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Audiology in the Classrooms – A Terminology Primer for Education

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Pam Millett, PhD, Reg CASLPO



This primer will focus on terminology, abbreviations, and jargon commonly used in education. You can find a more extensive list of educational terminology here.

Since education is a provincial, not a federal responsibility, terminology will vary across jurisdictions, but many terms are common across Canada, North America and even internationally.

Accommodations versus Modifications

This is a very important distinction in education. “Accommodations” refer to strategies,

services or technologies that allow students to access the curriculum to the same degree as students without disabilities. These could include FM systems, a sign language interpreter, speech-to-text dictation programs for students who have difficulty writing, etc.). Students who have accommodations are learning the same content, using the same curriculum, and have the same learning expectations (ie are expected to demonstrate the same knowledge and skills). For example, a student may have the novel Jane Eyre provided in Braille, but he/she is still expected to read the novel and do the same assignments, tests, and assessments as other students.

“Modifications” change the curriculum content, and the learning expectations. The student’s educational program is modified so that material is presented at the student’s current learning level, rather than at grade level. For example, a grade 10 student who has a grade 2 reading level would not be expected to read *Jane Eyre*; in fact, it is likely that virtually all of this student’s educational program is modified, so that learning expectations are consistent with his reading ability.

These distinctions are important and are clearly indicated on the student's IEP for day to day classroom learning and for assessment (at the school level and for provincial testing, if required). In Ontario, for province-wide standardized testing, only accommodations are allowed. This means that, for example, an ASL interpreter is allowed to interpret the verbal instructions for the test, but is not allowed to read the questions and then provide or explain them in ASL.

Deaf/deaf/Hard of Hearing/Hearing Impaired

In education, “deaf and hard of hearing” is the term most likely to be used. Interestingly, there is something of a trend in educational research, particularly outside of North America, to use the term “deaf” generically to refer to children with hearing loss of any degree. “Hearing impaired” is *never* used in education.

DI/UDL

Differentiated Instruction and Universal Design for Learning. Educational policy documents often reference two different but complementary concepts – differentiated instruction (how to individualize instruction for a *specific student*), and universal design for learning (UDL), which refers to the importance of providing learning environments

and strategies which support *all* students.

IEP

Individual Education Plan. An IEP is a written document which identifies the student's learning strengths and needs, and describes the accommodations, modifications, and strategies that school staff are required to provide. Input from the classroom teacher, resource teacher and special education staff (such as teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing) are considered along with the results of internal and external assessments, and a plan is developed. Parents can also provide input into the plan and must sign off on the IEP each year. IEP is probably the most commonly used term but varies across Canada somewhat (IPP – Individualized Program Plan is used in Alberta, for example, while PLP – Personalized Learning Plan is used in New Brunswick). The IEP is the legal document that sets out the details of the educational plan for students with special needs.

HAT/FM/DM

As technology becomes more complicated, so does the terminology used for it. When I began my career, FM technology was the only technology; now, there is a wide variety of assistive classroom listening systems, some of which still use FM transmission, but many more which use proprietary digital technology, occasionally infrared transmission and more recently, Bluetooth. Among educational audiologists, the term "Hearing Assistance Technology" or HAT is becoming common as the generic term for what we used to call "FM systems" (but I will admit to still using "FM systems" routinely since that is the term with which teachers are still most familiar). As I discussed in a previous article on the use of streaming technologies at school, good communication between clinical audiologists, school staff and parents is crucial, to ensure that everyone clearly understands which of the many available HAT options, are being considered for a particular student.

LRT/SERT/RT

These are all abbreviations for the school resource teacher used in different school boards (Learning Resource Teacher, Special Education Resource Teacher, Resource

Teacher). Although there are other terms as well, the job description is very similar. The resource teacher is the educator at each school responsible for ensuring that students with special needs have the accommodations, modifications and/or supports needed to be successful. If you are sending an audiological report to a school directly, addressing it “Attention: Resource Teacher” will ensure that it is received by the person who will be responsible for following up for the student.

EA

Educational Assistant. Previously sometimes referred to as a TA (Teaching Assistant) or sometimes Educational Aide. This is a person (generally not a teacher) who assists in providing special education services in the classroom. In Ontario, it is now extremely rare for a single student to have a dedicated EA, unless the student is medically fragile, or has behavior issues that pose a danger to himself or others. Students with high needs will sometimes share an EA with another student, or more often, an EA may be assigned generally to the classroom, with responsibilities assigned by the classroom teacher in consultation with special education professionals.

TODHH/TOD/HRT

Teacher of the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Teacher of the Deaf, sometimes Hearing Resource Teacher. “Hearing Resource Teacher” is increasingly common, particularly for itinerant teachers.

For those of us practicing in Ontario, I have included a few more relevant terms. Similar processes, programs or funding models exist in other provinces, so it is useful to research what is relevant to your area (for example, provincial standardized testing now occurs in most provinces). The Ontario Teachers Federation website has a useful glossary of special education terms in Ontario which you may find useful as well.

IPRC

Identification, Placement and Review Committee. This is the formal process by which a student is identified as having an exceptionality. It involves the development of an IEP, followed by a formal meeting attended by parents, the principal, and relevant teachers and special education staff, to review the formal plan for that academic year. Everyone

involved signs off, and the plan is reviewed yearly. Having a formal identification through the IPRC process does not provide funding or additional supports for the student, nor is it necessary for the student to receive support services. For example, students with hearing loss do not need to go through the IPRC process to receive services from the teacher of the deaf and hard of hearing, to obtain an FM system, etc. School boards vary widely in whether or not they routinely identify students through this process – many boards no longer “IPRC” students formally unless the student has high needs. This means that in Ontario, at least, the Ministry of Education has no accurate count of how many students with hearing loss there are in school.

SEA

Specialized Equipment Amount. Across Canada, funding for assistive technology such as FM systems or laptops varies widely. In Ontario, SEA funding is available to any student who requires assistive technology. A claim can be submitted for assistive technology that costs more than $800; the school board pays the first $800, and the Ministry of Education provides funding for the rest. The technology must be demonstrated to be essential for the student’s learning; however, it is important to remember that the determination of whether the technology is “essential” is made at the school level, *not* by the professional recommending the technology. You can find the current SEA guidelines here.

EQAO

Education Quality and Accountability Office. This is the government branch responsible for standardized testing in grades 3, 6, and 9, and for the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test at grade 10 (required for high school graduation). Students with special needs are expected to participate; issuing exemptions for students with special needs from EQAO testing is rare. However, while EQAO testing has implications for educational policy at the provincial level, an individual student's EQAO score has no impact at the school level, except for the Grade 10 literacy test.

Exceptionalities

In Ontario, there are five categories of special needs under which a student can be

formally identified through the IPRC process: Behaviour, Communication, Intellectual, Physical, Multiple (2 or more from the previous categories). “Deaf and Hard of Hearing” falls under Communication; auditory processing disorder is not recognized as an exceptionality by the Ministry.

Wading through profession-specific terminology and jargon will always be a challenge when working in interdisciplinary settings, as we all do. Learning to speak a bit of each other’s professional language can only lead to better communication, though, and better communication amongst all of the adults in the life of a child with hearing loss can only lead to better outcomes.