

Origin of “Handicap”

Some people with disabilities do not like the term "handicap" because of a belief that it originally meant someone who could not work and went begging with their cap in hand. This, however, appears to possibly not be the true origin of the word. It could have originated in a lottery game known as Hand In Cap in the 1600s, which involved players placing money in a cap.

People First / Respectful Language

People First Language is a form of politically correct linguistic prescriptivism aiming to avoid perceived and subconscious dehumanization when discussing people with disabilities. The basic idea is to replace, e.g., "disabled people" with "people with disabilities", "deaf people" with "people who are deaf" or "individuals who are deaf", etc., thus emphasizing that they are people first, hence the concept's name. Recognizing the disability as secondary acknowledges the disability as a significant characteristic of one's life, but not the genuine identity of a person. Further, the concept favors the use of "having" rather than "being", e.g. "she has a learning disability" instead of "she is learning-disabled", an example of E-Prime language avoiding the verb to be.

The rationale behind people-first language is that it recognizes that someone is a person, a human being, or a citizen first, and that the disability is a part, but not all of them. Thus, it asks for one to respect the disability community as first and foremost a community of people. It is also supposed to confirm the right of the concerned group to define themselves and choose their own name. Since the late 1980s, people-first language has gained considerable acceptance amongst people with disabilities as well as professionals working with them or people otherwise interested in the topic. Adherence to the rules of people-first language has become a requirement in some academic journals. By extension, "people first" is a common part of the names of organizations representing people with disabilities in the United States and internationally.

Person-first terminology is rejected by some people with disabilities, most commonly the deaf and autistic communities. The National Federation of the Blind has also officially rejected person-first terminology.^[1] People who reject person-first terminology generally see their condition as an important part of their identity, and so prefer to be described as "deaf people" and "blind people" and "autistics"^[2] or "autistic people" rather than "people with deafness" and "people with blindness" and "people with autism". In a reversal of the rationale for person-first terminology, these people see person-first terminology as devaluing an important part of their identity and falsely suggesting that there is, somewhere in them, a person distinct from their condition. Notably, these two conditions have extensive effects on language use, leading to significant subcultures, the deaf community and the autistic community. These features are not shared with most other conditions that are commonly considered disabilities. Some people with these conditions do not consider them disabilities, but rather traits.