Beyond Inclusion: Making the System Work for Children with a Language Learning Disability

From the Editor

This issue of the Newsletter contains summaries from six presentations sponsored by the Language division at the 1994 annual meeting of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association. Topics include service delivery and the integration of special education services, identification of LEP students, working with parents of LEP students, ethnographic perspectives in language science, assessment issues on facilitated communication, psycholinguistic perspectives on reading; and health care attitudes and practices for Native North Americans.

On another note, the division sponsored its first Inaugural Conference, May 12–13, entitled Children and Youth with Communication Disorders: Changing Models in a Changing World. Over 75 affiliates attended this groundbreaking conference. Action plans were generated relative to service delivery models and implementation of the models from infancy through post-secondary levels. Watch for these in your mailboxes soon! Special thanks is extended to the conference faculty, the Division 1 Steering Committee and Focus Group Coordinators, the National Office staff, Judy Montgomery (ASHA President), and Kay Butler (ASHA President-Elect) for their support of and participation at the conference.

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**Disclaimer**
The discussion papers in this newsletter have not been approved by the Legislative Council or the Executive Board and, until approved, do not constitute the policy of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association.
The short course focused on the premise that inclusive schooling, as an educational philosophy for children and youth with language learning disorders, can be consistent with the notion of an educational continuum. However, the integration of special education services, including speech and language services, with general education, is not the same as inclusive schooling. From the perspective of some educational reformers (e.g., Skrtic, 1992), successful integration of special education with general education within an inclusion framework initially requires three related transformations in current thinking and procedures. These alterations involve: (a) the collaborative linking of professional beliefs about authentic language and literacy learning with principles and practices that reflect these beliefs; (b) the development of a problem-solving orientation to the process of teaching and learning; and (c) the ability to connect assessment with instruction, what is often called “authentic” or “alternate” assessments.

Because of space constraints, this overview summarizes some of the content covered in the short course. The first section reviews motivations driving reform in general and special education and their implications for speech-language pathologists. In the second section, alternate assessments for children with a language learning disorder are examined with an emphasis on a modified case study design as an implementation strategy. It is suggested that this kind of approach is applicable to the documentation of individual children's progress along the educational continuum.

**The Changes: Where Are We Going and Why?**

**Reform of General Education**

The concept of systemic school reform (SSR) is central to the public debate about education in the United States (Wilkinson & Silliman, in press). SSR refers to the process of making and implementing educational policy and incorporates a design for a systemic state structure that supports school-site efforts to improve classroom learning and instruction. The idea is that the structure be based on clear and challenging standards for students' learning. Policy components would be linked directly to standards that support each other and guide classroom teachers and building administrators about how to optimize instruction. Thus, the states are viewed as the critical providers of two fundamental aspects for universal educational excellence: (a) a unifying vision and set of goals, and (b) a coherent system of instructional guidance.

Regarding a unifying vision, each state must provide coherent direction for educational reform throughout the state and each state must have a common idea about what schools should be like. At the core of this vision is the building of learning environments where all students are provided with an intellectually stimulating and challenging education. The key ideas here are educational equity and excellence.

The five elements of SSR address how to provide a coherent system of instructional guidance. These elements include:

- **Curriculum frameworks and materials:** The emphasis is on in-depth understanding, higher-order thinking, problem-solving, hands-on experiences, and the integration of content and pedagogy. One often-cited successful example of a curricular framework is the mathematics
standards developed by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. Schools will select specific curriculum materials that support the instruction guided by the frameworks.

- **Teacher education and professional development**: States must support excellent programs to prepare teachers and show a commitment to the continuing professional education of teachers.

- **Accountability assessment**: States must develop a system to measure and report on what students know, which is tied to what the curriculum frameworks specify. Instruments must be developed that reveal the knowledge assumed to have been learned. Exclusive reliance on paper-and-pencil multiple choice tests will not address this need. However, this system is to assess outcomes (the products) of the teaching and learning of subject matter. Processes, like thinking, talking, affective development, or social adjustment, are not a focus of assessment.

