose, and are one of the last groups to protest the dominant culture’s negative ideas about them (Coffman, 2007). Their isolation has inhibited their ability to cultivate a supportive subculture. Individuals with disabilities are not included in the mainstream culture, and at least until recently also have not been included in a unified minority subculture or disability community (Gilson & Depoy, 2000),



despite efforts by certain groups with specific disabilities. Although the passage of legislation, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act and Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, has attempted to allow individuals with disabilities greater participation in mainstream culture, they are still not fully included. Various barriers to full implementation of these laws, such as a lack of resources or general resistance, have slowed the process.

### Language, Disability, and Implications

Now that the exclusion of individuals with disabilities has been established as part of their history, we will focus on a specific aspect of society's treatment of people with disabilities that contributes to this marginalization: the language that has previously been used to refer to these individuals. Language is powerful, and, other things being equal, it has the power keep individuals with disabilities in the same position in life: as outcasts. The Whorfian hypothesis, which emphasizes the importance of attention to language in understanding experience, includes the principle of metalinguistic awareness. Metalinguistic awareness calls for "attention to the effects of variations in language—being aware, for example, of how different words impact on different speech partners in different situations" (Lee, 1997, p. 448). By increasing awareness around the language used to refer to people with disabilities, it is possible to better understand and possibly improve their experiences.

Generally speaking, "language is a reflection of how people in a society see each other" (Blaska, 1993, p. 25). According to Samuel Gridley Howe, in his 1866 dedication address at a new institution for individuals who were blind,

language revealed “character, and even their secret motives of action...[and] the prevailing ideas of ... men...” (Howe, 1866). Essentially, if the language used is deprecating, it is because society views individuals with disabilities in a negative light. Language, and the cognition that accompanies it, is one way that stigma surfaces: from “a process of generalizing from a single experience, people are treated categorically rather than individually and are devalued in the process” (Zola, 1993, p. 169). Stigma exists as a relationship between a negative attitude and stereotype about people with disabilities, and results in exclusion from society because those who are stigmatized are seen as “others” (Goffman, 1997). Language can contribute to stigma due to its negative connotations; specifically, disabling conditions are stigmatizing because they evoke negative responses from others (Susman, 1994). Stigma is especially consequential because it shapes “central aspects of self-concept [including low self-esteem], which is connected to life satisfaction” (Rosenfield, 1997, p. 661). Regardless of disability type, labeling an individual as disabled could stigmatize the individual and lead to exclusion from society (Waxman, 1991).

Although labels are seemingly arbitrary and subjective, their consequences are far-reaching (Caras, 1994). The words or phrases people speak or write, as well as the order in which they are sequenced, have a strong effect on society’s perception of people with disabilities as well as the self-image of the individuals with the disabilities (Blaska, 1993; Froschl et al, 1984; Zola, 1993). According to sociological labeling theory, labeling an individual based on a diagnosis can lead to negative consequences for those individuals as a result of the stigma evoked

(Scheff, 1966). These negative consequences can include a lack of access to resources and a lack of feelings of well-being (Link, Cullen, Struening, Shrout, & Dohrenwend, 1989). As Rosenhan (1973) demonstrated in his study of “sane” people in mental hospitals, simply giving someone a label with a negative meaning (viz. schizophrenia) can exclude the individual from society. In Rosenhan’s study, labeling individuals as schizophrenic, and consistently emphasizing the label over actual observed symptoms, resulted in the individuals being defined by their illness and subsequently treated differently.

Specifically in regards to language effects on children and inclusion, children’s attitudes can be shaped by the words they hear or read (Byrnes, 1987). Kosteinik et al (1988) agreed, declaring that a positive verbal environment, facilitated by words used by adults, can make the children feel like valued members of society. Based on both theoretical claims and empirical support, it is clear that the language used to refer to individuals with disabilities must be positive and non-demeaning. Thereby, speakers can avoid portraying a negative image to others and may work to prevent exclusion. Language is the first step in making society responsible for including individuals with disabilities:

“Call a person sick or crazy and all their behavior becomes dismissable’. Because someone has been labeled ill, all their activity and beliefs—past, present, and future—become related to and explainable in terms of their illness. Once this occurs, society can deny the validity of anything

which they might say, do, or stand for. Being seen as the object of medical treatment evokes the image of many ascribed traits, such as weakness, helplessness, dependency, regressiveness, abnormality of appearance and depreciation of every mode of physical and mental functioning.”

(Zola, 1993, p. 170)

Unfortunately, the language used to refer to people with disabilities has not reflected the positive image necessary for these individuals to be included in society: it has, for most of history, kept them at their marginalized place in society. These individuals were made to feel like outcasts, in part, through the language that was used toward them: historically and currently. Frequently, the language used to refer to individuals with disabilities has portrayed them in an imprecise, stereotypical, and devaluing light (Haley & Brodwin, 1988). For example, common usage has included the word “cripple” and the term “handicapped” which originated from a begging term meaning “cap-in-hand” (Blaska, 1993). It should be noted that the term handicapped, once thought to be “optimistic”, is no longer widely used in 2010. In an article written in 1975, when some language was beginning to change to reflect the more positive emerging views of individuals with disabilities, Manus (1975) described additional terms used in the past that are far from positive: “ ‘idiot’, ‘moron’, ‘gimpy’, or ‘psycho’”. At that time,

“‘Easter Seal Society’ ha[d] replaced the ‘Society for

Crippled Children and Adults'. The letters ICD have replaced the explicit 'Institute for Crippled and Disabled;' 'crippled children' are now [in 1975] more optimistically referred to as handicapped or disabled children. We still, however, hear of 'crippling diseases' and the 'invalid wards' or 'incurables'" (Manus, 1975, p. 35).

Although attempts were made to make language less exclusionary, it was not nearly as beneficial for those individuals with disabilities as it could have been. Zola (1993) agreed that labeling occurs more often than people think, and in much more offensive ways: "while it is commonplace to hear of doctors referring to people as 'the appendicitis in Room 306' or 'the amputee down the hall', such labeling is more common in popular culture than one might believe" (p. 168). Interestingly, this labeling has happened in ways as subtle as in children's comic books:

"Perhaps not unexpectedly, such stand-in appellations are most commonly applied to villains. They were commonplace during the heyday of the pulp magazines, where the disability was incorporated into their names—'One-Eyed Joe', 'Scarface Kelly', a tradition enshrined in the Dick Tracy comic strips. It is a tradition that continues, though with more subtlety. Today we may no

longer have ‘Clubfoot the Avenger’, a mad German master-criminal who crossed swords for 25 years with the British Secret service, but we do have ‘The Deaf Man’, the recurring thorn in the side of Ed McBain’s long-running (over 30 years) 87<sup>th</sup> Precinct novels.” (Zola, 1993, p. 169)

Focusing only on the disability as a diagnosis “can subsume the culturally, socially, and historically derived identity of an individual beneath a label of pathology...personal characteristics become secondary, and people become defined by their disability” (Block-Lourie et al., 2001, p. 23). This prejudice against individuals with disabilities, combined with multiple contextual factors, drove people with disabilities to unite in an attempt to take ownership over their own lives.

The first stage of this effort to take ownership was characterized by the struggle for anti-discrimination laws and practices, such as the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act. The second phase was characterized by individuals with disabilities experiencing a shift in attitude toward and ownership over their lives (Longmore, 2003). Instead of simply avoiding discrimination, they attempted to achieve a new identity, distinct from that of a “disabled person”. Instead of focusing on a pathology, individuals with disabilities were more likely to experience a positive identity and sense of community (Block-Lourie et al, 2001).

Individuals with disabilities have been referred to as “disabled people” which emphasizes the disability before the individual and may be considered disability-first language. This language usage can make it difficult for individuals with disabilities to distance themselves from their disability or be perceived as anything beyond it. The individual is seen as disabled before anything else (Blaska, 1994). In contrast, individuals with disabilities are sometimes referenced in general terms, without particular attention paid to a disability. This language use, which may be considered disability-implicit language, indicates a disability through context but does not specifically reference a disability. Although this language may be used when the disability is not considered relevant, it may also be used as a substitute or indirect way to reference a disability.

In the recent movement for people with disabilities to take ownership over their lives, “the issue of naming—what they are called—was one of the first battlegrounds” (Zola, 1993, p. 167). The creation of stigma through language compelled individuals with disabilities to attempt to be aware of, address and ultimately transcend stigma-induced constraints. In doing so, people with disabilities could develop a group identity whose general welfare is a result of contributions from everyone (Gill & Cross, 2009). The move to language with fewer negative connotations and less stigma allowed individuals with disabilities to be viewed by others, as well as view themselves, more positively. In the words of Billy Joel, “it just might be a lunatic you’re looking for!” (Joel, 1980). Although the disability is a part of the individual, a common identity emphasizes positive qualities that may otherwise be overlooked. More disability-implicit and

positive, individual-focused language places less emphasis on disability, and ultimately may allow people with disabilities to experience more acceptance in society.

### People-First Language

Through a combination of the preference of individuals with disabilities and federal mandates, the concept of people-first language came to dominate. People-first language is a semantic approach that “puts the person before the disability, and it describes what a person *has*, not who a person *is*” (Kids Together, Inc., 2009). A united group of individuals with disabilities attempted to “re-shape mainstream sensibilities and make possible the inclusion of individuals regarded as strangers, deviants, and damaged people” (Gill & Cross, 2009, p.1). In doing so, they shunned the old derogatory terms in favor of a language that “demonstrates respect for people with disabilities by referring to them first as individuals, and then referring to their disability when it is needed” (Blaska, 1993, p. 27). In part, this shift was driven by the spirit of the Americans with Disabilities Act, and also by previous efforts for racial civil rights (Gill & Cross, 2009).

Linguistic relativity in naming posits that emphasizing different parts of experience can refocus attention (Lee, 1997): in this case, an emphasis on the individual refocuses attention away from the disability. People-first language structure avoids “giving a disability more prominence than it deserves” (Blaska, 1993, p. 27). For example, the term “the boy who is blind” uses people-first language, as opposed to “the blind boy”, which places the focus primarily on the



disability. The language of the past excluded or diminished individuals with disabilities, whereas “the utilization of ‘person first’ language demonstrates acceptance and respect for differences among people as we speak and write and in turn can have a positive effect upon society” (Blaska, 1993, p. 31). Theoretically, the use of people-first language works to prevent the previously mentioned exclusion from society by noting the person prior to noting the disability. People-first language only mentions a disability when necessary, and its use may reflect new thinking about people with disabilities (Lee, 1997). People-first language also may prevent the severity of a disability from being overgeneralized: “even if a person has a particular physical disability, this does not mean that the person is unable to do all physical activities” (American Psychological Association, 2008). Moreover, a disability in one domain such as the physical does not automatically mean that the individual so affected also has impairments in another domain such as cognitive, sensory or emotional functioning. The Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps (TASH) is one of many groups of individuals with disabilities that endorse the use of people-first language (Bailey, 1991). The American Psychological Association also has offered its support, beginning in 1992, through its requirements of the use of people-first language in order to remove bias in language when dealing with disabilities in its journals (APA, 2008).

In certain circumstances, not using people-first language has been supported in order to emphasize that society or the environment disables the person. For example, “the phrase ‘disabled child’ will be used rather than ‘child with disability’...the phrase ‘child with disability, although laudable for being

person and child centered, nevertheless implies that the disability is something intrinsic to the child” (Colver, 2005, p. 781). A developmental disability advocacy organization in the United Kingdom “preferred disabled people over people with disabilities to emphasize that people are disadvantaged by oppressive social forces, not by physical or learning impairments” (Fernald, 1995, p. 101). The assumption underlying this preference for putting the disability first has not yet been widely affirmed or empirically supported. Overall in the United States at present, individuals with disabilities, professional and disability advocacy organizations, and people without disabilities overwhelmingly prefer people-first language as a way to accept the individuals into society. Therefore, we will not use a term that emphasizes a disability, whether or not this disability is a result of society or something intrinsic to the individual. The people-first term is in theory the one that allows for more inclusion, which in itself is a concept that will confront, not perpetuate, the oppression in society.

The United States is not the only country that prefers people-first language. In a study of language preferences in the United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, and the United States of America, “people first language was the one practice that was most consistently favored by organizations in different countries. In three of the four countries, organizations had strong preferences (exceeding 85%) for people first language” (Fernald, 1995, p. 101). Organizations in Ireland did not have marked preferences for people-first or non-people-first language, but did use the phrase “intellectual disability” as opposed to “mental handicap”.

A concern about people-first language is that its structure makes it longer and therefore less readable. However, an empirical study by Guth and Murphy (1998) found that “there is no significant difference in the readability of the people first and non-people first materials”. Therefore, “we can conclude that the language style preferences of people with disabilities and advocacy groups who work with individuals with disabilities are of the utmost significance. The preferred, people first language should be incorporated into written and oral communications when talking about individuals with disabilities”. Because of the ease with which individuals can comprehend people-first language, this language should be used across groups.

A necessary point about people-first language is that although its preference has been established for a multitude of reasons, whether it or other forms of language are actually used and in what forms or variations has not yet been empirically examined. Previous writing about people-first language, as well as other forms of language used to refer to people with disabilities, has been much more prescriptive than descriptive. Language use is a crucial aspect of the inclusion and identity of individuals with disabilities. Therefore, there is a great deal of value in attempting to describe the ways people refer to individuals with disabilities, and a need to study people-first language in particular, before any steps are taken to advocate for people-first language or analyze its effects.

#### Language Use and Role

Because people-first language is the preferred way to refer to individuals with disability, ideally, all groups would use it. However, based on studies of

ecology, it is unlikely that people-first language is used similarly across groups. Community psychology has long ago established ecology as a concept of importance, and the social ecology of education is crucial. According to Gruber and Trickett (1987), the ecology of schools produces differences in the experiences of students, as each school has its own structure, culture, and climate. Different ecological levels may utilize varying forms of language (Bronfenbrenner, 1983). For example, ecological levels of schools may include students at the peer level, parents at the familial level, teachers at the classroom level, and administrators at the school level. Individuals likely interact within their own levels, as well as between levels. As individuals can grow cognitively through dialogue with others (Lee, 1997), a study of language use by role is necessary.

As previously stated, there are very few empirical studies relating to people-first language; one of the only others deals with training teachers at the classroom level. In her study with special education teachers, Blaska (1993) found that it is possible to train people to use people-first language. The potential for such training is crucial because “teachers admitted that they were less aware of...disability bias in language” (p. 27). They indicated their need to be more aware of words they use which may be promoting disability bias (Froschl et al., 1984), a point which may still be relevant today given the confusion surround preferred language. Blaska’s study offers more empirical support for why people-first language needs to be used and taught. Additionally, for people in positions to influence children’s development, such as teachers and parents, the verbal

environment created in different situations is critical (Gill & Cross, 2009; Lee, 1997). Role differences in previous studies demonstrate that, beyond simply studying what language is used to refer to individuals with disabilities, language use by role may also be useful for analysis.

Language can also be viewed as a reflection of attitude (Zola, 1993), and therefore any differences in language use by role may be understood as more than superficial. Stigma can be created through the language used by people in power who do not have the stigmatized attribute; therefore the language of people in different roles is of interest (Goffman, 1997). Attitudes can differ by role, as seen in a study of attitudes toward people with intellectual disabilities in Japan, South Korea, and the United States. University students and staff working with people with intellectual disabilities participated in the study. Particularly in the United States, but also in Japan and South Korea, staff had more positive attitudes of individuals with disabilities than students did. After country, role was the best predictor of variation in attitude (Horner-Johnson, 2002). This point can also be seen indirectly in a study of inclusion-related attitudes: participants with higher educational levels had more positive attitudes about inclusion (Henry et al., 2004). As attitudes differ by role, language may differ by role as a result of variations in attitudes. Despite the research on attitude differences by role, there is little data on language differences by role. There is empirical support for the fact that social roles can contribute to social perceptions (Ross, Amabile, & Steinmetz, 1977). The roles that people in a school setting occupy may influence their perceptions or attitudes and therefore language use. Younger people also tended to have more

positive attitudes toward individuals with disabilities, which may also be relevant to people in an education setting (Horner-Johnson, 2002).

