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School-Based Speech-Language Pathologist Collaborative Practice: A Literature Review

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Abstract

Background: School-based speech language pathologists (SLPs) are increasing collaborative engagement with educators and other professionals in school settings. Collaborative practice in the general education classroom increased student's awareness of literacy concepts. The push-in model of service delivery reached students with varied levels of literacy understanding. There is insufficient empirical evidence regarding school-based interprofessional practice (IPP) available to clinicians. Systemic reviews provide a model for educators and SLPs to follow; many professionals hesitate to engage in IPP because there is a deficiency in evidence of success.

Aims: Investigation of the necessary components for successful IPP and the impacts of collaboration on an array of student abilities is explored in this literature review.

Contributions: IPP leading to improved literacy comprehension across a range of students was reported through various systematic reviews.

Conclusion: Initiating and implementing IPP increases literacy education in the general education classroom and reduces the number of students needing literacy assistance in approaching years. Student's improved understanding of literacy concepts leads to success in reading, writing, spelling, and communicating. If SLP-teacher collaborative instruction becomes common practice, implications could include improved literacy skills across a spectrum of students and educators efficiently teaching literacy objectives without SLP assistance.

Keywords: collaborative, interprofessional practice (IPP), speech-language pathology, response to intervention (RTI), literacy, push-in model

School-Based Speech-Language Pathologist Collaborative Practice

In 2010, World Health Organization (WHO) described interprofessional practice (IPP) as two or more specialists in distinctive fields collaborating to optimize skills of team members and deliver the highest quality of care. Initiating and implementing IPP between school-based speech language pathologists (SLPs) and classroom teachers improves student success and influences student's literacy education at varied tier levels.

SLPs teaching in the general education classroom supports a classroom of children representing different tier levels, and reaches those who may not otherwise receive services, but need additional literacy assistance. In-classroom services correlate with the response to intervention (RTI) framework. RTI is a multitiered system encompassing intervention and assessment to support and monitor struggling learners before initiating a referral for appropriate special education services (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). In a school setting, the focus is on student-centered service delivery, aiding student success with a range of objectives and learning (Giess & Serianni, 2018).

IPP is applicable to school-based practice due to the high number of students currently receiving speech-language services and the benefits other students may derive from literacy assistance. Educators in the school setting may not be aware of the benefits of collaborating with SLPs, or are hesitant to implement a collaborative model without confirmation of success (Gabig & Zaretsky, 2013).

A deficiency of evidence in the field of IPP exists, with only 49 articles published containing empirical evidence (Archibald, 2017). Many research papers on collaborative practice between SLPs and educators are low-level informative reviews and models for instigating service delivery. Though few experiments have been discussed in research articles, SLPs and

educators are increasing collaboration in the classroom setting, and reason-based practice has been recommended while implementing IPP (Wilson, McNeill, & Gillion, 2016).

Results

Benefits of Collaboration

Researchers found that IPP and collaboration in the classroom targeting student's literacy skills assures consistency of material and eliminates the amount of classroom instruction students miss (Archibald, 2017; Bland & Prelock, 1995; Collins & Wolter, 2019; and Griffin, 2017). The push-in service delivery model focuses on applying combined knowledge from SLPs and classroom teachers into one general classroom setting. In a case study for SLP and educator collaboration, Griffin (2017) reported that frequent communication between educational team members aids uniformity in instruction.

In addition to receiving consistent training, students who would otherwise work with an SLP outside of the general classroom are able to acquire classroom specific concepts. The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association (ASHA) describes multiple models of direct service delivery. SLPs may push into the general classroom in order to practice generalizing skills or working with larger groups of students, whereas students may be pulled out of the general classroom to work individually with SLPs to avoid classroom distractions.

In a classroom setting, SLPs focus on practicing functional communication goals, which can be generalized for use in many settings. Generalization of therapy gains has been an ongoing concern throughout the field of speech-language pathology, especially within clinic environments (Archibald, 2017). Acquiring the ability to generalize learnt material across multiple settings is important, as is maintaining these capabilities. Individuals with

communication and literacy deficits may develop skills inside of the clinic room, but these gains are difficult to transfer elsewhere, and tend to last a limited amount of time. Children receiving language support from an SLP inside the classroom show generalization of material and continuing advances in literacy skills (Bland & Prelock, 1995).

While assisting students inside the general education classroom who qualify for supplementary services, SLPs are able to simultaneously educate groups of students. Children at varied tier levels are supported by the push-in model of service, allowing those who do not qualify for services to receive additional preventative assistance (Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006). The goal of the response to intervention (RTI) model is to see if struggling students rise to age appropriate expectations with additional support. Measures determining the tier level each student fits into are not always accurate, and struggling learners are overlooked.

Several studies, (Collins & Wolter, 2019; Fuchs & Fuchs, 2006; and Kerins, Trotter, & Schoenbrodt, 2010) defined and discussed the three tiers of educational support. Tier one students receive mainstream classroom instruction, typically aligned with state standards. Tier two consists of students who are at risk for academic difficulties, but do not qualify for special education services. Tier two students are usually placed in small groups for certain learning activities and skills and receive more help than students at tier one. Special education services encompass the third tier of learners and involve higher intensity instruction, with smaller ratios of professionals to students.