- **Governance**: For SSR to work, the research literature suggests that three critical ingredients are essential for instructional success: (a) well-trained professional staffs who use their knowledge with their students to meet goals; (b) an internal governance structure that allows teachers to be decision makers; and (c) a well-supported and flexible infrastructure that supports teachers in this work.

- **Finance**: States must ensure that schools have sufficient resources to carry out the other elements in a high-quality way.

SSR emphasizes the teaching and learning of content as shown in performance assessments, which are often synonymous with the notorious “high stakes” exams (Stallman & Pearson, 1990). It is important that SSR support implications of alternate assessment. SSR also holds that all American children are to be included in this new plan, but little mention is made about individual differences and diversity among children. The emphasis is on empowering teachers, which is typically heard as “regular education” teachers. No references are made about other educational professionals.

In summary, the combined effects of the SSR movement, with its emphasis on standards and outcomes assessment, the increasing cultural and linguistic diversity of our school population, and the implementation of inclusive principles and practices will change American classrooms substantially. These effects will significantly alter teachers' work with children and change, as well, the roles, responsibilities, and competencies of speech-language pathologists (SLPs).

**Inclusive Schooling: What Is It?**

Skrtic (1992) makes the case that inclusive schooling is a challenge to the restructuring of traditional educational systems and assumptions. Others (e.g., Allington, 1994; Semel, Gerber, & MacMillan, 1995) add that inclusive schooling is a civil rights issue and a challenge to failures in instructional innovations. A basic philosophical issue is whether educational excellence is compatible with educational equity. Educational excellence,
consistent with the premises of SSR, is assessed as to the products of learning, whereas educational equity has a process focus. For example, inclusion is a process of engagement in a community of learners, not an outcome (Bateman, 1995). Moreover, inclusive schooling is a philosophy, not a cost-saving measure. It is one educational system, integrated, where all supports and services necessary for success are brought to children and their teachers. It seeks to eliminate mainstreaming, where students have to earn the right to be part of the “mainstream” for all or part of the school day (Stainback & Stainback, 1990).

The term “inclusion” is not mentioned in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (PL 101-476). But a recent interpretation from the U.S. Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services (November 1994) indicates that IDEA does not preclude inclusive schooling. Rather, inclusive schooling is one means to meet the legal requirements for an education in the least restrictive environment (LRE) (see also, Bateman, 1995; McCarthy, 1994; Osborne & Dimattia, 1994).

The provisions of IDEA require that a continuum of alternate placements (CAPS) be available. IDEA also prohibits decisions made from a student's categorization. Instead, IDEA calls for first determining the appropriate education and related services necessary for student success on a case-by-case basis and, only then, determining the LRE for service delivery. Bateman (1995) further points out that individual placement decisions for best meeting children's needs can only be made if, to begin with, a variety of options are available. Furthermore, a placement should not be viewed as a permanent condition. Instead, the educational continuum (CAPS) should be flexible, allowing the individual student to move along the continuum as needs change. Finally, an effective and flexible educational continuum depends on collaboration and an integrated approach to assessment and instruction.

Full inclusion advocates, in contrast, argue the reverse, which, technically, violates the procedural rights protected through IDEA (Bateman, 1995, pp. 86-87). First, determine a uniform placement (typically the general education classroom), and then, decide the appropriate education and related services to be delivered in that placement. Rogers (1993) offers some criteria for assessing whether educational staffs are engaging in instructional/intervention practices that are consistent with the principles of inclusive schooling. Among these criteria are whether:

- The shared belief exists that each child, whatever his or her disorder, belongs in a regular education classroom.
- The shared belief exists that instructional programs for all children, whether or not they have disabilities, are individualized to meet each child's unique needs.
- General and special educators have integrated their efforts and resources, or are prepared to integrate efforts and resources, to work together as a collaborative unit.
- The administration values and creates a work climate in which all staff are supported in providing assistance to each other.
- Parents of students with disabilities are offered sufficient opportunities to integrate fully into the school community so that they also have a sense of belonging.
Administrators and educational staff evaluate instructional effectiveness based on progress made by all of the students in the class rather than separately assessing progress for the included students.