Additionally, the language used by those who occupy different roles can have different effects. Gill and Cross (2009) suggest that studying teachers' and parents' communications about disability may reveal differences in the way children with disabilities develop. Teachers and parents, and possibly administrators, may use different language in their varying roles in children's development. As people-first language is the preferred way to refer to individuals with disabilities, the people who use it are of interest, as is the alternative language used by different groups. Understanding patterns of language use by role contributes to a greater appreciation of the experiences of individuals with disabilities, as all ecological levels interact.

### The Current Study

In a large urban Midwestern school district, students with disabilities were transferred from a specialized school to general education schools when the former school closed. In the transition, the goal of the schools was to be able to effectively educate students with disabilities, in a more inclusive setting as well or better than they were being educated prior to the transition. The transfer provided an appropriate context for conducting a qualitative empirical study regarding the nature and extent of use or non-use of people-first language among role groups in the school ecology.

### Rationale

Ever since the birth of the field at the Swampscott Conference in 1965, community psychology established itself as an advocate for marginalized groups. As individuals in a position of power, it is our responsibility to defend those who are oppressed. In doing so, we will work to change the systems and context which enable that oppression. As community psychology attempts to make progress through research and ultimately action, it follows that it is most logical to look to the largest minority groups to most effectively guide our work and fulfill our responsibilities.

Through a review of the literature, language use has demonstrated its ability to reflect changing social status, and people-first language has been established as a possible way to further include individuals with disabilities in society. People-first language is also the preferred way to refer to individuals with disabilities, because of the language's potential to include them. Because of the sheer possible power of language, it is necessary to understand how people refer to individuals with disabilities through various forms of language. This study provided a description of exactly how people refer to individuals with disabilities, as all language use has potential impacts; however, people-first language could have the most beneficial impacts. As an initial step in the empirical analysis of language, this study looked at active use of people-first, disability-first, and disability-implicit language in particular in key roles in an educational setting. As individuals' with disabilities position in society has been steadily changing and improving in recent years, this study demonstrated whether language used to refer

to them reflects that change. Based on previous studies of role-based differences, language differences between roles were expected for students with disabilities, parents, teachers, and administrators. The qualitative strategies of this study were very appropriate for the descriptive analysis of language use. By determining language use by role, the study sought to provide a basis for future empirical studies of language, particularly language about people with disabilities. Without an analysis of if and how language was used, future empirical research has no reference point. If people-first language is as powerful as the literature suggests, it benefits everyone to use it frequently. This study examined in what ways and to what extent such use is actually happening.

This study provided an excellent opportunity to determine the use of language in education, as well as community psychology. In a field that prides itself on advocating for the acceptance of marginalized groups, community psychology has not sufficiently analyzed the use of language. As Samuel Gridley Howe (1848) stated, language will “speak to many generations in the coming time”. An analysis of language may be able to contribute an explanation to the ways the ways individuals with disabilities are included in society. This study may also provide implications for policy, specifically in the education of students with disabilities. Results of this study also defined a framework of language used to refer to individuals with disabilities, which could be used for future research concerning promotion of well being and opportunities for people with disabilities and lessening the impacts of ableism.



### Research Questions

1. What language is used to refer to students with disabilities? What are the forms of language used?
2. How does this use of language vary by role?
  - Are there differences in the use of people-first, disability-first and disability-implicit language among students, parents, teachers, and administrators?
    - Which groups are more active in the use of each form of language?

## CHAPTER II

### METHOD

This study is part of a larger one conducted in a large, urban Midwestern school system. The school system was in the process of closing a school that primarily served students with disabilities, and was relocating these students with disabilities to other schools throughout the district. This proposed study focuses on interviews conducted with students with disabilities, all but one of whom had attended the closed school mentioned above, as well as interviews of parents, and teachers and administrators from three of the receiving schools. It seeks to provide a multi-role description of language used to describe students with disabilities. The approach of this study allows for exploration of the ecology of language as language use is similar and as it varies across different role groups.

### Research Participants

The interviews were conducted with 7 students, 4 parents and 1 guardian, 7 teachers, and 3 administrators in three urban high schools. All five parents or guardians had students who were also interviewed; two students were wards of the state and therefore no parents were available for interview purposes. Each of the three high schools had a culturally and ethnically diverse student body and an enrollment above 2000 students. Two of the schools had two or more years of experience in educating students with physical disabilities, although in small numbers, and one of the schools enrolled students with physical disabilities in the fall of the school transition year for the first time.

All students interviewed used wheelchairs. Three identified themselves as African American, two identified as Caucasian, and two identified as Hispanic. Three boys and four girls were interviewed. Three attended a magnet school, which focuses its curriculum around a specific theme. Three students attended a general education high school. One attended a selective enrollment high school for academically advanced students. Six of the students transferred to their current schools when the specialized school closed, and one entered high school from an elementary school in a different district that same year as the others transferred. Although this student did not experience exactly the same transition as other students, his account was still of interest. He was also a student with a disability in an involuntary transition attempting to succeed in his first year in a general education high school setting. This account also gave a description of a slightly more normative transition that acts as a check on the experiences of students with

disabilities going through a non-normative transition. It was normative in that it was a transition from elementary to high school, but non-normative in that the student transitioned without a choice and without his cohort. If there were differences in the transitions, there would be a need to explore normative transitions in more depth. If the accounts were similar, this student would add more information and perspective to the current study. This particular student's experiences of the transition were compared to other students' experiences. To more fully assess his similarity or uniqueness within the students, the interviews of this particular student's parent, teacher, and administrator were also compared to other parent, teacher, and administrator interviews.

Four parents and one guardian were interviewed. Two identified as African American, one identified as Caucasian, and two identified as Hispanic. All were female. The difference in number of students and parents was due to the fact that two students were wards of the state; as these two students were not in the care of official guardians, the researcher was unable to reach any type of caretakers suitable for these in-depth interviews. One parent spoke only Spanish, and a translator was used for her interview.

Of the seven teachers interviewed, five identified as Caucasian and two identified as Hispanic. Six were female and one was male. Six had three or more years of teaching experience. One teacher was in his second year of teaching. Two teachers had previous experience with inclusion. One teacher was a special education teacher, and six were general education teachers with content specialties.

Of the administrators, two identified as African American and one identified as Caucasian. Two were female and one was male. Two were principals. One was an assistant principal whose principal chose not to participate. This assistant principal had an exceedingly sound knowledge of special education for the purposes of these interviews. Each of these three administrators had held their current positions for over five years at the time of the interviews.

Students' interviews were of interest in this study because they provided a first-hand perspective on both experiencing life with a disability, as well as transitioning to a more mainstreamed setting. They may have been less concerned with speaking in a "politically correct" manner than they were with accurately describing the transition process. Teachers' interviews were of interest as they played the most direct role in educating the students with disabilities, which may influence language use, as well as implementing inclusion practices. Parents' interviews were of interest because they feel a unique sense of concern for these students with disabilities, far beyond that of the teachers and administrators. Parents also interact with their children in a way that may affect language use. Administrators' interviews were of interest because they were able to understand the transition from an administrative standpoint, and were also responsible for fostering a sense of belonging at a school-wide level.

### Measures

In order to gain a multi-perspective understanding of the transition, semi-structured interviews were developed for students, parents, teachers, and administrators (see Appendix A). All participants were questioned about their

experiences of the transition, any initial concerns they had, awareness of and attitudes toward inclusion practices, and what they would change about the transition.

Participants were also asked questions tailored to suit their particular respective groups. Specifically, students were asked if they chose to attend that particular school, and if so, why. They were also questioned about their experiences of social and extracurricular activities. In addition to the general questions, parents were asked about why they chose that school for their child, their involvement in the transition, and how they thought their child handled the new experiences. Teachers were also questioned about the transition at the school and classroom level. Administrators were asked about the transition at the school level, as well as ways their staff handled the experiences. They were also questioned about any training for staff members prior to the transition, as well as any other preparations that were made before the arrival of the new students with disabilities. The present study focused on the language used to refer to people with disabilities, not the topics discussed during the interview.

#### Procedure

After receiving initial IRB approval from Northwestern University (see Appendix B) in 2004 by the original primary investigator, permission was granted by the school district that same year. This study involved secondary data analysis; however, data was deidentified by the original primary investigator before it was received by the current researcher. Therefore the study was designated non-reviewable by the IRB at the current researcher's university in 2009. Sixty-two

schools received students with disabilities, and three of these schools were selected for this study based on recommendations from central office personnel. Transition experience, number of students received, and willingness to participate were considered by central office personnel. Administrators of these schools were sought out to voluntarily participate in the study, and after receiving information about the purpose and process, gave written permission. Then letters of invitation, as well as consent forms were sent home to parents of students with disabilities. Seven students were allowed to participate, and they, their parents, teachers, and administrators were interviewed as well. All participants were informed that their responses would be anonymous and de-identified. They were asked to confirm their understanding by repeating back the purpose of the study in their own words. All interviews were conducted by a primary investigator, at the participants' convenience. This investigator has mobility constraints herself and uses a wheelchair, which established a common connection with the student interviewees. Additionally, in terms of language used, it can be safely assumed that teacher, administrator and parent participants tended to be careful in her presence. No assumption is made about how the students responded. All interviews were digitally recorded and ranged from 30 to 60 minutes in duration. Following the completion of an interview, it was transcribed verbatim for future coding.

#### Coding and Analysis

Once all interviews were completed and transcribed, a coding manual for all types of interviews was developed. The data reduction began with one sample

interview for each role. Common themes were identified in this sample, then in the next group's sample, until themes were identified across all roles involved.

Important concepts were identified in several ways. They were defined by the administrator investigator and addressed directly in interview questions, and surfaced as a result of the interactive interview process. They also emerged from a general examination of the content of the data as described in grounded theory approaches to data analysis (Charmaz, 2008). Of the important concepts defined, language use in particular could not be examined through any other method but qualitative analysis (Charmaz, 2008). Based on previous inductive coding, which allows dominant themes to emerge (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003), language, such as people-first language, was identified as central and recurring. Language use as a common theme was then grouped into categories of codes. Each time language was used to refer to people with disabilities, it was coded as people-first, disability-implicit, or disability-first. These more general codes guided the qualitative analyses, and allowed for variations in language to present themselves. These codes were further refined by applying them to interviews from each role group that were not used as samples. Each interview was recoded several times to ensure that codes were sufficient to cover all interview material and that they did not overlap. A minimum of five appearances was required for a code to be included in the final codebook. Two coders continued to code and recode each interview to achieve an acceptable ( $\kappa=.80$ ) level of reliability.

After initial coding took place, it was determined that the general codes of people-first, disability-implicit, and disability-first language were not sufficient

and more specific codes were inductively added and/or adapted to encompass all existing language. These subcategories include general disability, specific disability, disability type, disability severity, and historically sensitive references for people-first and disability-first language, disability-only references as a subcategory for disability-first language, and general, school-focused, transition/inclusion-focused, and individual/name-focused references for disability-implicit language. A minimum of five appearances was required for a code to be included in the final codebook. These codes were used to recode a representative sample of interviews by a second coder, achieving an acceptable ( $\kappa=.82$ ) level of reliability. Final codes and subcategories are described in Appendix D.

This qualitative approach yielded a description of language used to refer to students with disabilities among individuals in a school setting. A comparison of frequency, based on Miles' and Huberman's (1994) approach, and descriptive strength of similar quotes between groups demonstrated emerging variations, commonalities, or differences in language use that emerge by role. Quotes were used to illustrate variations in language use.

Qualitative methods allow for a rich and in-depth understanding of data, which is ideal for the exploratory nature of the current study: an initial examination of language use in reference to people with disabilities. Additionally, the interest in variations of language use by role makes qualitative analyses appropriate. Quotes from interviews with students with disabilities, parents,



teachers, and administrators are used to describe and illustrate phenomena of interest.

## CHAPTER III

### RESULTS

*Research Question 1: What language is used to refer to students with disabilities?*

*What are the forms of language used?*

The variability in the language used to refer to students with disabilities spans a wide range. Multiple types of language fall under three broad categories: disability-first language, disability-implicit language, and people-first language. People-first language refers first to the individual, then the disability. Disability-implicit language avoids a direct reference to a disability at all, but the reference to the disability is implied in and understood through the language and context. Disability-first language refers to a disability before referencing the individual. These broad categories, as well as the more specific language usage that falls within them, allow for a multi-faceted picture of the language currently used to refer to individuals with disabilities in a school setting. Additionally, a descriptive analysis of language usage displays current status, progress made and any need for further improvement.

#### People-First Language

People-first language is the current most frequently preferred way to refer to individuals with disabilities, by people with disabilities, disability advocacy groups, and professional organizations (APA, 2008; Bailey, 1991). This form of language places emphasis on the individual by referring to the person first,

followed by a reference to the disability. The types of this category of language mirror those of non-people first language, and provide a rich understanding of various ways to use people-first language.

#### General people-first language

One form of people-first language involves making a general reference to a disability, following the primary reference, which is to the individual. When discussing inclusion in his classroom, one teacher stated, "We have some class activities that require pairing up. That pairing up doesn't work so well for the students with disabilities." Here, the teacher speaks about the students with disabilities generally, without specifying what their disabilities are. However, the focus is on the individual, as opposed to stating the disability first. Similarly, one parent of a student with a disability who transitioned into general education stated, "She learned not to be afraid and that's important and to know I can get to know other people besides people with disabilities." This mother viewed the transition for her daughter as extremely positive, particularly because her daughter was able to expand her social network beyond other students with disabilities. The mother did not refer to specific disabilities, but focused on the people. When asked about his attitudes toward inclusion, one administrator said, "I just think it's really important that we give as much of the same education as we can. Kids with disabilities have the same rights as the students without disabilities." This administrator had extremely positive attitudes toward inclusion, which may have been reflected in his use of people-first language to refer to individuals with disabilities.

### Disability-domain people-first language

Another form of people-first language focuses on the individual, then references the domain of the disability. These domains may be labeled as physical, sensory, emotional, or cognitive disabilities. These domain labels are often used to categorize students into groups for placement in classrooms. However, some schools received only students with particular types of disabilities; therefore, some references to disability type may not be for student placement purposes. When speaking about a student in her class, one teacher responded, "She has cognitive learning disabilities and also her attention span and her motivation is very, very limited." This teacher references the student first, followed by the domain of her disability. Similarly, when questioned about trainings organized by the school to prepare for the transition, another teacher stated, "The only training that comes to mind is in the beginning of the year when we were instructed to take care of students with physical disabilities as far as getting them out of the building and uhm, like a fire drill." This teacher references the students, followed by the disability domain, in an effort to explain why trainings were necessary. Another teacher said, "In some cases it's really true, the kid has a learning disability and just happens to not be very smart." This is an example of a justification for using disability domain to categorize students, using people-first language. In regards to interactions between students with disabilities and students without disabilities, another teacher said, "I have never ever seen a kid in this school make fun of someone for a physical disability." This teacher uses people-first language with a reference to disability domain to discuss the

acceptance of students with physical disabilities. This particular school received only students with physical disabilities.