Incorporating all students' learning in the classroom engages students at each tier level (Watson & Bellon-Harn, 2013). Many students at tier two find difficulties with aspects of literacy, and do not receive the additional help that they need. Specializing in literacy, oral language, and phonological awareness, SLPs qualify as the best professionals to assist tier two

instruction. Through preventative activities and collaboration with classroom teachers, SLPs are able to provide high-quality language-literacy instruction to several students at one time (Collins & Wolter, 2019). Many educators are unfamiliar with the role that collaboration plays in the RTI model, and frequently oppose implementing IPP. The prospective outcome of educating entire classrooms of students at one time may convert professional's general opinions of IPP within schools (Archibald, 2017). Resistance to collaborate appears across varied professionals; understanding benefits of teamwork may influence opinions and lead to change in practice. Opposition to collaboration is only one of the reasons that many school systems struggle to implement IPP.

Implementing Collaboration

Variation of specialists' goals, pressure to meet state standards, and lack of collaboration strategies for literacy skill instruction cause lack of appropriate IPP. Collins and Wolter (2019) suggest important aspects of ongoing IPP include procuring administrative support, consistent communication between professionals, monitoring of processes, and understanding areas of expertise for each professional role. Obtaining support from administrative officials is necessary due to strategizing how to manage varying goals throughout school systems. Within a school setting, the principal focuses on meeting school, district, and statewide literacy goals, while an SLP may primarily focus on assuring that students have the language fundamentals necessary for reading, writing, and spelling. With busy schedules and varying goals, professionals must identify common priorities and collaborate to most efficiently use planning time. Consistent communication between all team members is recommended once support throughout a school system is established.

Without steady internal communication between team members, collaborative planning and decisions regarding timely information may be impacted. Rosa-Lugo, Mihai, & Nutta (2017) listed necessary examples of interprofessional communication; engaging in shared decision-making, listening to others, and sharing successes and disappointments connect team members. Effectively giving and receiving information allows for efficient collaboration and exchanging of knowledge (Giess & Serianni, 2018).

To limit barriers between team members, obstacles must be identified and addressed during initial interprofessional meetings. Education in varied disciplines, such as speech-language pathology and elementary education, involve heavy use of exclusive terminology (Pfeiffer et al., 2018). It is likely that members of an interprofessional team are not familiar with field-specific terms used by colleagues. Following appropriate collaborative training, discipline specific jargon frequently results in accurately sharing therapy and education objectives and successes. A second component of training includes discussing the teaching structure for each collaborative setting; preparation allows members of an interprofessional team to understand how participants collaborate and share responsibilities.

SLPs must shift from the idea of ‘providing teacher training’ to the mindset of ‘partnering with teachers,’ and educators must recognize benefits SLPs can bring to their classroom (Archibald, 2017). Prior clarification of individual roles while collaborating helps professionals effectively co-instruct. The roles of SLPs and classroom teachers are tied together by the relationship between morphological awareness (MA), oral, written, and reading skills, all targeted by literacy educators. Collins and Wolter (2019) defined MA as the metalinguistic ability to reflect on and manipulate morphemes, the smallest units of meaning. Many professionals are unaware of these interconnected concepts and the benefits SLPs can provide

while pushing into the classroom. Additionally, SLPs can prepare students for common core state standard (CCSS) testing, a goal teachers and school principals must prioritize.

Faculty successfully assisting their students to meet CCSS is a timely objective throughout many school systems. If professionals recognized the amount of support SLPs could bring to this target, educators may be more obliged to collaborate (Archibald, 2017). A major obstacle barring collaborative practice is a lack of time. For successful IPP implementation, time and resources must exist, and many professionals are not able to build extra time into their already busy schedules. Giess and Serianni (2018) suggest discussing more than one student at each meeting, creating classroom activities that are applicable to multiple students, and spacing out the frequency of meetings to once every four to six weeks. Once a relationship has been established, devoting extra time to collaborative measures has not been shown to be a burden (Watson & Bellon-Harn, 2013).

As part of a successful interprofessional team, all members must understand benefits of IPP, roles each will play, and difficulties that may come along with building this relationship. If effectively implemented, members of interprofessional teams recognize how to share responsibilities and optimize skills specific to each professional's role (WHO, 2010).

Discussion

Investigation of IPP between SLPs and teachers within a school setting cultivated many benefits and challenges. Models of classroom-based speech-language service delivery produced consistent success. However, several students worked more fluently outside of the classroom, where fewer distractions were experienced. The delivery approach implemented parallels goals

of professional participants and students involved, with agreement that the best model for speech and language services will be determined on a case-by-case basis.

Clinical Implications

Successful IPP in the general education classroom integrates students at all tier levels into classroom material without removing tiers two and three to individually work with SLPs (Collins & Wolter, 2019; Gabig & Zaretsky, 2013). SLPs provide a base of language knowledge, anticipating that professionals in a school setting will continue engaging students understanding of literacy concepts. Early literacy skills contribute to reading, writing, and spelling abilities throughout a general life span. If students across the United States received deeper literacy instruction by the age of nine years old, the percentage of high school graduates would significantly increase, decreasing educational failure (Fiester & Smith, 2010).

Future Directions

Although collaborative practice between SLPs and teachers continues to successfully support literacy skill instruction, the small quantity and age of empirical evidence available on IPP prevents standard use of this model in schools. There is a need for additional research and sharing of information to not only SLPs, but educators as well. Published evidence suggesting the benefit of IPP in the school setting would lead to training of graduate SLPs and prospective teachers, exposing preprofessionals to the importance of collaboration in future practice (Pfeiffer et al., 2018). As political and philosophical shifts occur in the United States, there is increasing emphasis on the creation of diverse and integrated classroom instruction. Interprofessional education would encourage preprofessional SLPs and teachers to prioritize time, resources, and collaborative structure in their future practice (Wilson, McNeill, & Gillion, 2016).

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