A1 Teachers Guide, Ways of thinking and speaking about Disabled People [1]

The models of disability

It was the segregation, discrimination and exclusion of disabled people from community life, that led the Disability Movement to challenge the way in which people were treated and labelled by society and the medical profession in particular.

The **traditional model of disability** in all societies prior to the medical model seeks to explain difference by magic, superstition or the acts of all powerful deities. These vary between cultures and over time depending on material circumstances, but the thinking is largely negative. They are the root of many powerful stereotypes. However, there are also examples throughout history that run counter to the dominant ideas about disabled people, which demonstrate that love and relationships often lead to acceptance.

The **Medical Model of Disability** places the problem with the individual that only a cure will solve. It denies the individual their value, worth and individuality as they do not meet the accepted 'norms' of our society. This disabled people are often viewed in society.

The World Health Organisation's old definition:

* 'Disability is any restriction or lack (resulting from an impairment) of ability to perform an activity in the manner or within the range considered normal for a human being'.
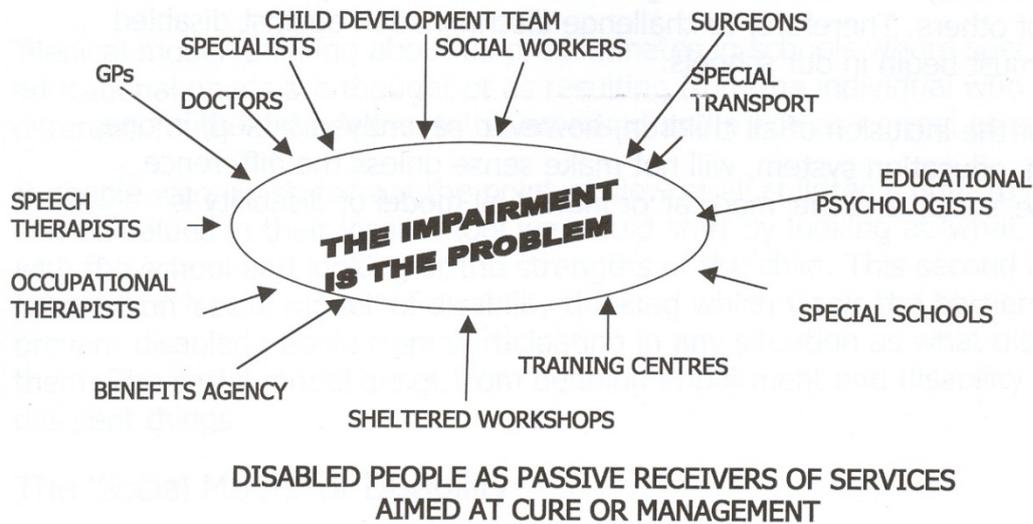
Medical labels are often misleading, as no two people are alike. Medical labels tend to reinforce stereotypes of disabled people as patients who are ill, powerless and wholly dependent on the medical profession.
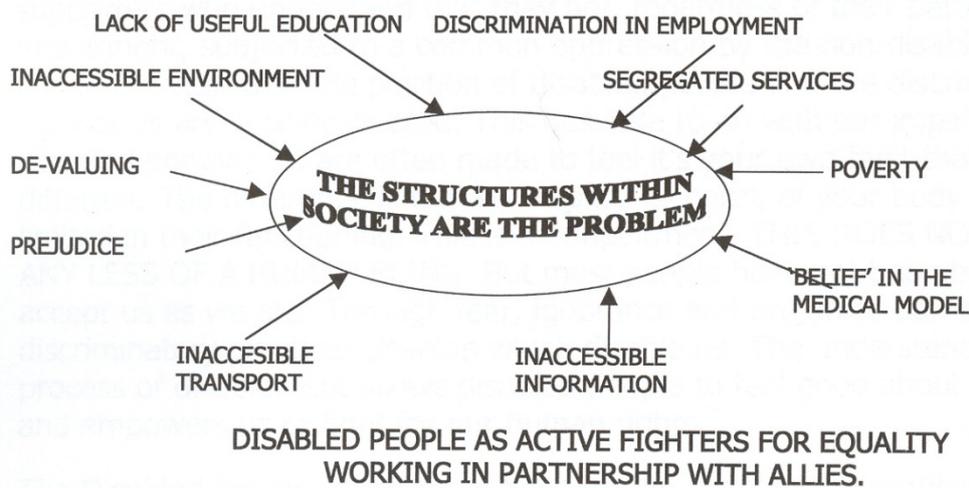
The ICF WHO definition from 2001 defined disability