#### Specific people-first language

Another form of people-first language makes a reference to the person, followed by a mention of the specific disability. One teacher used this language in a discussion of preparation for receiving the transfer students: "We had one big giant assembly and they talked about the Wilson school that closed and they told us we would be receiving more students that were in wheelchairs." This teacher focused on the students, with less emphasis on the disability: in fact, this teacher used a positive form of people-first language. The disability does not define the individual, but the disability is simply something the individual has. In regards to modifications made to curriculum to support students with disabilities, one teacher stated, "We have a map drawing exercise in one of my classes. The paper for the maps is quite large and the students in wheelchairs weren't able to join in. I rigged something up...so they could also participate." This teacher used people-first language to describe an inclusion practice used in the classroom. One student used disability-specific, people-first language to describe the lack of inclusion occurring in her school: "I find it difficult just being here grouped with just kids in wheelchairs. I'm used to being with kids that are like walking and stuff like that. It's different here." This student was being isolated within a group of students in wheelchairs. Others experienced the transition differently, but used similar language. In regards to his attitude toward inclusion, one administrator said, "If it were your daughter who wants to take that class in Art, and our school has a great

art program, would you want her to be deprived because she's in a wheelchair? That usually hits home for most of them." This administrator, while using primarily neutral language, also used language with an emphasis on the individual as opposed to her disability. The administrator's language could be considered an effort to personalize that student's perspective. The language and the context of the quote work together to promote the inclusion of that student.

#### Severity-focused people-first language

Another form of people-first language mentions the individual first, followed by a reference to the severity of the disability. Similar to language using the disability type, references to severity are often used to categorize students or justify their separation from other students or modifications made. In a discussion of accommodations made for a student, one teacher said, "Uh, I have one student with a pretty severe disability so time wise, it would take them too long to do the whole test." This teacher allowed the student more time to take a test on the basis of his disability, but placed the emphasis on the individual in his language usage. Similarly, one teacher discussed social opportunities for students with disabilities: "There's a best buddy club for the kids with profound and severe." This teacher focused on the individuals, with less emphasis on the severity of the disability. However, this teacher did not use the word "disability" specifically, which may be important to include.

#### Historically sensitive people-first language

The final form of people-first language focuses on the person, then makes a reference to the disability using what may be considered a politically correct

term. Often, these politically correct terms are outdated, but the speaker may be making an effort to use the correct words, and the use of people-first language is encouraging. One teacher spoke of his experience working with students with disabilities: "Well, uh, as an undergrad I took a course on students with special needs. I learned the laws and the abbreviations; just, it was pretty much a general course for students with special needs. I took it at community college. In the college of education we had to observe children with special needs to see how they reacted to inclusion classes." This teacher used the term "special needs" within his people-first language usage. Similarly, an administrator spoke positively about inclusion: "Students with special needs need to be in a regular classroom because they see what their peers are going through." The teacher used people-first language and a gentle, if less appropriate, term to refer to the disability, while discussing the benefits of inclusion.

People-first language places emphasis on the individual, as opposed to the disability, allowing people with disabilities to reduce or avoid definition on the basis of disability. Additionally, it is currently the most inclusive and most preferred way to refer to individuals with disabilities.

#### Disability-Implicit Language

Disability-implicit language is defined as a reference to individuals with disabilities when the reference to the disability is unstated but suggested by the context, rather than direct. It is crucial to note that these terms of reference may be neutral in their denotation; that is, this language may have positive or negative connotations when read in the context of the rest of an interview. These references

are not ambiguous in whom they refer to; instead, the reference to the disability itself is neutral in that it is not disability-first or people-first. For the purposes of this study, language without a direct, overt reference to a disability is regarded as disability-implicit. Disability-implicit language does not refer to a disability explicitly, but that disability is understood to be part of the meaning conveyed by the context. Across the set of interviews, disability-implicit language was used more than any other form of language.

#### General disability-implicit language

One type of disability-implicit language involves general references to students who have disabilities, without any mention of the disability or without attaching the disability to the individual in any way in the phrase or term used to identify them. If the disability is not mentioned at all in this phrase or term, the broader context demonstrates that the reference was to an individual with a disability. When asked about preparations made for the transition, one teacher said, "Uh, some training, some to...ah...just telling us basically who these kids [with disabilities] are and what ah, what their situation is and that's it...basically with a lot of them [their education] is dependent on an aide." It is clear that this teacher was discussing the students with disabilities, but does not directly refer to the disability with the students specifically in one phrase. Additionally, another teacher used disability-implicit language when referring to the students with disabilities who were transferring into his school. He stated, "I didn't realize how many students [were transferring into his school] and ah, so I really was just unsure. I didn't know how many kids I was going to have." Similarly, a teacher

used disability-implicit language to voice concerns about the attendance of students with disabilities: "Some of the students [with disabilities] are struggling because of their attendance. I worry about their success. You also worry in terms of isolation. Even though there is a general acceptance, there is a separateness." This teacher speaks about students with disabilities without any reference to the disability itself, but the reference is understood due to the nature of problems discussed.

#### Disability euphemism disability-implicit language

Another form of disability-implicit language involves referring to students with disabilities by using a euphemistic term as opposed to "disability". There is no reference to the disability directly, but instead an alternate word is used as a replacement for "disability". This form of language appears neutral on paper, but the reference to a disability is understood. This language use may reference the school students transferred from, inclusion practices, or the transition itself as a substitute for a disability reference. One teacher used this type of language in a discussion of preparation efforts for the transition: "We had...an in-service meeting day and a lecture that was to ease the apprehension that teachers felt when they heard we were getting students from Wilson [a pseudonym for a school with about 80% students with disabilities]. I guess the teachers didn't really know what to expect and how much their jobs would be changed or how much they would have to do in addition to what they were already doing." These schools received Wilson students with disabilities, but instead of mentioning the disability, this teacher only referred to Wilson.



However, it is clear that the teacher is speaking about students with disabilities. When asked about preparation for the transition, one administrator said, “The homework we did was we prepared by going to Wilson [the closed school] before the students transferred here. We sent a team to that school and had the families and students come here. We had the families come out, we went to the old school, we talked to everybody about what was going to happen.” This administrator referred to the students with disabilities by referencing the transition as a euphemism for “disability”. Another euphemistic way of referencing a disability is by substituting something specific to disability in a particular context. For example, in some schools, students with disabilities are required to ride on a yellow school bus, separated from other students without disabilities. One student used this type of disability-implicit language: "The other times I always came to school on the yellow bus with all the other kids." This student uses the “yellow bus” as a euphemistic way to refer to students with disabilities. In this context, yellow buses may be understood to only carry students with disabilities; therefore, the disability reference is implied through a substitution of a euphemistic term.

#### Name/individual-focused disability-implicit language

A final form of disability-implicit language refers to the student by name or by a direct reference to the individual, perhaps the most personal language usage. Because interview questions focus specifically on the transition experiences of students with disabilities, it is understood that those are the students mentioned. One teacher said, "My other student, Carla [alias], her thing is she has a lot more skills. She has wonderful verbal skills. She also has a lot of

mobility. Her attention span and her motivation is very, very limited. So, I give her the verbal cues, 'Why don't you sit over here?' You can sit in a different spot...but she's only comfortable sitting at my side here." This teacher personalizes her reference to the student by using her name, with no direct mention of her disability. Similarly, another teacher said, "Sam [alias], actually, when he can he comes, ah I'm one of the basketball coaches, and when he can he'll come and put his chair right next to us by the bench. He likes to come and help coach. He'll sit behind the bench or next to the coach and somehow, and I don't know how it is, there is transportation arranged for him to come and pick him up." This teacher speaks about the student specifically by using his name, as opposed to referencing the disability, although it is understood that the student has a disability. Similarly, one parent stated: "If there is something that, ah, homework she may have, they give her extra time to do it. They don't push her. They don't rush her." This parent references her daughter specifically, without direct mention of the disability.

Disability-implicit language is a complicated form of language in that, while some usages are more neutral, some usages are simply a way to reference the disability indirectly. It is important to reiterate the fact that, although this study has determined the form of language usage based on straightforward coding and interpretation of interview transcriptions, all language could potentially be positive or negative depending on context.

### Disability-First Language

The third general category of language is that of disability-first language. Disability-first language, often thought of as the conventional usage, is defined as a reference to the disability before the person. Disability-first language also encompasses disability-only language, when no reference is made to the person. This language places the focus on the disability as opposed to the individual, and may promote discounting and/or exclusion on the basis of disability. These types of language parallel those used in the people-first language category.

#### General disability-first language

One specific type of disability-first language makes only a general reference to the disability. That is, there is no clarification of what the disability actually is. One female student said, "I think that the teachers make me more mad. I don't like the way disabled people are treated. Before I was on public transportation the juniors and seniors are allowed to go to lunch, but the kids on the yellow bus couldn't." In this statement, the student places disability before the person, but does not specify a particular disability.

#### Disability-domain disability-first language

Another form of disability-first language demonstrates a knowledge of the domain of disability an individual has, but not the specific disability. For example, many disabilities can be categorized under physical, sensory, emotional, or cognitive disability-domain labels. This disability domain receives the primary focus, followed by the individual. One teacher said, in reference to her experience in the education of students with disabilities, "But I've never had like the IEP's,

ah...I don't know if they do them for physically disabled kids." This teacher clarifies what domain of disability her students have had, followed by a reference to the individual, in her discussion of Individualized Education Plans. Similarly, when asked about his experience working with students with disabilities, another teacher said, "I am familiar enough with physically disabled people. Also, my upbringing, both my parents, uh, were special ed teachers and have run a group home. So, uh, I am very, very comfortable and I feel this is just on a personal level to some of the ideas, I think they have." This teacher refers to the domain of disability he has previously encountered, followed by the individual, in his discussion of his attitude toward and familiarity with individuals with disabilities.

#### Specific disability-first language

Another form of disability-first language involves a very specific reference to the disability with which the individual is living. The disability is still mentioned first, and the reference to the person follows, but this type of language allows the individual a more personalized mention of his or her disability. One teacher said, "When other students are working with the deaf student, they will ask, 'Show me how to sign that.'" Although this teacher uses the disability as the primary way to refer to this student, he demonstrates personalized knowledge of the student. In contrast, one teacher said, "I think that the regular ed kids gained a huge respect for the wheelchair kids when they saw them out there playing, and I saw people giving kids high fives and afterwards in the hall. You know, people still talk about that game." By referring to the students as "wheelchair kids", this

teacher uses a limiting and offensive term although he attempts to make a positive statement about the students' inclusion in extracurricular activities.

#### Severity-focused disability-first language

Another form of disability-first language focuses on not only the disability, but the severity of the disability, followed by a reference to the person. A focus on severity of the disability allows the students with disabilities to be separated, most often by level of functioning, into multiple groups. When one teacher was questioned about his attitude toward the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education classrooms, he disagreed with the concept, stating that , "Very severely disabled students? No, because it takes time away from the other students." This teacher prefaces his answer to the question by referencing only "severely disabled students", whom he believes should not be included in general education classrooms. Perhaps this teacher supports students with less limiting disabilities being educated in general education classrooms, but mentions the severity of the disability first as a way to refer to students and justify his position. Similarly, when asked a question about including students with different types of disabilities in a classroom, another teacher responded, "Certainly a class with severe and profound students...something could be done." This teacher references the severity of the disability, in a way that implied an intellectual disability, before mentioning the individuals. In education settings, severity of disability is often used as a proxy for placing students in various classrooms, as well as for gauging functioning. Those functions of severity of disability may

explain why this type of language is used as a justification for attitudes toward inclusion.

#### Historically sensitive disability-first language

Another type of disability-first language involves anything that may have at one point been considered the appropriate way to refer to an individual with a disability. This language usage typically demonstrates care or caution toward the situation, as well as a knowledge that there is a correct or preferred way to speak about individuals with disabilities. This type of non-people first language may include references to special education, special needs, or handicapped individuals. When asked about ways that the school and district prepared for the transfer of students with disabilities, one teacher responded, "Other than the meetings here on site... A lot of it was focused on ah, evacuations and um of handicapped people--physically handicapped kids in case of emergency." This teacher may believe that "physically handicapped" is the appropriate way to refer to individuals with disabilities, as "handicapped" was appropriate at one point in time. However, this teacher still places the focus on the disability of the student, as opposed to the individual. Another teacher reported, "With the special ed students in general you might have accommodations other than the time accommodations--they come in later and leave earlier because of the elevators." By referring to the students as "special ed", this teacher did not emphasize the disability as much as a direct reference would, and possibly made an effort to use the correct term. When asked about trainings teachers attended to prepare for the transition, the teacher responded, "Our visually impaired students have had

workshops for the teachers.” Although this teacher made a reference to a specific disability followed by the individual, he was very careful to use a more gentle, accurate and inclusive term for the disability: “visually impaired” may be considered more sensitive than “blind”, and also is a more broadly applicable term than “blind”.

### Disability-only language

A unique form of disability-first language places all of the emphasis on the disability, without any reference to the individual at all. Disability-only language may be a reference to a general, specific, or categorized disability. Disability-only language may also demonstrate a reference to severity of disability, or to a historically sensitive term. This type of language is particularly problematic in that it completely depersonalizes the reference by defining the individual solely by the disability. For example, when questioned about a failure in the transition of students with disabilities, a teacher stated, "My failures have been with LD or behavior. Either I'm not strong enough or haven't gotten to them in time." This teacher refers to the disability type of his students, in this case, behavioral or learning disabilities, but does not reference the individual at all. This language usage defines the students purely by their type of disability, without a mention of the person. Similarly, one parent stated, "Try and get something for the disabled. Well, you know, some people there are very rude. I know it's hard, but it's the grown-ups that's the worst. We tried." Here, the parent demonstrates disability-only language, with notably more emphasis on the disability than the individual.

People are defined purely by their disability, which is problematic whether the reference is general, categorized, specific, or another form.

Disability-first language places emphasis on the disability, as opposed to the individual. In this way, this type of language may be considered less inclusive. However, disability-first language contains quite a bit of variation, and which is important to consider when determining effects.

#### A Note on Content Versus Form

It is important to note that, while in general the categories used in this study are applicable to all language used to refer to individuals with disabilities, these categories are the result of qualitative analysis of a specific set of interviews. In these interviews, the content of language used to refer to individuals with disabilities was largely positive; therefore, much of the focus in developing categories was on the order of the referents. However, in certain cases, the content is so negative that the order is of secondary importance. For example, if the language used to refer to an individual with a disability is “the student who is crippled” or “the boy with idiotic tendencies”, the order of the statement is positive, but the negative content is substantial. It is useful to think of language existing on a continuum in two directions: positive to negative for form, and positive to negative for content. In this particular study, people-first language is positive for form and for content. As presented here, disability-first language is generally positive for content, but negative for form. However, it is possible for language to also be negative for form and content or positive for form and negative for content. This study emphasizes form over content, as there is little



variability in the content presented here. A summary of the categories and subtypes of language are presented in Table 1. A visual representation of the frequencies of each category of language is shown in Figure 1. In general, disability-implicit language is used more frequently than other types, and people-first language is used more frequently than disability-first language. Breakdowns of category subtypes are depicted in Figures 2, 3, and 4.

Table 1: Summary of Language Usage Framework.

