Would introducing the social model of disability earlier in the semester give students more time to reflect, and consequently, allow them to arrive at a more integrated perspective? The purpose of the current study is to investigate these questions.

**Research Questions**

- Could student perspectives on disability be broadened earlier if the social model literature were introduced earlier?
- Would introducing the social model of disability earlier in the semester give students more time to reflect, and consequently, allow them to arrive at a more integrated perspective?

**Background of the Study**

Last year, we examined students' critical reflections about two models of disability: the medical and social models of disability. (For more information, please see Yu, B. & Epstein, L. (2011). Facilitating critical reflections about disability among students in speech-language pathology. Perspectives on Issues in Higher Education, 14, 11-20.) We found that graduate and undergraduate students in a required course on language disorders began the semester with a strongly medical model of disability. However, they responded to models of disability infused in the course, with shifts in their perspectives according to the models of disability from which the instructors operated. Students' perspectives did not shift until the introduction of disabilities studies literature towards the middle of the semester. We wondered if their perspectives could have been broadened earlier if the literature had been introduced earlier. Also, would introducing the disability perspectives earlier in the semester give students more time to reflect, and consequently, allow them to arrive at a more integrated perspective? The purpose of the current study is to investigate these questions.

**Method**

- **Participants:** 24 graduate students enrolled in one section of CD 658: Language Development and Language Disorders in the Communicative Disorders Program at San Francisco State University (SFU). CD 658 is a required second semester course for graduate students fulfilling prerequisite coursework. Consent to participate was optional for each student and had no bearing on his/her grades. Consent was provided by all students.
- **Procedures:** A series of 4 required reflection essays, in which students described their definition of developmental communication disorders (DCD) and their perception of the role of the SLP in working with them, were used for analysis in this study. The essays were assigned at the beginning of the semester (baseline), at two key points in time when course content on a particular model of disability (either medical or social) had been concluded, and after an intensive case study.
  - In the present study, the social model of disability was presented first, followed by the medical model of disability. In the previous study, the medical model of disability was presented first, followed by the social model. In both studies, the two models were followed by an intensive case study.
- **Analysis:** The investigators worked jointly to code and analyze the student reflection essays, coding them as either medical, social, or mixed in their orientations. Thirteen students' essays were eliminated because one or more of their essays did not provide the information required.

**Findings**

As in the first study, the students began the semester with a strongly medical model of disability. Their perspective shifted dramatically to a mixed (integration of medical and social) model of disability when the social model was presented. The medical model re-emerged when course material was presented from the medical perspective. The 2011 case study phase revealed similar numbers of essays with mixed or medical perspectives when considering the definition of DCD. The conceptualization of the role of the SLP followed a similar trajectory, but with the medical model maintaining the majority across the second half of the course.

**Implications**

Students' perspectives shifted according to the model from which the instructor operated in both studies. The proportions of medical, mixed and social perspectives of the definition of developmental communication disorders were similar across the two studies, suggesting that regardless of the order of presentation of the models of disability, students arrived at similar conclusions when presented with a case study. However, the conceptualization of the role of the SLP showed a greater proportion of essays from the medical perspective in 2011 when compared to 2010, at the conclusion of the case study phase. The medical model is the predominant model in our field (Ferguson, 2009; Harry & Kalyanpur, 1994; Kliewer, 2006); this was expressed by baseline reflections predominantly from a medical perspective. The timing of the presentation of the social model may have been too early in the course to hold up against the medical model when students reflected on the role of SLPs during that phase of the course. Subsequently, some students may not have contrasted the social model against their internalized perceptions of what SLPs do.

**Conceptualization of Disability**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2011 Findings</th>
<th>2010 Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>medical</td>
<td>social</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mixed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conceptualization of Role of SLP**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2011 Findings</th>
<th>2010 Findings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mixed</td>
<td>medical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>social</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