'Disability is a decrement (reduction or diminution) in functioning at the body, individual or societal level that arises when an individual with a health condition encounters barriers in the environment'. This still places the onus on the individual rather than society and has been developed into a bio-social model in recent years that places much emphasis on the individual and their perceptions and is promoted by commercial interests such as ATOS and UNNUM.

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[1] This draws on Disability Language and Etiquette Barking and Dagenham CIIIL Consortium and Council 2001.
http://www.insiderart.org.uk/userfiles/disability-language-01-07.pdf

The Medical Model

CHILD DEVELOPMENT TEAM   SURGEONS
SPECIALISTS   SOCIAL WORKERS
GPs   SPECIAL TRANSPORT
DOCTORS

SPEECH THERAPISTS

THE IMPAIRMENT IS THE PROBLEM

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS

SPECIAL SCHOOLS

TRAINING CENTRES

BENEFITS AGENCY

SHELTERED WORKSHOPS

DISABLED PEOPLE AS PASSIVE RECEIVERS OF SERVICES
AIMED AT CURE OR MANAGEMENT

The Social Model

LACK OF USEFUL EDUCATION   DISCRIMINATION IN EMPLOYMENT
INACCESSIBLE ENVIRONMENT   SEGREGATED SERVICES

DE-VALUING

THE STRUCTURES WITHIN SOCIETY ARE THE PROBLEM

POVERTY

PREJUDICE

'BELIEF' IN THE MEDICAL MODEL

INACCESSIBLE TRANSPORT   INACCESSIBLE INFORMATION

DISABLED PEOPLE AS ACTIVE FIGHTERS FOR EQUALITY
WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ALLIES.

The Social Model of Disability challenges the medical profession's definition and was developed by a group of disabled people who managed to escape from institutional care in 1976 known as 'The Union of the Physically Impaired Against Segregation'. Their definitions are:

* **Impairment** – Lacking part or all of a limb or having a defective limb, organ or mechanism of the body.

***Disability** – The disadvantage or restriction of activity caused by a contemporary social organisation which takes little or no account of people who have physical impairments and thus excludes them from participation in the mainstream of social activities. Disability is therefore a particular form of social oppression.

Under this classification, people have impairments, they do not have disabilities.

These approaches do not deny the problem of disability, but locate it within society. Individual limitations, of whatever kind, are perceived as only one factor.

Far more important, they say, is society's failure to ensure that the needs of disabled people are fully taken into account in its social organisation.

Therefore, according to the Social Model, disability is a social state and not a medical condition.

To take into account all forms of social oppression and all impairments, **Disabled People's International** adopted and redefined the definition of **disability** in 1981 as:

'The loss or limitation of opportunities that prevents people who have impairments from taking part in the mainstream life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers'.

Many organisations which are run and controlled by disabled people work within and promote the Social Model of Disability. Many Councils throughout the country have adopted a Social Model definition. Working in this way ensures equality of access and challenges discrimination at all levels within the organisation and the local and wider community.

The United Nations when it adopted 'The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities'(UNCRPD), in 2006, adopted this paradigm shift. While not defining disability it states 'Persons with disabilities include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others'. Article 1.

The UK alongside 131 countries have ratified the UNCRPD[2]

Knowing a little history of the Social Model will help the understanding of why we use particular language and how some words and phrases are now offensive.