<b>Language Type</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
<b>People-First Language</b>		
General people-first language	"We have some class activities that require pairing up. That pairing up doesn't work so well for the students with disabilities."	27
Disability-domain people-first language	"She has cognitive learning disabilities and also her attention span and her motivation is very, very limited."	15
Specific people-first language	"We had one big giant assembly and they talked about the Wilson school that closed and they told us we would be receiving more students that were in wheelchairs."	45
Severity-focused people-first language	"Uh, I have one student with a pretty severe disability so time wise, it would take them too long to do the whole test."	2
Historically sensitive people-first language	"Well, uh, as an undergrad I took a course on students with special needs."	9
<b>Disability-Implicit Language</b>		
General disability-implicit language	"Some of the students are struggling because of their attendance. I worry about their success. You also worry in terms of isolation."	112
Disability euphemism disability-implicit language	"Have I worked specifically with any of the transfer students? Yes to that as well."	12
Name/individual-focused disability-implicit	"My other student, Carla, her thing is she has a lot more skills. She has	199

language	wonderful verbal skills.”	
<b>Disability-First Language</b>		
General disability-first language	“I don't like the way disabled people are treated.”	9
Disability-domain disability-first language	"I am familiar enough with physically disabled people.”	5
Specific disability-first language	"When other students are working with the deaf student they will ask, 'Show me how to sign that.'"	11
Severity-focused disability-first language	"Very severely disabled students? No, because it takes time away from the other students.”	2
Historically sensitive disability-first language	"With the special ed students in general you might have accommodations other than the time accommodations--they come in later and leave earlier because of the elevators.”	12
Disability-only disability-first language	“Try and get something for the disabled. Well, you know, some people there are very rude.”	4

Figure 1: Overall Language Use.

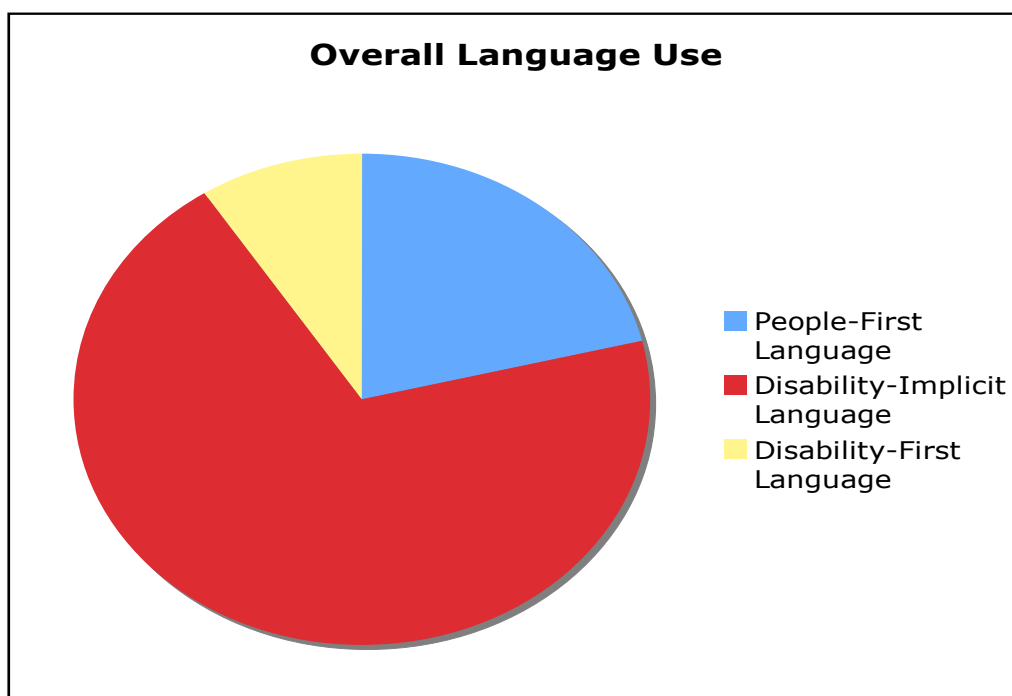


Figure 2: People-First Language Use By Subtype.

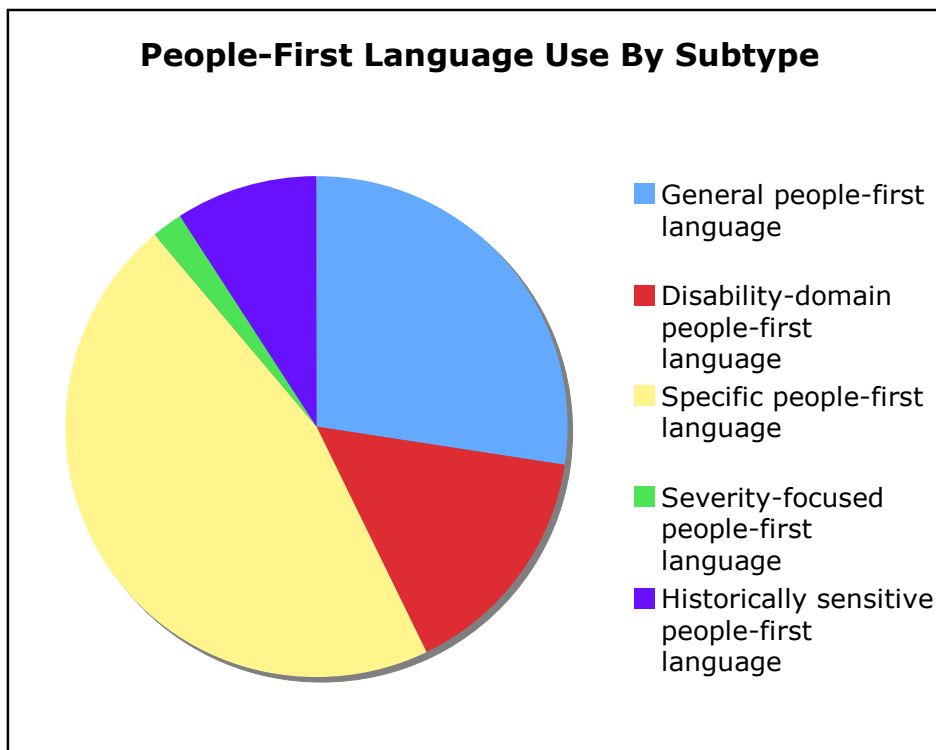


Figure 3: Disability-Implicit Language Use By Subtype.

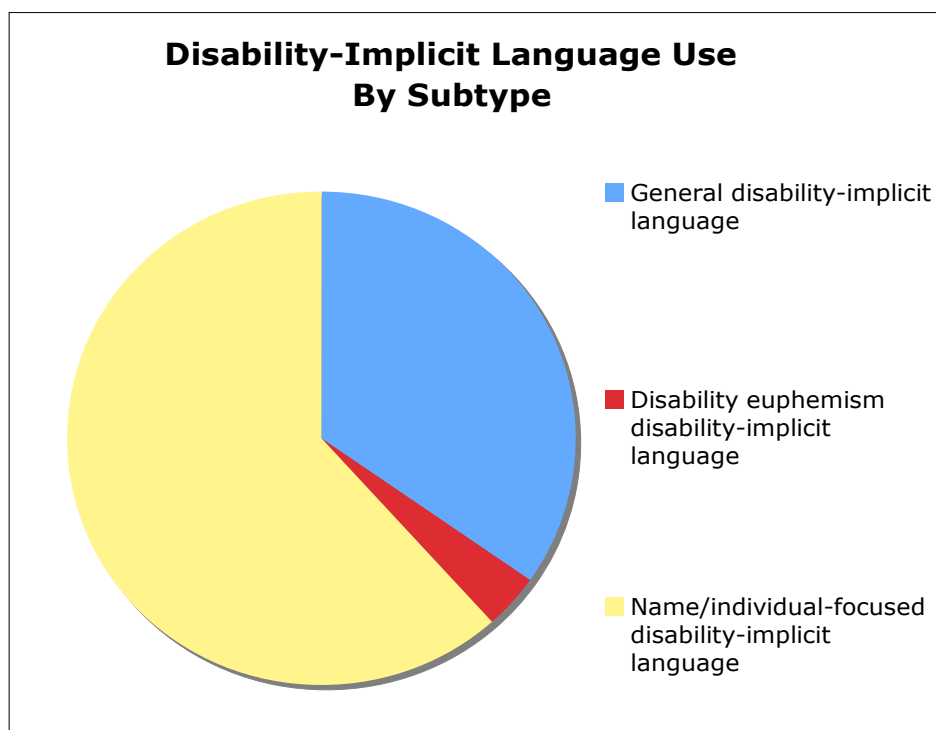
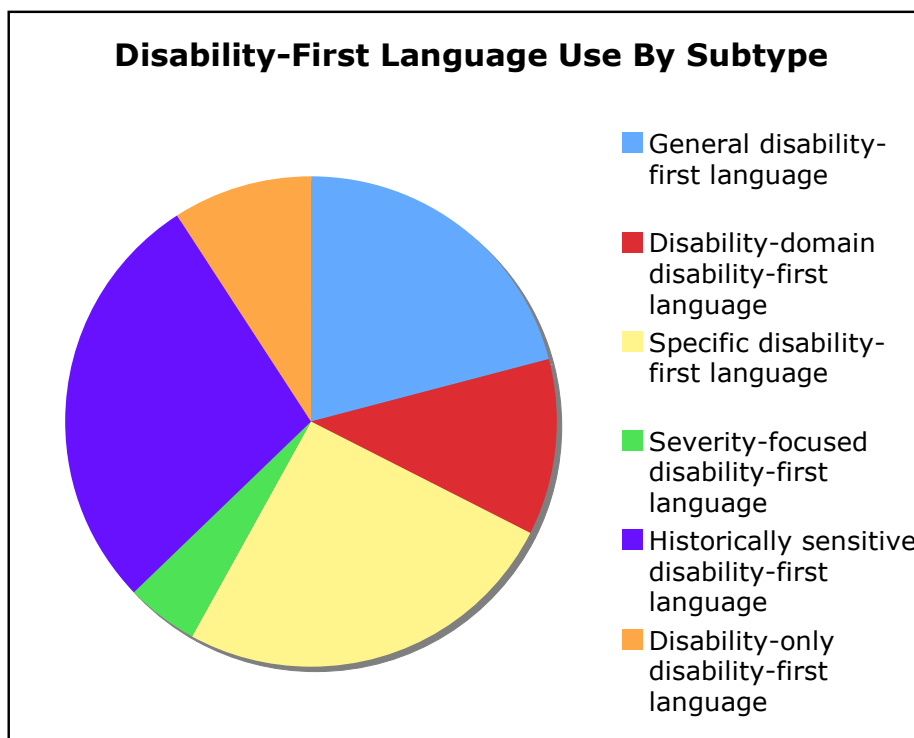


Figure 4: Disability-First Language Use By Subtype.



*Research Question 2: How does the use of language to refer to students with disabilities vary by role? Are there differences in the use of people-first language among students, parents, teachers, and administrators? Which groups are more active in the use of people-first language?*

Students, parents, teachers, and administrators all use a variety of forms of language to refer to individuals with disabilities. People in all roles utilize the general categories of people-first, disability-implicit, and disability-first language described above, as well as the subcategories. However, this study uses an ecological approach to understand language in an educational setting. A significant ecological factor is the role of the interviewee. Therefore, it is valuable

to analyze specific language used by role. As expected, nearly everyone used more disability-implicit language than anything else; therefore disability-implicit language is only discussed in particularly distinctive situations and comparison of disability-first to people-first language is especially interesting. Within each interview, the number of people-first language references were compared to disability-first and disability-implicit language references. Primary language use and subtype by role is depicted in Table 2.

### Students

Of all participant role groups, more students used mostly disability-implicit language, and predominantly more people-first language than disability-first language. Of the seven students interviewed, five used more people-first language than disability-first language. One student used mostly disability-first language, and one student used only disability-implicit language.

Within the category of disability implicit-language, students used predominantly general disability-implicit language, which does not directly reference the disability at all; rather disability is implied through context. One student said, "One problem was that we couldn't leave the school at lunchtime. Everybody else can leave just us couldn't go." The student does not directly reference a disability, but instead implies that he is talking about students with disabilities through a general term. Context from surrounding sentences clearly demonstrates that this reference is meant to be to a disability. Within the broad categories of people-first and disability-first language, students used the subcategory of disability-specific language most frequently. This subcategory of

language, which appears in both people-first and disability-first language, makes a reference to the specific disability that the individual has. For example, one student said, "When you leave school and go and work you are already going to be a minority in a chair. That's the way it is. Might as well be that way in school too." This student used disability-specific, people-first language to describe why he supports inclusion in schools. Another student said, "The only ones you ever ride with [on the elevator] are aides or other kids in chairs." This student also uses disability-specific, people-first language to discuss the exclusion she feels as a result of using an elevator at school.

One student in the sample experienced a transition slightly different than the other students, as he transferred into a general education high school from a grade school, as opposed to a specialized school for students with disabilities. His answers, as well as those of his parent, did not differ significantly from the others: language use and discussion of the transition were comparable to other interviewees. This similarity added more depth to the results by increasing sample size and diversity of perspective.

### Parents

The five parent interviewees used more disability-implicit language than anything else. They were equally divided in their usage of other forms of language: two parents used primarily people-first language compared to disability-first language, and two used primarily disability-first language compared to people-first language. One parent used only disability-implicit language.

Within both the people-first and disability-first categories, parents used the subcategory of general disability reference most often. This language subcategory makes a general reference to the students with disabilities. One parent said, "If they are only going to be around other people with disabilities, they're never going to learn what it's like out there." Here, this parent uses general people-first language to describe her attitudes toward inclusion. In contrast, another parent said, "Wilson was mostly disability kids and they knew how to handle a kid. They were more considerate. At this school, no." This parent uses general disability-first language as well as disability-implicit language to discuss problems with the transition of students with disabilities.

Within the disability-implicit category of language, parents used name/individual-focused language to refer to the students with disabilities most frequently. All the parents interviewed in this study used a great deal of disability-implicit language. In contrast to teachers and administrators, their language did not make general references to students. Most disability-implicit language used by parents involved a specific reference to their child. One parent said, "I wanted her to get a better education. You can get a better education in a regular school. I want my daughter to be challenged so, yes, I would choose a regular school." This parent used name/individual-focused disability-implicit language to discuss her daughter's education. Another parent had different views on the transition: "My son had to take the bus. My son crying... This is wrong. My son no go to detention because he have to go to bus. He get detention he late to the classroom. It is not

good to go to this school for my son.” This parent used name/individual-focused disability-implicit language to describe challenges faced by her son.

### Teachers

Like other groups, teachers used more disability-implicit language relative to other forms of language. Following students and administrators, teachers are third most active in their use of people-first language compared to disability-first language. Four teachers used predominantly people-first language as opposed to disability-first language, and three used disability-first language more than people-first language. The number of teachers who used primarily disability-first language was greater than any other group.

Within the category of disability-implicit language, teachers tended to use disability euphemism disability-implicit or general disability-implicit language. Disability-euphemism disability-implicit language uses a less direct term as a substitute for “disability”, and general disability-implicit language implies a reference to people with disabilities only through context. For example, one teacher said, “There are kids that isolate themselves, but for the most part, ah I think the kids get involved after school...the other inclusion kids.” This teacher uses a general term, “kids”, to discuss the social isolation of students with disabilities, then uses “inclusion” as a replacement for the term “disability” to clarify who he is talking about.

Within the categories of both people-first and disability-first language, teachers tended to use disability-specific or disability-domain language most frequently. Disability-specific language makes a direct reference to the



individual's particular disability. For example, one teacher said, "It's an elementary school with a lot of kids with special needs, uh, that range from kids that were wheelchair bound, or kids that had autism." This teacher uses disability-specific, people-first language to refer to the school's experience educating students with disabilities.