**New Professional Roles, Responsibilities, and Competencies**

As speech-language pathologists, we will need to rethink beliefs about “what's right for kids.” At the same time, we will be revising our views about what we do, how we do it, and what we must know to serve children with a language learning disorder in more functional and collaborative ways (Naremore, Densmore, & Harman, 1995; Silliman, Wilkinson & Hoffman, in press).

New professional roles are not mutually exclusive. Speech-language pathologists most likely will continue to be direct service providers in-and-out of the regular or special education classroom settings. Increasingly, in either special or general education, they may also become co-teachers, transdisciplinary team members, or consultants.

In these new roles, speech-language pathologists will be assuming a wide range of responsibilities as communication specialists. A sampling might include the integration of: communication goals and objectives into classroom content, individualized learning strategies into classroom activities, strategies for listening, speaking, reading, writing, and spelling across the curriculum, and literacy development into classroom activities. Speech-language pathologists will also be engaged in adapting curriculum, implementing alternate assessments, documenting and tracking intervention effectiveness, and carrying out staff development.

Implications follow for new competencies. In keeping with the critical thinking goals of educational reform in both general and special education, speech-language pathologists will need to have a broadened perspective on literacy learning. In this enriched perspective, listening, speaking, reading, and writing all serve as tools for learning how to apply knowledge of the world for new purposes in thinking and communicating. We will also need to understand:

- Specific connections between language learning and literacy development (Wallach & Butler, 1994).
- Discourse principles of effective instruction (Englert, Tarrant, Mariage & Oxer, 1994; Tharp, 1994).
- Integrated learning, including thematic-based learning (Manning, Manning & Long, 1994; Rand, 1994; Weaver, Chaston, & Peterson, 1993).
- Multilevel instruction (e.g., see Salisbury et al., 1994).
- The social structure and culture of general education classrooms.
- Group dynamics and classroom management.
- How to gather, document, and analyze observational information (Reid, Robinson & Bunsen, 1995; Silliman & Wilkinson, 1994).
Shifting to Alternate Assessments: Some Whys and Hows

In shifting to alternate assessments grounded to collaborative decision-making, speech-language pathologists and their team members should begin with asking some practical questions. For example, team members need to ask whether current assessment practices: (a) focus on students' abilities in the classrooms rather than their “deficits”; (b) focus on what students can learn given appropriate discourse support, not just their current level of performance; (c) provide useful information on the real progress of individual students in cognitive, communicative, social, and academic areas; (d) provide ongoing information on the effectiveness of instructional/intervention strategies; and (e) include the individual student as a partner in ongoing evaluation.

The next step is to build a flexible plan for authentic assessment that will meet certain outcomes or standards that serve as the framework for the plan (Silliman, Wilkinson, & Hoffman, in press). For example, teams need to agree on what they mean specifically by successful educational and communicative outcomes. At a minimum, a flexible plan will allow:

- The educational team (teachers, speech-language pathologists, others) to become participant observers of their own classrooms and discover what matters as learning (Lytle & Cochran-Smith, 1992).
- Systematic observation of real teaching and learning in the classroom.
- Students to make continuous transitions from being novice learners in a particular domain to becoming more independent learners.
- Meaningful information to emerge about individual student progress on an ongoing basis.
- Multiple sources of information and multiple perspectives to be incorporated.
- Sufficient adaptability so that changes can be made to the plan as teams learn from experience what works well, what needs modification, and what should be eliminated.
- Reasonable standards of reliability and validity to be met.
- The information gathered to be meaningful to different constituencies, such as the students, their families, other staff, administrators, and school boards.

Several points merit mention. First, change to a problem-solving orientation requires the willingness to take intellectual and emotional risks, the ability to expect the unexpected, and the understanding that change is both a dynamic and continuous process. Second, change also requires an educational atmosphere supportive of inquiry, creativity, and a problem-solving approach to teaching and learning. Finally, administrative support for flexible time management is essential for planning, collaborating, and analyzing.

A Case Study Strategy

A case study design, as modified from Yin (1994), is an alternate assessment strategy appropriate to use when three purposes are present: (a) The intent is to explore, describe, or explain “how” and “why” changes are happening in real-life interventions over time; (b) the aim is not focused on control of multiple “variables”; and (c) multiple perspectives and sources of information will be used to document changes and answer questions. In other words, a case study design is an
action plan for addressing how we get from the questions being asked about individual children to outcomes or conclusions about the questions.