Language and Terminology

Whilst it is important to have a general understanding of words and phrases which give offence to disabled people, we should note where they come from and why. The history of disability is a fascinating one. If we understand where things come from, we can put the jigsaw together and make sense of the full picture.

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* The term 'the disabled' implies a homogeneous group separate from the rest of society. We are all individuals. The preferred term is 'disabled people'.

* The term 'the handicapped' is offensive to many disabled people because it has associations with 'cap in hand' and begging. The preferred term is 'disabled people'.

*Under the Social Model, the term 'people with disabilities' is incorrect as we have impairments. We are people who are disabled by the environment, attitudes, stereotypes etc. The preferred term is 'disabled people'.

*Another example is 'invalid' because this equates disability with illness and can be construed as 'not valid' or 'worthless' . Similarly the word 'cripple', originally meaning either to creep or be without power, is offensive.

* A wheelchair represents 'independence' and 'freedom' and not a 'confining burden' as it is thought of by non-disabled people. Disabled people prefer the term 'wheelchair user' or 'person who uses a wheelchair' to 'wheelchair bound'.

*People with an 'intellectual impairment' prefer to be described as people with 'learning difficulties' not 'mental handicap'. Words like 'idiot', 'imbecile' and 'feeble minded' are equally offensive as these were used to classify and incarcerate people under the 1913 Mental Deficiency Act. It is important not to confuse learning difficulties with mental illness.

*People who have experienced mental health problems have no one preferred 'name' by which to be called. The most common terms being 'user' or 'clients' of Mental Health Services. The term 'survivor' is not frequently used, in this area, but it is important to find how the group or person you are dealing with likes to be referred .

*People who are deaf or blind or deaf/blind are said to have 'sensory impairment', either 'hearing' or 'sight impaired' or both.

*The term 'disabled toilets' is inappropriate. The toilet is either 'accessible' or inaccessible'.

* Unpaid relatives, family members and friends are often known as carers. This should not be confused with care workers who are paid to support disabled people and children as part of their paid work.

*Disabled people prefer the term 'personal assistant' when referring to paid home care workers. Disabled people require support and assistance from service providers, not to be looked after and cared for.

* Often the term 'disabled parking bays' is used inappropriately at supermarkets and shopping centres. It should be 'parking for Blue Badge Holders or 'parking for disabled

drivers and passengers'. More and more supermarkets are changing to the latter through pressure from disabled people.

Disabled people say they prefer you to use the words in the first column. Many of the old words are offensive, but these will appear in old sources and students should be warned not to use them to describe disabled people.

Use / preferred	Avoid / offensive
Person who has Person with Person who experienced	Victim of
Disabled person Person who has Person with	Crippled by
Person who has Person with	Sufferer Suffering from
Wheelchair user	Wheelchair bound
Disabled person	Invalid
Disability / impairment	Handicap
Disabled person	Handicapped person / person with disability
Condition / impairment	Disability(when referring to specific condition).
Someone with cerebral palsy	Spastic
Disabled people	The disabled
Blind person / visually impaired	The blind
Deaf people	The deaf
Sign Language User	Deaf and dumb
Hearing impaired people	The deaf
Someone with Down's Syndrome or Learning Difficulty	Mongol
Learning difficulty	Mental handicap
Learning difficulty	Retard / idiot / feeble-minded
Speech difficulty	Mute / dumb / dummy
Mental health system user, Mental health survivor	Mad / crazy / insane
Mental health system user, Mental health survivor	Mentally ill
Disabled person	Mental
Foolish / thoughtless	Stupid
Short person	Dwarf
Short stature	Midget
Neuro-diverse or person with autism	Autist or Savant
Disfigured	Deformed
Disabled Person	Congenital

| Accessible toilet | Disabled toilet |

Activity Ask students why the words in the second column might be offensive to disabled people.

Remember that language does change over time and that as a first step should be asked what they feel comfortable with in terms of description, if indeed a description is needed.