Disability-domain language makes a reference to the domain of disability an individual has; for example, learning or physical. One teacher said, "Failures are more with students with LD [learning disabilities]. I haven't had a student with a physical disability fail because of the PD [personal disability] or otherwise." This teacher uses disability-domain people-first language to refer to students who have physical constraints or learning disabilities, which are subtypes of disability.

### Administrators

Like other role groups, administrators used more disability-implicit language compared to other forms of language. Following students, administrators are second most active in their use of people-first language compared to disability-first language. Two administrators used predominantly people-first language compared to disability-first language to refer to individuals with disabilities, and one administrator used only disability-implicit language.

Within the category of disability-implicit language, administrators tended to use predominantly general disability-implicit language, which does not mention a disability at all and instead implies a reference to people with disabilities through context. One administrator said, "The first thing we have to do is make

sure the kids feel wanted and comfortable in being here. Sometimes that sounds so basic, but unfortunately it isn't always true. Kids someplace don't feel wanted. I've heard horror stories about kids being made fun of at other schools.” This administrator speaks about the acceptance of students with disabilities in his school without any mention of a disability, although it is understood.

Within all the general categories of language usage, the most frequently used subtype among administrators was that of a general disability reference. This subtype references the fact that an individual has a disability, but does not specify what that disability is. For example, one administrator said, “One of the things we've really tried to do and our special ed coordinator has done a great job with that is making sure that people understand that just because someone has a disability doesn't mean they deserve any less.” This administrator used general people-first language to talk about supports for students with disabilities. Another administrator stated: “It doesn't matter if they are a student with a disability or just a student that wasn't doing well. If they are in a classroom with kids that are reading five and six years above them, then it's not fair to them.” This administrator used general people-first language to discuss classroom-level inclusion practices.

Table 2: Primary Language Use and Subtype By Role.

<b>Role</b>	<b>Primary Language Use</b>	<b>Primary Subtype</b>
Students	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Disability-implicit</li> <li>2. People-first</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. General disability-implicit</li> <li>2. Disability-specific</li> </ol>
Parents	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Disability-implicit</li> <li>2. People-first; disability-first</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Name/individual focused</li> <li>2. General disability</li> </ol>
Teachers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Disability-implicit</li> <li>2. People-first</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Disability euphemism; general disability-implicit</li> <li>2. Disability-specific; disability-domain</li> </ol>
Admins	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Disability-implicit</li> <li>2. People-first</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. General disability-implicit</li> <li>2. General disability</li> </ol>

## CHAPTER IV

### DISCUSSION

Taking a cue from Lee's (1997) call for metalinguistic awareness and more attention to language, the current study has explored the ways individuals in an education setting refer to students with disabilities. The results demonstrate large variability in language usage, even within the categories of people-first language, disability-implicit language, and disability-first language. These more specific subcategories of language usage elaborate on the existing literature that defines people-first language as simply putting the individual before the disability. According to Blaska (1993), people-first language avoids giving the disability more emphasis than it deserves. The subcategories of people-first language clarified in this study, include general people-first language, disability-domain people-first language, specific people-first language, severity-focused

people-first language, and historically sensitive people-first language. These varieties of subcategories further clarify the ways people-first language can be used. These distinctions are crucial to note because, in addition to raising awareness around the overwhelming variations in language, they may be useful in understanding the ways language relates to how members of society perceive, interact with and/or exclude individuals with disabilities. Additionally, these subcategories of language used to refer to individuals with disabilities provide a more nuanced framework to describe and evaluate language use. As the consequences of language are far-reaching (Caras, 1994), it is important to determine the most beneficial way to refer to individuals with disabilities.

People-first language, although the current most preferred language (Fernald, 1995), is a very general category with considerable room for variation. People-first language may contain too much variation to assume that it provides all the benefits it claims to provide. As previously mentioned, the positive form of people-first language may be overridden by negative content. In some cases, although most people advocate for its use, people-first language may not be the best option. For example, if someone refers to “a person who is a retard”, the negative content by far outweighs the positive structure. By analyzing language use with greater precision, it is possible to improve too general a category.

If people-first language is, in general, the most accepting way to refer to individuals with disabilities, it is also important to scrutinize other forms of language, in order to determine progress made and other ways people refer to individuals with disabilities. The current study was able to establish general

alternatives to people-first language in the categories of disability-first and disability-implicit language, as well as subtle variations within the categories. The general category of disability-implicit language posed several issues in the current study. The subtypes of general disability-implicit language, school-focused disability-implicit language, transition/inclusion-focused disability-implicit language, local disability equivalency implicit/broad meaning neutral language, and name/individual-focused disability-implicit language were defined and illustrated. Nonetheless, it is difficult to distinguish between truly neutral terms and euphemistic ways of referring to a disability. On paper, all of the language that fell into this category is relatively neutral. But when analyzed further, many people interviewed may be using euphemistic terms to avoid dealing with the complications of using the term “disability” and of determining the best way to refer to individuals with disabilities. Given the context of disability-implicit language in the current study none of the language was completely neutral because reference to a disability was ultimately recognizable. However, the subtypes of disability-implicit language are still useful in that they demonstrate variations in the routes people take when they choose not to refer to a disability directly.

Although disability-implicit language is more complex as a category than other forms of language, it is important to note that disability-implicit language can still be a positive way to refer to people with disabilities. In some cases, it may be more positive than people-first language, because the disability may be considered so unimportant that it is not mentioned at all (Blaska, 1994). The

speaker may be looking so far past the disability that it is simply not perceived. However, in some cases, the use of disability-implicit language may be a result of confusion or caution, as opposed to a transcendent view of the individual beyond the disability.

Within disability-first language, subcategories include general disability-first language, disability-domain disability-first language, specific disability-first language, historically sensitive disability-first language, and disability-only disability-first language. Because language is powerful, it has the ability to create a positive identity for individuals with disabilities, and also allow them to be seen in a positive light by society. The use of metonymy, or naming a part to represent the whole (Dictionary.com, 2010), is reflected in disability-only disability-first language. By referring to an individual's disability as a way to represent the whole person, that individual is reduced to their disability. Labeling an individual solely on the basis of a diagnosis or disability ignores strengths and abilities and can have negative consequences (Scheff, 1966). Therefore, it is necessary to understand the various ways that individuals are labeled to fully address the problems that result.

Recently, individuals with disabilities have experienced improvements in the positions they hold in society. Historically, people with disabilities have been referred to as "cripples", "gimps", or "handicapped" (Manus, 1975). As their position in society improves, ideally the language used to refer to them would also improve. This phenomenon is reflected in other social movements. For example, women advocated for non-sexist language in their effort to achieve dignity and

respect that was not dependent on gender (Gay, 2007). Additionally, non-sexist language was promoted as a way to avoid excluding anyone from a particular community or society (Karlovic, 2009). In studies of sexist language, Parks and Robertson (2009) found that men and women with more positive attitudes toward people of both genders used more inclusive, non-sexist language. During the Civil Rights Movement, language was a crucial issue. As racism is entwined in language, it reflects the attitudes of society. Racist language and ethnic slurs encourage the marginalization of racial and ethnic minorities (Asante, 2002). Based on the improved social status of people with disabilities, it was expected that language would reflect that improvement. Indeed, the results of this study demonstrated that when people talk about individuals with disabilities with someone with a visible disability, they do not use derogatory terms as described above, or terms that are derogatory by current standards. Instead, many people used people-first language to refer to the students discussed in this study, a phenomenon which reflects the improved societal status individuals with disabilities currently enjoy and the context of speaking with an interviewee with a physical disability. The people who did not use people-first language structure still spoke in relatively positive terms to refer to individuals with disabilities, regardless of the form their language took.

In all interviews across role groups, disability-implicit language was used most frequently. This consistency may be explained by a variety of reasons. Disability-implicit language avoids referencing a disability directly, which may free the speaker from the responsibility of using the “correct” reference.

Additionally, disability-implicit language is somewhat less cumbersome, and in lengthy interviews focused on the topic, referencing a disability continually may seem unnecessary. However, it is also possible that disability-implicit language is positive in that the disability is so unimportant or irrelevant that it is not mentioned. In this context, the speaker views the person with a disability as an individual and sees beyond the disability.

In different role groups, disability-implicit language was used differently, a reflection of the importance of an ecological approach to language use (Bronfenbrenner, 1983). In students' use of disability-implicit language, the subcategory of general disability-implicit language was used most frequently. This category does not mention a disability at all, and the term itself is neutral, but a disability reference is understood. Students may have used this type of language most frequently because they do not feel the need to reference the disability at all, and assume it is understood because of their experiences. Also, as people with disabilities have recently made efforts to achieve a positive identity (Charlton, 1998), these students' references to "us" and "kids like me" may result from their feelings of similarity to others within the group, as well as an identity that focuses on positives.

Parents tend to use more disability-implicit language than any other form of language, most specifically name/individual-focused language. Gill and Cross (2009) recommend analyzing parents' communications about disability because it may influence the way their children with disabilities develop. This study demonstrates that parents of children with disabilities may be less focused on the



disability and more focused on their child; in fact, the focus is so centered on the child as a person that it omits any reference to a disability at all. This finding also makes intuitive sense in that parents are not concerned with “students with disabilities” as a group; rather, they are most concerned with their child. To parents, the name of their child means more than simply saying “the student with a disability”. This type of implicit language suggests a transcendent view of their child beyond the disability that other uses of the disability-implicit category may not have: parents use the names of their children to encompass much, and teachers or administrators may use other forms of disability-implicit language to say less.

Teachers’ use of disability-implicit language involved predominantly general or disability euphemism subcategories. General disability-implicit language, which does not reference a disability at all, may be used frequently by teachers because they often discuss groups of students and do not feel a need to differentiate between types of disabilities. Their use of disability euphemism disability-implicit language may result from a cognizance of disability because of a need for accommodations and modifications, and they do not want to use “disability” every time they mention these students. Additionally, the euphemisms used by teachers often are related to inclusion practices, which may be because these students are defined by a need for specific inclusive actions by teachers.

Administrators’ use of disability-implicit language involved predominantly general disability-implicit language. Administrators, as staff somewhat removed from the students, do not see or have to work with students and the limitations of their specific disabilities as often as teachers or parents, which may influence

them to avoid references to disabilities. Similar to and perhaps more so than teachers, administrators may also avoid references to disabilities because they are speaking about groups of students, and general disability-implicit language allows them to discuss multiple students without distinguishing between or specifying the disabilities.

This study also examined differences in disability language use by individuals in various roles in an education setting. Previous research has focused more on role differences in attitudes toward people with disabilities (e.g., Henry et al., 2004; Horner-Johnson, 2002), which may indirectly relate to language use, but the current study was able to directly assess differences in language use by role. Qualitative interviews with students, parents, teachers, and administrators revealed a great deal of variation in language use, both between general categories and within those categories. These differences echoed Bronfenbrenner's (1983) explanation of ecology within settings: students, parents, teachers, and administrators occupy very distinct roles within schools, which means the ways they interact with individuals with disabilities varies significantly. That variation was reflected in their language use.

According to Zola (1993), the movement of people with disabilities to take ownership over their lives began with the issue of naming. The results of this study supported Zola's point in that students with disabilities used more people-first language in comparison to disability-first language than any other role group. The use of people-first language may be an important part of the development of a positive identity for individuals with disabilities, and therefore it is encouraging

that this role group uses this language most frequently. Five of seven students spoke mostly in people-first terms relative to disability-first language. Only one student used primarily disability-first language relative to people-first language and another student used only disability-implicit language. However, all students tended to use primarily disability-specific language regardless of whether they used more disability-first or people-first language. This use of disability-specific, people-first language may be because people with disabilities are most familiar with their own disabilities, and may view others with other disabilities as different from themselves on the basis of disability. Although students used primarily people-first language, too much emphasis on specific disability may create rifts between people who could potentially form a united, positive identity.

As previously stated, parents were more active in their use of disability-implicit language versus other types of language than any other group. When parents did refer to people with disabilities with a mention of disability directly, it was through a general disability reference. For parents, the name of their child says a great deal more than just “a person with a disability”, and when a reference to a disability is used, it may carry less weight than their child’s name. General disability references may suggest that parents do not view the specific disability or disability domain as especially relevant: again, they may be making general references because to them, their child is more important than anything else.

Teachers were third to students and administrators in their use of people-first language as compared to other types of language. This finding offered some support for Horner-Johnson’s (2002) point that staff in education settings often

had positive attitudes toward the inclusion of students with disabilities, and therefore more positive language use. Four teachers used primarily people-first language; however, three used primarily disability-first language. This relatively high use of disability-first language may be because teachers must be aware of disabilities in efforts to make curriculum modifications or address accessibility issues. This point was reflected in the fact that teachers were most likely to use disability-specific or disability-domain references to students with disabilities, whether they used primarily people-first or disability-first language. In regards to curriculum modifications or accessibility concerns, the specific domain or type of disability is probably extremely relevant for teachers who dealt with these issues on a regular basis, more so than for other roles. In this particular study, many teachers only received students with one type of disability, so the disability type or domain they reference is probably the one that is most salient for them.

Administrators were second only to students in their use of people-first language as compared to other types of language, and made general references to disability more frequently than they did to any other category of people-first language. The high frequency of people-first language used may have resulted from administrators' efforts to be cognizant of the most preferred or appropriate way to refer to individuals with disabilities, because of their prominent position within the school. The high frequency of administrators' use of general-disability, people-first language may have been because administrators are the farthest removed from specific disability types in their daily work. Additionally, administrators are thought to be speaking on behalf of the whole school, and

therefore general disability references can be an effective way to include all disability types and domains. One administrator used only disability-implicit language throughout a very lengthy interview. This administrator also gave very few concrete answers to questions and spoke more holistically. His avoidance of specific references to disabilities may reflect an unwillingness to admit that students with disabilities may need special supports, or an uncertainty about the correct way to refer to students with disabilities. Additionally, this administrator may be less connected with specific accommodations made for students with disabilities, and therefore less cognizant of their specific disabilities.

#### Limitations

In the current study, all interviews were conducted by a researcher who uses a wheelchair herself. Although it is unclear how this influenced interview responses, the presence of an interviewer in a wheelchair likely has a different effect than one who is not in a wheelchair. Therefore, in many other contexts there may be more variation in language use than what is depicted in the current study. The current study was only able to develop a framework of language usage based on the language that was presented in the interviews; therefore, future research may attempt to address any language use which may not have existed in the interviews analyzed for the purposes of this study.

Another limitation of the current study is that all students who were interviewed were in wheelchairs, meaning that there was little variability in students' disability type. Experiences related specifically to being in a wheelchair may have influenced the way the students interviewed for this study referenced

people with disabilities. For example, people in wheelchairs without cognitive or intellectual differences have been successful at participating in the disability rights movement and unifying toward a common identity (Charlton, 1997). That common positive identity, in contrast with people with other types of disabilities, may have facilitated more positive language use.

Of the five parents interviewed, one spoke Spanish and the interview was conducted with the help of a translator. Although her interview was useful in that it provided another perspective on the experiences of her child, the translator's language may not directly reflect all the subtleties of the parent's language to refer to people with disabilities. For example, it is impossible to differentiate between how the translator referred to students with disabilities, and how the parent did. A Spanish equivalent to people-first language may not exist. However, this parent's language was child-centered, similar to other parents' language, and therefore was useful to the current study.

All participants in this study were associated with schools who received students with disabilities in the context of the closing of a specialized school. This transition was the result of preparation and effort by both the schools and the school district. The closing of the specialized school and the subsequent transition of students made the education of students with disabilities a primary focus of parents, teachers, and administrators alike. Staff members involved in this transition, therefore, may have received special workshops or seminars, for example, sensitivity trainings, which could have influenced their language use. However, the exact trainings provided for each school, and the material covered

during the trainings, are unclear. Future research could study language use in different contexts; for example, schools not in the midst of a complicated transition period.