The basic purpose of the case study approach is not to generalize to larger populations. The goal is to compare whether patterns found over time for individual children support the educational and intervention framework in place. Thus, a case study design must be driven by a well-integrated conceptual framework of oral language and literacy learning.

**Building in Validity**

Observationally based assessments are frequently called “informal assessments.” Typically, this means that this kind of assessment lacks the rigor of more experimentally based approaches, including norm-referenced assessments. Major issues in the use of observationally based assessments concern questions of validity and reliability. In connecting assessment with instruction in the real world of the classroom, educational teams can build in validity procedures that will allow them to better address questions about the authenticity of new communicative behaviors. A key point is to create a clear chain of evidence, from the questions being asked about the individual child to the conclusions reached.

The pathway to a clear chain of evidence in the case study design is guided by the kinds of questions being asked. First, educational teams must develop clear operational definitions of the communicative behaviors to be assessed and can give examples of the behavior of interest. Stated another way, “How will we know this behavior when we see or hear it”? Speech-language pathologists need to avoid asking unanswerable questions, such as “How much has the child's comprehension improved?” In this instance, the global use of comprehension precludes understanding what the child actually does to comprehend in particular activities with particular conversational partners engaged in specific kinds of discourse genres that comprise particular topics. Instead, the focus should be directed to the answerable question, for example, “To what extent does Mary now use repair strategies independently to fix comprehension breakdowns in cooperative learning activities involving story writing with her peers? What kinds of strategies does she use? What level of support does she need to repair effectively?”

A second step in constructing validity is to incorporate multiple sources of information to discover whether there are converging lines of evidence. When we use different assessment tools (videos, portfolios, dialogue journals, criterion-referenced measures, etc.), do we find similar patterns of behavior? Simply stated, do different tools allow Mary's use of repair strategies to become visible?

Validity is also enhanced when multiple perspectives are included as a means to document, analyze, and draw conclusions about the authenticity of emerging behaviors in naturalistic situations, such as the classroom. Do the speech-language pathologist, classroom teacher, Mary, and her parent(s) interpret the occurrences and meaning of her repair strategies in cooperative story writing in similar ways? If disagreement exists, is it possible to reconcile perspectives (our interpretations) to arrive at a “best meaning?”
The goal here is to reach for consequential validity (Darling-Hammond, 1994), or the natural social outcomes that emerge from integrating assessment and instruction in the classroom. According to Darling-Hammond (1994), the types of natural social consequences revealed should show that assessments now: (a) document students' natural learning processes and their individual needs for discourse support; (b) motivate students to learn more from being a partner in ongoing assessment; and (c) are interpreted and evaluated based on their natural instructional or intervention effects.

**Building in Reliability**

Reliability procedures in the case study approach can also be constructed to maximize the consistency of information-gathering within and across teams. From an accountability perspective, teams want to assure to the greatest extent possible that pears are being compared with pears and not with apples or oranges. Procedures can include the development of an assessment protocol and the development of a formal data base.

An assessment protocol should contain certain categories, such as: (a) the purposes and objectives of assessment; (b) the specific questions being asked over time about individual children; (c) the possible sources of documentation; (d) how information is to be gathered and organized; (e) a timetable for gathering different kinds of information; and (f) the format for storing, reporting, and describing the information gathered. If the information gathered is to be useable, which means that it can be reviewed by various constituencies, then constructing an easily retrievable, formal data base is also essential.

In the end, there are literally thousands of observational tools that can be selected to provide information at various levels of detail (Silliman & Wilkinson, 1991). Almost any teaching-learning interaction can serve as assessment data (Weaver, 1994); however, the tools selected for assessment-should always depend on the purposes of assessment for individual children. Most important to the purposes of assessment is a simple, but often forgotten, principle. Themes and activities should not be the basis for what is learned, why it is learned, and how it is learned. Children's academic and communication goals should always drive the themes and activities selected to achieve goals.

**Selected References**