A final limitation of the current study is that interview questions were not structured to directly assess people-first language, but interviews were retroactively analyzed for language use. Although this strategy was sufficient in that all interviews included references to people with disabilities, interview questions could have been framed differently to evaluate use of various types of language more directly, but without focusing respondents' attention on language in a potentially biased way.

### Strengths

The presence of an interviewer who used a wheelchair herself may be considered a strength as well as a limitation, specifically for the purposes of interviewing students. Students may have felt more comfortable with this interviewer and were better able to relate to her than they would to someone without a disability. This comfort level may have facilitated more engaging conversation and resulted in more relevant results. The interviewer may also have been better able to facilitate conversations with parents whose children use wheelchairs. Parents may have perceived her as knowledgeable and credible based on her experiences in a wheelchair. Additionally, the presence of the interviewer may have worked in the opposite direction as it did in interviews with parents, teachers, and administrators: students with disabilities may have been more likely to use casual, slang, or disability-first language in much the same way

that members of the same group accept the use of derogatory terms within group members. The language used by students with disabilities in this study may actually be the worst we would see, which is encouraging because students were still most active in their use of people-first language.

Although the transitional context of the current study may be considered a limitation, it could also be considered a strength. Because the pressing issue of the education of students with disabilities was at the forefront of most teachers' and administrators' agendas, interviewees may have been well-versed and well-aware of language issues. The context of the transition, combined with the presence of an interviewer in a wheelchair, may have presented a "best-case scenario" of language use. This scenario may explain why language used in the current study does not include any of the derogatory terms used in the past.

To the author's knowledge this study is the first to describe language use regarding individuals with disabilities in people-first, disability-implicit and disability-first terms. The results of this study discuss language in a descriptive, rather than a prescriptive, manner. An additional strength of the current study is the fact that it develops a nuanced model for the language used to refer to people with disabilities. Language in general is so implicit in everything we do that it is often overlooked as important to research. People-first language specifically is a relatively new construct. Although it has the power to contribute to individuals with disabilities' acceptance in society, relatively little, if any, descriptive empirical research exists on the topic. The current study captures a new topic for both the fields of community psychology and disability studies.



Another strength of this study is the use of interviews with individuals in different roles to assess variations in types of language. The field of community psychology prides itself on the utilization of different perspectives, specifically the perspectives of those people who may not otherwise be given a voice. The current study attempts to incorporate interviews with individuals from crucial roles in an education setting, including students with disabilities, who may be marginalized as students as well as because of their disabilities. While role is but one dimension of the rich tapestry of ecological variables, these multiple role-related perspectives reflect Bronfenbrenner's (1983) emphasis on the importance of an ecological approach to research.

#### Implications

This study has implications for theory, research, and practice. The classifications of language usage contribute to the existing conceptualization of language concerning disability status. The primary and secondary descriptive categories clearly describe alternative forms of language. Previous research has not provided such a comprehensive understanding of language variations used to refer to individuals with disabilities, nor has it described how people use such language. The current study also suggests and supports the existence of role differences in language, which have previously only been a theory indirectly assessed through attitude variations by role (Horner-Johnson, 2002).

The results of this study contribute a framework of language used to refer to individuals with disabilities, which can ultimately be used to evaluate language in a variety of settings, and to evaluate language's relationship to inclusion

practices in schools and elsewhere. The link between people-first language, or disability-first language, and individuals with disabilities' acceptance into or exclusion from society can be studied using the specific categories designated from the results of the current study. It is difficult to avoid assigning a label of "positive" or "negative" to any of the language types defined in this study, despite the fact that creating a meaning for anything is extremely subjective (Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1954). By determining a relationship between language and inclusion practices, it will be more possible to designate people-first language as "positive". The benefits of inclusion have been established in previous research, and include the building of friendships between students with and without disabilities, lower incidence of abusive behavior, and advocacy for students with disabilities (Bunch & Valeo, 2004). Additionally, future studies that explore only language or language in relation to other constructs should directly assess various types of language usage, as opposed to retroactively analyzing data for language use. A major strength of qualitative data is its ability to allow important themes to emerge organically. As a result of this study, future research could more directly assess language's relationship to other constructs using the described framework. Although the current study presented a useful framework for language, the impacts of this framework and language usage in general largely remain to be demonstrated empirically.

This study has implications in education settings for staff trainings. According to Blaska (1993), it is possible to train people to use people-first language, and teachers have acknowledged that they are unaware of the

appropriate way to refer to students with disabilities (Froschl et al., 1984). Schools should consider training staff in the use of people-first language, particularly if future research finds a link between language and inclusion practices. Until then, staff could be trained in the use of people-first language because language reflects an improved position in society for individuals with disabilities. Variations of people-first language could be described, as well as the potential benefits of each subtype of language. Additionally, language in general and its potential implications should be discussed in order to raise awareness around language's role in structuring an education setting. Many conceptions of people with disabilities are taken from media depictions, which are generally negative and stereotypical in nature (Ralph & Haller, 2009). People-first language can foster a positive identity for individuals with disabilities. Specifically in education settings, where staff members have the power to facilitate an inclusive and positive environment for all students through language, it is crucial to ensure the use of people-first language across roles. The likely benefits for students, with and without disabilities, and society as a whole, are too great.

### Conclusion

The current study proved both worthwhile and fascinating in terms of the results garnered. Language use, even when classified as people-first, disability-implicit, or disability-first, can be further categorized into useful subtypes. Because language may have many implications for attitudes and action toward people with disabilities, particularly in an education setting, its study may be extremely relevant to the nature of education for those with and without

disabilities and to the values of the field of community psychology. Additionally, for disability studies, language could be another avenue to address in advocacy for equality and justice. Language is one of the primary ways individuals with disabilities are held at a marginalized position in society and lack a unified positive identity. Without understanding language's power, it will remain an undeveloped and seldom utilized resource in understanding the experiences of people with disabilities.

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## Appendix A

### Interview Questions

#### Student Interview Questions

What made you choose this school?

Why?

From an opportunity to socialize and make friends what has it meant for you to transfer into this school?

Do you have more opportunities to make friends, less opportunities, or about the same in your new school?

Do you take part in any clubs, sports, or activities after school? (If yes go to next question. If No skip next question)

How have you arranged for transportation?

At school when do you have the opportunity to hang with friends and make new friends?

At school is there anything that prevents you from hanging with your friends or making new friends?

What changes if any in yourself have you noticed since you came to this school?

From a social standpoint, how does this school differ from your old school?

What are the advantages in your opinion between this school and your old school?

What are the disadvantages in your opinion between this school and your old school?

Do your friends ever ride the elevator with you?

Thinking about the friends that you have made since you came to this school, do you do things together after school or on weekends?

Can you think of any instances when a teacher changed anything about his or her teaching or instruction to try and include you more?

Did you come to the school to visit before classes began to check it out?

What concerns if any did you have about coming to this new school?

Did the school or your teacher do anything special to make you feel a part of the school community when you transferred here?

Since my study is all about friendships and socialization for students with disabilities, is there anything else you would like to add or tell me about?

Anything else you want to ad?

### Parent Interview Questions

What were your biggest concerns about transferring schools?

What made you choose this school?

Has the school made any special attempts to involve you?

What did the new school do to help you and your student prepare for the move?

Did you take a tour of the school?

Did you attend a picnic or anything else?

How easy has the transition been for your child?

What problems did your child face in the beginning?

Were you satisfied with the way the school resolved these issues?

How do you define inclusion?

Have you noticed any positive changes in your child since your child transferred?

Can you give me an example of a positive change?

Have you noticed any negative changes?

Does your child seem more happy, more sad, or about the same?

If you could choose, would you choose for your child to attend a regular school?

Why?

What do you think the biggest problems were about transferring to the new school?

What still needs to be resolved?

Do you have anything else you would like me to know?

Has your child made new friends since the move?

Do those friends call your child on the phone or does your child call them?

Does your child participate in any extracurricular activities after school?

Has your child had any social contact outside of school with any of the students they have met since the transfer?

What do you think is important for parents when a child with a disability has to change schools?

Do you think your child is fully included in their new school?

Anything else you want to add?

### Teacher Interview Questions

#### Special Education

How long have you been teaching here?

Can you describe your role as inclusion teacher?

Can you tell me a little more about what an Inclusion Teacher means at this school?

What kind of assistance do you provide as an inclusion teacher?

What about curriculum?

Could you give me an example?

I understand that some teachers have no students with disabilities in their classroom and others are specified as inclusion classrooms. Can you better

explain this?

As an inclusion teacher how does your relationship with the students differ from a general ed teacher?

What has the evolution of inclusion looked like at this school?

How long have students with disabilities been in attendance at this school?

What specific training or preparation activities did the school district provide?

Was this training/preparation for the transfer students the same as for other students with disabilities that have entered your school?

What specific training or activity was provided by your own administrator?

What, if any, resources were made available to you?

Did you seek out any resources on your own?

What were your main concerns about integrating students with disabilities with your general education students?

Did the transition go smoother or worse than you expected?

Can you give me an example of a success?

What about a failure?

What could the school district have done differently?

What advice would you give other teachers facing a similar experience?

Have you done any team teaching with a Special Education teacher for any of the transfer students?

Do you think students with disabilities should be taught in general education classrooms?

Now, moving on to the socialization process...

What observations have you made of how well the students are "fitting in" during your class or just in the school in general?

Can you give me any examples?

Has the school done anything to encourage socialization for the students with disabilities?

Have you witnessed any concrete examples of other students making overtures of friendship toward the transfer students?

Have you observed any difference in the social skills of these transfer students versus other non-disabled transfer students that you may have taught?

What tactics have you yourself used to try and include the students in your class activities?

Can you give me an example of a lesson plan or activity that you specifically altered to better include any of the transfer students?

What could your own administrator have done differently?

#### Administrator Interview Questions

What is your opinion about students with disabilities receiving their education in general education classrooms?

What is the attitude of faculty here? Would you say it is similar to yours?

What were some of the concerns the teachers brought up about this new group that would be entering your school?

Are students with learning disabilities in segregated classrooms?

How do you deal with these attitudes as an administrator?

How were the students selected for attending this school?

Do you think you are adequately informed about Inclusion Best Practices?

What issues have come up that you hadn't anticipated?

What do you think has been the biggest challenge?

Would you say that the transition has been a success?

(How) did you arrive at the decision to begin team teaching?



Did you feel the support you were provided was adequate?

What about staff development? How would you assess the support you received with respect to staff development?

How did you prepare your staff?

How have you measured success?

Have you had any failures?

Appendix B  
Original IRB Approval

Office for the Protection  
of Research Subjects

Northwestern University  
710 North Lake Shore Drive  
Room 532  
Chicago, Illinois 60611-3001

irb@northwestern.edu  
Phone: 312-503-8338  
Fax: 312-503-8565



NORTHWESTERN  
UNIVERSITY

January 04, 2005

Penelope Peterson, MD  
Annonberg Hall  
Evanston Campus

**IRB Project Number:** 1122-006  
**Meeting Date:** 10/22/2004  
**Study Sites:** Schools (K-12)

**Project Title:** Inclusion Efforts and their Effect on the Socialization of Youth with Physical Disabilities in a Public School Setting

**Submission Accession Number:** 200410-0563

**Submission(s) Considered:** New Project

**Recruitment Material:** letters to parents

**Status:** APPROVED

**Project Expiration:** 11/5/2005

At its 10/22/2004 meeting, the Institutional Review Board considered and approved your submission referenced above for a one year period ending 11/5/2005. IRB approval includes approval of the protocol and consent forms(s) listed below.

IRB approval is granted with the understanding that the investigator will:

- Change neither the procedures nor the consent form without prior IRB review and approval of those changes. Proposed changes must be submitted via the IRB Revisions Submission Form found on the OPRS website.
- Report any serious adverse events (SAEs) involving an NU subject to the IRB within 5 days.
- Report any unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or adverse events (AEs) to the IRB within 30 days.
- Submit a periodic review (PR) to the IRB 4-6 weeks prior to the expiration of this approval. If renewal is not obtained by the expiration date indicated above, the project will be closed.
- Send a copy of the final approved consent form and a copy of this approval letter to the Office of Sponsored Research (OSR) if this is a sponsored project. Additionally, OSR must be contacted if any amendments are made to this project that may affect the award.

Sincerely,

*Kerendimah*

Keren Dimah  
IRB Manager

CC: Kately O'Neill  
10163 Potter Rd.  
Des Plaines, IL 60016

For more information regarding OPRS submissions and guidelines, please consult <http://www.northwestern.edu/irsenrb/OPRS/irb>.  
This institution has an approved Federalwide Assurance with the Department of Health and Human Services: Assurance ID# FWA00001319.

## Appendix C

## Non-Reviewable Research Memo

DEPAUL  
UNIVERSITY

Institutional Review Board  
1 East Jackson Boulevard  
Chicago, Illinois 60604-2201  
312-362-7593  
Fax: 312-362-8105

**Office of Research Protections Memorandum**

## Non-Reviewable Determination

**To:** Lindsey Back, Graduate Student, Psychology  
Christopher Keys, PhD, Faculty Sponsor, Psychology

**From:** Office of Research Protections

**Date:** November 11, 2009

**Re:** "Language Use & the Inclusion of Students with Disabilities: The Potential of People-First Language"

The Office of Research Protections has received the application materials for your research activity entitled "Language Use & the Inclusion of Student with Disabilities: The Potential of People-First Language." After a review of these materials, the Office has determined that the activity does not involve human subjects as defined by 45 CFR 46.102 (f), because it does not involve living individuals about whom an investigator (whether professional or student) conducting research obtains either:

- (1) data through intervention or interaction with the individual, or
- (2) identifiable private information.

Although the activity involves research with data about people, you receive the data de-identified and will not have a code or link that could be used to match the data in an identifiable manner to individual people. For this reason, the Office of Research Protections has determined that the activity is non-reviewable.

Please be reminded that revisions to the activity may change its eligibility for IRB review. If you are unsure whether a revised version of this activity requires IRB review, you should contact the Office of Research Protections prior to implementing the changes.

The Office of Research Protections would like to thank you for your efforts and cooperation. If you have any questions, please contact the Director, Research Protections by telephone at (312) 362-7593 or by email at [sloesspe@depaul.edu](mailto:sloesspe@depaul.edu).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Susan M. Loess-Perez".

Susan M. Loess-Perez, MS, CIP, CCRC  
Director, Research Protections

## Appendix D

## Codebook

**1. Background information describing experience with students with disabilities**

Description: Experience with students with disabilities *prior to* the students' transfers. This code includes any worries or concerns and any positive thoughts or neutral questions that emerge as a result of previous experience. This code *excludes* any references to experiences subsequent to the transition.

## 1a. School's previous experience with students with disabilities

Description: This code refers to any experience that the school has had educating students with disabilities.

Example: *"No students [clarification by interviewer with disabilities] were here before?" "That is true."*

Example: *"It's a relatively new thing for our school. We've gone from virtually no students with disabilities, other than those with hearing disabilities, to now having about 300 students with Special Ed needs."*

## 1b. Teacher or administrator's previous experience with students with disabilities

Description: This code refers to any experience that teachers or administrators have had in educating students with disabilities.

Example: *"Just who the special ed help is, that's it. I've done IEPs and I've gotten IEPs. I've been to one IEP meeting where they wanted to have a teacher other than her teacher there. It depends on who the special ed teacher is."*

**2. School selection process to receive incoming students**

Description: Any mention of methods to select the school for the student with disability. This code includes reasons the students/parents have for choosing the school. This code also refers to a lack of action related to selection or preparation, as well as negative references to or concerns about selection or preparation.

## 2a. Selection by school

Description: This code refers to any actions taken by the school related to the school selection process.

Example: *“So, ah, the kids in wheelchairs certainly...because they are in wheelchairs doesn’t mean they are less intelligent. But, ah, some of the kids who do have learning disabilities, there was a concern that they wouldn’t be able to do the work.”*

#### 2b. Selection by student/family

Description: This code refers to any measures taken by the student of family to select the school the student would transition to.

Example: *“They had experience with kids with disabilities. The school [Spalding] wanted me to go to Clemente but my mom she said, ‘no’ because they never had kids there before in wheelchairs.”*

### 3. Preparation process to receive incoming student

Description: Any mention of efforts to prepare for incoming students with disabilities.

#### 3a. Preparation by school district/Central Office

Description: This code refers to any assistance or support the schools or students received from the school district or Central Office prior to and during the transition to prepare for the students with disabilities.

Example: *“Central Office could have been a little more supportive. They should have given us more time to meet rather than just dictate that you will take these kids. I think we wanted to say which kids we can serve. Rather than coming to people with ‘this is a done deal’, they should have had more communication initially and given us more support. We should have had more examples of what has been done. They did come in and tell us what needed to be done.”*

#### 3b. Preparation by school

Description: This code refers to any action taken by the school to prepare for the transition of students with disabilities.

Example: “We had a workshop and training for all staff. It was a presentation and then our own kids [students with disabilities] presented. One of the things a kid said was welcome to our world.”

### 3c. Preparation by student/family

Description: This code refers to any actions taken by the student or family to prepare for the transition.

Example: “Yes [we took a tour of the school prior to the transition]. They [new school] gave her a one-on-one tour of the school. We also went to an open house the school had.”

## 4. Knowledge of best practice [BP]

Description: Interviewees’ opinions of their own knowledge of BP information. This code is *not intended* to define what *is* or *is not* best practice, but rather should only capture reference to the interviewees’ familiarity with “best practice” or to code any other mention of the term “best practice”.

Example: “I would want to say yes - but that’s a relative yes because I’m not sure that I have captured all that is known and all of the best [practice] because I don’t know it all. But, I believe that we have both a theoretical understanding and we are trying to implement a practical understanding especially through the practice. I’m not sure we have a vision of that [best] practice. Logically, psychologically, pedagogically or spiritual, all that is best for children – and that is the practice I would talk about, that I would think about.”

Example: “Ah, Yeah, I think so. I think when I’m not, our disability coordinator makes sure I am.”

## 5. Language Use to Refer to Students with Disabilities

Description: This code refers to any language used to refer to individuals with disabilities. The three codes below [6a, people first usage, and 6b conventional or non-people first usage, and 6c, neutral language] are distinctive codes because they overlay all other codes and will lead to double coding appropriately.

These general examples will help to clarify people first language:

<b>People-First Language</b>	<b>Disability-Implicit Language</b>	<b>Conventional or Disability-Focused Usage</b>
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Student with disability	The student	Handicapped or disabled student
Sharon has a cognitive disability	She	Sharon is mentally disabled
Bill has Down's syndrome	He	Bill is Down's
Sonya has a learning disability	The girl	Sonya is learning disabled
Karen has quadriplegia	Karen	Karen is a quad
Jason uses a wheelchair	The boy	Jason is wheelchair bound

### 5a. Use of people first language

Description: This code is intended to capture the inclusive language practice known as “people first” (as described above). Such language puts the person, rather than the disability, first and/or favors the use of “having” rather than “being”. Conventional language use that places the disability description in front of the person or favors language that suggests “being” a person with a disability versus “having” a disability is excluded from this code (example would be “blind student”). This code is *not meant* to capture general descriptors (example: kids, this particular person, etc.).

Example: “*Students with special needs*”

Example: “*We have thirty-one students now in wheelchairs*”

#### 5ai. General people-first language

Description: This code is intended to capture language use that uses people-first structure and makes a reference to a general disability.

Example: “*Students with disabilities*”

#### 5a.ii. Disability-domain people-first language

Description: This code is intended to capture language use that uses people-first structure and makes a reference to a domain of disability.

Example: “*She has cognitive learning disabilities*”

#### 5a.iii. Specific people-first language

Description: This code is intended to capture language use that uses people-first structure and makes a reference to a specific disability.

Example: “*We would be receiving more students that were in wheelchairs.*”

#### **5aiv. Severity-focused people-first language**

Description: This code is intended to capture language use that uses people-first structure and makes a reference to the severity of a disability.

Example: “*I have one student with a pretty severe disability.*”

#### **5av. Historically sensitive people-first language**

Description: This code is intended to capture language use that uses people-first structure and uses terms that may have at one point been considered appropriate or sensitive to people with disabilities.

Example: “*I took a course on students with special needs.*”

### **5b. Conventional or disability-focused language**

Description: Conventional description language (other than people first) used when describing persons with disabilities. This code highlights descriptive language which emphasizes an individual’s condition, diagnosis, or needed orthotic by placing that descriptor in front of the noun or pronoun representing a person with a disability. Please note that the coder may also include one or two sentences surrounding the phrase in question if it helps capture the appropriate context, therefore explaining why the code in question was applied. This code is *not meant* to capture general descriptors (example: kids, this particular person, etc.).

Example: “*Wheelchair kids*”

#### **5bi. General disability-first language**

Description: This code is intended to capture language use that uses disability-first structure and makes a reference to a general disability.



Example: *“I don’t like the way disabled people are treated.”*

### **5bii. Disability-domain disability-first language**

Description: This code is intended to capture language use that uses disability-first structure and makes a reference to a domain of disability.

Example: *“I am familiar enough with physically disabled people.”*

### **5biii. Specific disability-first language**

Description: This code is intended to capture language use that uses disability-first structure and makes a reference to a specific disability.

Example: *“When other students are working with the deaf student they will ask, ‘Show me how to sign that.’”*

### **5biv. Severity-focused disability-first language**

Description: This code is intended to capture language use that uses disability-first structure and makes a reference to the severity of a disability.

Example: *“Very severely disabled students”*

### **5bv. Historically sensitive disability-first language**

Description: This code is intended to capture language use that uses disability-first structure and uses terms that may have at one point been considered appropriate or sensitive to people with disabilities.

Example: *“Special ed students”*

### **5bvi. Disability-only disability-first language**

Description: This code is intended to capture language use that makes a reference only to the disability and does not reference the person at all. The individual is reduced to their disability.

Example: *“Try and get something for the disabled.”*

### **5c. Disability-implicit language or general descriptors**

Description: This code is intended to capture language which does not fall into the people-first or disability-focused language category, *when referencing an individual or group of individuals with a disability*. It refers to any language used that does not mention an individual's disability at all; however, the context makes it clear that the speaker is referring to people with disabilities.

Example: *"The kids"*

Example: *"Students"*

### **5ci. General disability-implicit language**

Description: This code is intended to capture language which uses general terms to refer to individuals with disabilities, without mentioning their disability.

Example: *"Some of the students are struggling."*

### **5cii. Disability euphemism disability-implicit language**

Description: This code is intended to capture language use that substitutes another term as a replacement for the word "disability". This replacement term may reference the school students transferred from, a use of inclusion practices, or the transition the students experienced.

Example: *"They heard they were getting students from Wilson."*

Example: *"Have I worked specifically with any of the transfer students?"*

### **5ciii. Name/individual-focused disability-implicit language**

Description: This code is intended to capture language that uses a student's name or reference to a specific individual to refer to a student with a disability.

Example: *"My other student, Carla, her thing is she has a lot more skills."*

## 6. Transition concerns/comments

Description: Concerns and/or challenges prior to the transition and during the first year of the transferring students. This code refers to concerns specifically related to and taking place during the transition, and excludes references to the inclusion and education of students with disabilities that occurred after the transition.

### 6a. Safety concerns/comments

Description: Concerns regarding safety issues at the school (evacuation chairs, elevator issues specifically related to safety, etc.). This code excludes transition concerns that focus on issues not related to the safety of the students or school personnel. This code excludes general elevator issues unless they are specifically refer to a safety issue.

Example: *What if I have to carry a student down in the evacuation chair?"*

Example: *"There were fears that are still fears now. We are in a building that is nine floors tall. This place calls for an emergency - a weather emergency, or some type of what do you do? Ok, we have said you cannot use the elevator. We have set all kinds of precautions by bringing into the building special chairs to be able to help exit if one has to do it manually."*

### 6b. School/Classroom size concerns/comments

Description: Any size-related reference made relating to a transition concern. This code includes overcrowding issues associated with a large school in general, classroom student/teacher ratios if such references are mentioned as part of a transition concerns. This code excludes size descriptors such as *"We are a very large urban type school."* unless the comments pertain to a concern such as in the example below."

Example: *"First of all, we are such a large school we were concerned that these kids would get lost in the shuffle."*

### 6c. Social interaction transition concerns/comments

Description: This code refers to any comments or concerns made regarding social interaction directly related to the transition.

Example: “*When I got here I thought it was going to be just me. I didn’t know there would be other kids here from my old school so that helped me in the beginning.*”

#### **6d. Other transition concerns**

Description: This code is intended to capture any other concerns or comments related to the transition that do not fit into other categories.

Example: “*In general, I think it’s not that they were concerned about the students from Spalding. It’s just that with No Child Left Behind we’ve been inundated with so many more things to do. It just becomes, “Wow! This is one more thing we have to do.” I think it’s just feeling overwhelmed in general. One more thing to do.*”

### **7. Inclusion comments/concerns**

Description: This code refers to any comments or concerns regarding the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education. This code excludes comments or concerns that refer to the transition of students with disabilities, and includes references to the inclusion that took place following the transition.

#### **7a. Overall attitude toward inclusion of students with disabilities in general education**

Description: Comments made that demonstrate an attitude toward the *shared presence* of students with disabilities and general education students. This code is *not intended* to capture any references specific to academics/curriculum or actions toward students with disabilities but pertains to attitudes toward schooling of students with disabilities (aka; attitudes toward inclusion - students with disabilities receiving their education in same classroom as general education students). This code includes positive attitudes toward inclusion, such as respect for the inherent value and dignity of students with disabilities, as well as respect for privacy of students with disabilities; for example, by discussing students’ personal care, medical needs, and other sensitive issues out of earshot of other students, and only with those who need to know. This code also includes negative attitudes toward inclusion, such as emphasizing segregating students with disabilities or vocalizing concerns about students’ with disabilities inability to do the work in general education classrooms.

### **7ai. Attitudes toward classroom inclusion**

Description: This code refers to any references to attitudes toward inclusion specifically at the classroom level.

Example: *“I think that we both can benefit from that. Students with special needs need to be in a regular classroom because they see what their peers are going through. I think it’s a good thing for the regular students to have friends with special needs. It makes them in contact a little more often to people with differences. Fortunately, we already deal with kids from other cultures but now this [inclusion of students with disabilities] has made us a little more caring. We feel fortunate to have these students.”*

### **7aii. Attitudes toward inclusion in schoolwide/extracurricular activities**

Description: This code refers to any references to attitudes toward inclusion at the schoolwide level or in extracurricular activities.

Example: *“It’s been very positive for both sides. Our role has changed. Our students who have transferred in with disabilities have similar needs to our other students. I think it’s not just an extra, it’s something that they have articulated into our school. There are some things we have to deal with, but it has already become a regular part of our culture.”*

### **7aiii. Attitudes toward inclusion through transportation**

Description: This code refers to any references to attitudes toward inclusion through the ways students with disabilities were transported to and from school.

Example: *“I take public transportation...Everybody was saying it would be too hard in the winter to take public transportation but they would still give it a try...I want to take public transportation all the time, but it’s a problem getting to school on time in the morning. I have to take public transportation because I have a job.”*

## **7b. Academic or curriculum concerns/comments**

Description: Any reference to students with disabilities regarding academics. This code also should include any comment related to the student's academic ability regardless of perspective (administrator/teacher/parent/student); for example, references to students with disabilities successfully completing schoolwork. The code excludes general academic references that describe the school in general such as "...we are a receiving type of school for kids that do not qualify for select enrollment schools" unless they relate to inclusion concerns or issues.

Example: *"Some of the kids who do have learning disabilities - there was a concern there that they wouldn't be able to do the work."*

### **7c. Communication concerns/comments**

Description: This code captures any communication concerns (visual, auditory, cognitive, etc.) pertaining to students with disabilities. This code includes references to the existence of the particular inclusion best practice of providing students with the means to communicate in a variety of settings (e.g., classroom, small group, one-on-one). The code excludes expressed general communication concerns not related to students with disabilities.

Example: *"Some of the kids are not able to express, even through their eyes or their hands, what they feel and so they are in a vacuum sometimes."*

### **7d. Schedule concerns/comments**

Description: Any reference made to school schedule concerns of students with disabilities. This code also captures leaving class early due to elevator issues, and references to schedule concerns as a result of transportation. This code excludes curriculum or academic concerns captured under code 8c.

Example: *"In terms of our programming and scheduling, it hasn't turned out the way we wanted it. It hasn't been as smooth as we've wanted. We're going to get better."*

Example: *"I try to make it, their schedules, so that all thirty-plus aren't going from a different floor at the same period because it just takes too much time. So, those are some of the things that were of concern."*

### **7e. Accessibility concerns/comments**

Description: Any concerns about access issues that influence the full integration of students with disabilities. This code includes any reference to elevator related accessibility issues. This code *excludes* any safety-related or schedule –related issues.

Example: *“We worked hard to convince the bureaucracy that we had non-working elevators. Even now they are not working all the time. But we didn’t have accessible music department. Even now our physical Ed department is inaccessible.”*

Example: *“One of the biggest concerns, and it’s a concern of mine, was that the building, the facility, is not set-up for anyone with a disability - especially those in wheelchairs. We were having a lot of problems with our elevators.”*

### **7f. Staffing support concerns/comments**

Description: This code describes staffing concerns/comments. This code applies to increased need for staffing (hiring needs) or the impact on existing personnel related to the Spalding students transfer. This code excludes general comments about staffing not related to students with disabilities.

Example: *“I mentioned one [student aid] which was we hired at random, not with knowledge of the child but with knowledge of the system. I hired wrong because I followed the system not the child. That was one regrettable error.”*

### **7g. Funding concerns/comments**

Description: Any mention of lack of funding to accommodate students with disabilities. This code includes references made regarding additional funding needed.

Example: *“Those pieces were difficult when it involved funding.”*

Example: *“The disparity in the funding[from CPS] and formulas that exist state-wise and nationally.”*

### **7h. Transportation concerns/comments**

Description: Any reference made towards the transportation provided for students with disabilities. This code includes any references made to transportation concerns or perceived

inadequacies. This code excludes any references to schedule concerns.

Example: *“When students were getting let out on time, the complaint was from the bus. They can't get out of the parking lot because of the kids [with disabilities] and that puts them behind schedule.”*

### **7i. Leadership concerns/comments**

Description: The administrator’s comments related to their own leadership ability as an administrator.

Example: *“As an administrator my fear is how to realize am I able to bring and develop communicable vision that day by day moves us all to develop greater capacity , greater potential, greater sensibility, which truly permits all children to assist this child become a life-long learner. That is a dream that all teachers would be able to do that. That all students would be able. My fear is not being able to do that. I try hard to develop ways of attaining that.”*

### **7j. Comments/concerns about parents/parental involvement**

Description: Comments made with respect to parents’ actions or attitudes that positively or negatively affect students’ with disabilities experience in their new schools. This category includes references to parents’ support for or involvement with the students’ with disabilities IEP.

Example: *“Especially for children who come from homes where the parents are not literate. The parents are not necessarily controlling the growth of that child. In the homes where the parents are literate, the parents are the ones controlling how well a kid is reading and pushing a kid’s score. So the school depends on the parents’ support at home in many ways. But the parents are lawyers, the parents are whatever. But those are in the homes where the parents are taking care of those kids. But then you have the affluent parent who is at work and the kid becomes anti social because the kid doesn’t have the parents’ support.”*

### **7k. Extracurricular activity inclusion concerns/comments**

Description: This code refers to concerns or comments about the inclusion of students with disabilities in extracurricular activities.



Example: *“I’d like to be in some of them clubs where my friends are in but I can’t.”*

## **7l. Other general inclusion concerns/comments**

Description: Any general concerns and comments excluding those covered by codes 7a through 7j).

Example: *“Am I liable?”*

Example: *“Ah...up until now I haven’t had a really good model of inclusion. I’ve had teachers come and pull the students out more for them or whatever and that’s disruptive. That was my, ah, main concern.”*

Example: *“Be open. Don’t be scared. It’s not such a big deal.”*

## **8. Resistance issues in the inclusion and education of students with disabilities**

Description: These codes refer to resistance issues in the education of students with disabilities.

### **8a. Staff member encounters resistance from another staff member**

Description: any reference in which a staff member encountered resistance from another staff member (general education teacher, special education teacher, administrator, or other staff member) specifically in providing accommodations for students with disabilities. This code includes any difficulties expressed while using a team teaching model.

Example: (special education teacher) *“Her argument was that she is going to do what every other kid is doing and, uhm, it wasn’t a class I was in. It was a student on my case load I had to work. When she did do modifications, she put out a new grading scale that pretty much eliminated the possibility of that student getting an A. That was another...uh...it was butting heads.”*

Example: (general education teacher) *“Some of the teachers are not open. Some of the teachers who have been here a long time do not like the direction the school is changing. Ah...it used to be a technical school and now we’re focusing more on college prep. So...ah...more your liberal arts classes so...ah...some of the more experienced teachers are fighting against the grain and they are*

*fighting against it. Then they see Special Ed kids coming in here and thinking automatically the negative things.”*

### **8b. Participants strategies to deal with resistance**

Description: Methods the administrator or teacher employs to assure successful transition of students with disabilities into their school in the face of resistance. This code refers to strategies enacted or considered rather than general comments or statements of concern. This code excludes preventive or promotive strategies to deal with resistance.

#### **8bi. Seeks help**

Description: Any reference made to the administrator or teacher seeking internal or external help (this code encompasses resources sought through outside consultants, internal specialists such as special education coordinators, seminars, peers, central office, etc.). This code excludes any reference to training provided prior to the Spalding students transfer.

Example: *“I had to go and see who is this person who has been working with this person. They had to know this person. And truly, I got short-changed and the child too because not always that person that had been working had that vision that I’m working toward and so I hired with the last person that was working with the child [in reference to hiring aids for the students with disabilities.”*

#### **8bii. Administrator or teacher confronts teacher’s thinking**

Description: Any instance where the administrator or teacher *directly* confronts what they consider to be flawed thinking or stereotypes regarding a disability.

Example: *“You know what? I think it’s like any other prejudice. You know you can’t - there is no way to justify it. You have to go along with it and eh once you really call somebody on it they can’t justify it. I think it’s embarrassing sometimes to them and it should be and so hopefully that wakes them up to realize their thinking was flawed.”*

Example: *“I’m not suggesting it’s the teacher’s choice but they put up a fight – it’s just they sort of... whoever makes the decisions sort of got the picture and it was just too much conflict. So, uh, I think there is simply just the understanding on some teachers’ parts of what it would mean to have a learning disability and how that doesn’t make the kids less intelligent. I think Ms. Seely [alias] really understands that. Some teachers just don’t get it. They think, ‘well this kid’s just not going to be as intelligent’. You know, it’s a prejudice. In some cases it’s really true, the kid has a learning disability and just happens to be not very smart. But, the majority of the students I work with are average to above average intelligence. With the proper support they’re often, six out of ten times, they’re A’s and B’s in the class. Sometimes that’s with a lot of help, sometimes with very little assistance.”*

### **8biii. Leads by example**

Description: Administrator or teacher attempts to emulate the type of behavior he/she expects. This code includes any references to the inclusion best practice of school administrators promoting the values and benefits of inclusive education (e.g., at meetings, in school improvement plans or annual reports, in school newsletters or Web sites, and in conversations).

Example: *“One of the things that has to be done – anytime you want an attitude to change or a behavior to be changed, then you as a administrator, or whoever you are in a leadership role, you have to be showing that same attitude if you want that from your people. I want to make sure that my attitude and my behavior indicates that it is a positive thing for me. That’s where it has to start.”*

### **8biv. Inclusion as a gradual transition**

Description: This code consists of the school’s efforts to gradually transition the staff’s ability to teach students with disabilities. The code includes acceptance of incremental change.

Example: *“We’re going to have more and more team teaching. We’re going to do it gradually. You can’t force*

*people to do things they aren't comfortable with. There will be more inclusion classes and more team teaching."*

Example: *"I think now it has gradually become where very few people look at it as a negative anymore."*

### **8bv. Personalize the children's perspective**

Description: Administrator or teacher tries to personalize the children's experience by asking faculty to view situations through the eyes of a parent or student with a disability. This also includes references to personalizing the experience in order to respect the value, dignity, and privacy of students with disabilities.

Example: *"Just think of it as if it were your son or daughter. How would you feel about a teacher who has your attitude? Those that have a negative attitude – I've had this conversation with a couple of people. Just think of it that way. If it were your daughter who wants to take that class in Art, and our school has a great art program, would you want her to be deprived because she's in a wheelchair? That usually hits home for most of them."*

## **9. Description of interactions between students with disabilities and general education students.**

Description: This code captures students' reaction to the presence of students with disabilities. Code applies to general education students' reactions towards their interaction with students with disabilities or vice versa. This code encompasses parent/administrator/and teacher's perceptions of the interactions of students with disabilities with non-disabled peers.

### **9a. Positive interactions**

Description: This code refers to positive interactions between students with and without disabilities.

Example: *"When I see them [students with disabilities] with children[without disabilities] and I see that they are happy, I do get reports from their mentors or caretakers that the kids are happy. That they want to come to school. They seem wanting to be in class."*

### **9b. Negative interactions**

Description: This code refers to negative interactions between students with and without disabilities.

Example: *“I think it’s just because of the wheelchair. They don’t look at you as a person. They just see the chair.”*

### **9c. No interactions**

Description: This code refers to a complete lack of interaction between students with and without disabilities.

Example: *“Before I was on public transportation the juniors and seniors are allowed to go to lunch but the kids on the yellow bus couldn’t. The kids on the yellow bus are all disabled.”*

## **10. Perceived social opportunities**

Description: These codes refer to opportunities or a lack of opportunities for social interaction for students with disabilities.

### **10a. Opportunities provided**

Description: Situations the administrator, teacher, or student perceives as opportunities for social engagement including students with disabilities. This code includes activities occurring either within or outside the regular school hours. This code includes references to the inclusion best practice of facilitating the same variety of social networks for students with disabilities as for students without disabilities. This may be done by proportionally representing students with disabilities in classes, courses, clubs, and extracurricular activities. This category excludes references to participation in social activities not connected to school.

Example: *“We had a Thanksgiving event that a church group and a kids store were going to give turkeys after having a reflection ceremony and the kids [students with disabilities] went home and they came back and they were so happy to be there.”*

### **10b. Lack of opportunities**

Description: situations in which a student with a disability does *not* have the opportunity for social engagement. The code references opportunities occurring either within or outside the regular school hours that are connected with school. This code excludes any reference to opportunities that *are* provided.

Example: *“Then, we had a homecoming night and some kids[with disabilities?] were very upset that we hadn’t told them early because they had no spare change of clothes and they were unable to come back at night. I remember feeling so bad because their hearts were broken.”*

## **11. Perception of change**

Description: any reference to perception of the changes they experience in regards to inclusion or mainstreaming in their present environment.

### **11a. Positive change**

Description: This code refers to descriptions of positive change as a result of the transition to an inclusive education.

Example: *“When I first came here, I didn’t know too many people. My cousin and a friend of his- that’s it. People would say “Hi” to me but I didn’t really know who they were. I would think, “Wow, are they talking to me?” They like talking to me. It made me feel just like I was regular. I am but I mean it made me feel they saw that too. That’s big advantage as I see it.”*

### **11b. Negative change**

Description: This code refers to descriptions of negative change as a result of the transition to an inclusive education.

Example: *“Well, ah Spalding had ramps which was easier than here”*

### **11c. No change**

Description: This code refers to descriptions of no change as a result of the transition to an inclusive education.

Example: *“In general, the teachers here are as nice as in the old school. The teachers are about equal.”*

## **12. Support provided for students with disabilities**

Description: Any reference to the inclusion best practice in which supports are provided to a student with disability in their academic or social development to enable students with disabilities to participate in and benefit from the general education classroom. This code includes

references to the formation of an IEP to best facilitate the student's learning in the general education classroom. It also includes modifications or adjustments to curriculum, as well as creative teaching methods, to most effectively support the students with disabilities.

### **12a Special educators provide support for students with disabilities**

Description: Any reference to the inclusion best practice in which a special education provides physical, emotional, and instructional supports to students with disabilities.

Example: *“I, ah ah, see my role more as support for these students [with disabilities] rather than giving them new instruction. Ah, so, if I'm in an inclusion class I'm in there with them [the students] seeing what they may have missed and in those classes I may have as little as four students or sometimes as many as nine students.”*

Example: *“One of the things we've really tried to do and our special ed coordinator has done a great job with that is making sure that people understand that just because someone has a disability doesn't mean they deserve any less.”*

### **12b. General educators and staff provide support for students with disabilities**

Description: Any reference to the inclusion best practice in which a non-special educator (e.g., classroom teachers, librarians, classmates, office personnel, volunteers) provide physical, emotional, and instructional supports to students with disabilities).

Example: *“We have a map drawing exercise in one of my classes. The paper for the maps is quite large and the students in wheelchairs weren't able to join in. I rigged something up by taping markers on the end of the map pointers so they could also participate.”*

Example: *“I've sent him [student with a disability] home with materials. He is pretty good about making work up. He has an extra book so if I can send him with supplies to do work outside of class...”*

Example: *“Yesterday I had my deaf girl read in class. It was her first time. It took her this long to build up to it. She didn't want to do it because she doesn't talk normally. I told her that she still needs to do it. I told her, 'you need to trust the kids.' 'They will*

*laugh at me,' she said. 'You still need to do it!' Then, when she read yesterday, they were empathetic. They were attentive. They were curious. There was not a student in that class who would make fun of her or mimic her. You have to let that trust develop organically.*

### **13. Resource-related issues**

Description: These codes refer to any mention of a lack of resources and subsequent strategies to acquire resources to support the education of students with disabilities.

#### **13a. Lack of resources**

Description: any reference in which a teacher states that she has been provided or not provided resources to assist her in providing an inclusive education.

Example: *"Sometimes I get the whole entire IEP the first week of school. Sometimes I don't know for five weeks until I get my permanent roster from CPS that I have kids that have special needs. I don't necessarily know."*

Example: *"Well, ah, they tried to bring in some people from Special Ed, uh, but on a regular basis a regular meeting? No"*

#### **13b. Seeking out resources**

Description: References made by teachers regarding their personal efforts to seek or not seek out assistance to improve their inclusive practices

##### **13bi. Sought out resources**

Description: any reference in which a teacher made efforts to seek resources to assist them in making a more inclusive classroom. This code includes any voluntary efforts to seek help or advice. For example, seeking out inclusive literature or asking other teachers for advice. This code excludes any training provided by the school, Central Office, and the district. This code also excludes any mentioning of not seeking out resources

Example: *"I seek out solutions on my own for my own classes, is that what you mean?"*



### 13bii. Did not seek out resources

Description; This code captures any teacher comment that refers directly to the absence of seeking out support and resource. This code excludes any teacher comments that do relate to seeking help.

Example: “No. Ah...no I can’t say that I felt that I needed to.”

## 14. Transition position

Description: any reference on how individuals feel the transition is going, if it is the same as they thought it would be better or is going worse. This includes an individual’s reflections on the transition. This excludes specific concerns related to the transition.

Example “*Hmm. Smoother or hmm.*”

Example: “*I would say as I expected. Uhm, not smoother not worse.*”

Example: “*Well, ah, you know, I’d have to say worse. That’s all.*”

## 15. Usage of Co-teaching

Description: Co-teaching (also called team teaching) is an instructional delivery approach in which a classroom teacher and a special education teacher (or other special services professional) share responsibility for planning, delivering, and evaluating instruction for a group of students, some of which have exceptional needs.

### 15a. Co-teaching

Description: Any reference made towards the experience of co-teaching or the incorporation of special education teachers into the general education classroom in a variety of roles. This code excludes references made towards the absence of a co-teaching model of instruction.

Example: “*Yes. I love it. I absolutely love it. A lot of teachers don’t like having another adult in the room. It takes away from their power base...Mr. Shea [Special Ed teacher, alias] is the fourth resource teacher I’ve worked with. As my 4<sup>th</sup> year has gotten on, I switch off to him a lot of times. Students will ask him questions as well as ask me questions. They have tried to play us against each*”

*other. One person just doesn't stretch far enough for twenty-eight students. I know he is taking five minutes with another group. They are sophomores. I like having team teaching. For me it is a really good idea."*

### **15b. No co-teaching**

Definition; Any comment that reflects the absence of co-teaching.

Example: *"No. I don't do any team teaching."*

## **16. Efforts made for the students with disabilities to receive equality**

Description: Any reference to efforts made to change or confront the system to allow students with disabilities to receive equality.

### **16a. Efforts made by the students to receive equality**

Description: Situations in which the students went against the system to receive more opportunities to be treated like every other student. This excludes references to supports to supplement inclusion, and includes references to equalizing the student with a disability to other students.

Example: *"The other times I always came to school on the yellow bus with all the other kids [transferring students]. I said one time, "OK, I'm going on the regular city bus today with all the other kids and other regular people. I just wanted to do it. I knew I could do it. I did it."*

### **16b. Efforts made by parents for students to receive equality**

Description: Situations in which parents went against the system for their students to receive more opportunities for equality.

Example: *"I told them [the school] that I want a weekly report, but the teachers haven't been responsive. These kids [with disabilities] just fall through the cracks, especially if the parents don't stay involved. Some of the kids have nobody advocating for them. I gave the administrator an idea today of what is going on. The special ed coordinator needs more help. She's only one person."*

### **16c. Efforts made by teachers, administrators, or other staff members for students to receive equality.**

Description: Situations in which teachers, administrators, or other staff members went against the system for students to receive more opportunities for equality.

Example: *“I [special education teacher] went to the administration and that was wiped out. Uh, well, there was another Special Ed teacher in there that was just going along with it. Given that it was one of my favorite students, I really fought it. Not that I wouldn’t have otherwise, but I just noticed it more because I work really close with this student. So the protocol was I went first to the inclusion teacher, then to the geometry teacher, and then, when things weren’t going the way they should have been, I went to the administrator and explained where it’s just not really legal and you can’t eliminate the possibility of an A just because you are making accommodations. That was changed quickly. Then the teacher got it and went along with it.”*