

Value-Added Activities of School-Based SLPs Serving Adolescents Struggling With Language and Literacy: Applications for Self-Reflection and Performance Evaluation

by Vicki A. Reed, EdD, CCC-SLP, ASHA Fellow

School-based speech-language pathologists (SLPs) comment that their education colleagues and administrators generally understand the positive impacts of their work with students with speech disorders. In contrast, they report that they often face the challenge that their colleagues do not as completely understand or appreciate their contributions to the academic and social improvements of students who struggle with language and literacy.

Because the presence of SLPs in secondary schools has been historically underrepresented – with their secondary-school work primarily involving services for students with, for example, residual or intractable speech impairments or autism spectrum disorder – secondary-school education professionals have had fewer opportunities to interact with SLPs. These teachers and administrators may not understand SLPs' roles in serving secondary schools and, in particular, their role with adolescents who struggle with language and literacy. They may not recognize the value that SLPs can add to adolescents' academic and social performance, to keep it from being negatively affected by language problems. And, because implementation of frameworks such as Response to Intervention (RtI) and Multi-tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) is less common in secondary-school contexts than in elementary schools, middle and high school teachers and administrators may not be as familiar with the range of approaches available to assist students, including the various service delivery models SLPs use.

Below is a list of 19 statements describing SLP activities that add value to the educational work of secondary schools to benefit adolescents who struggle academically because of language concerns. Statements on the list came from:

- Literature on evidence-based and best practices
- Expert opinions
- Advice of a group of SLPs experienced in providing language/literacy-focused services for adolescents in schools who participated in the Virginia Adolescent Language and Literacy Consortium. The Consortium was part of the secondary-school language and literacy emphases of the Institutions of Higher Education component of two consecutive State Personnel Development Grants (2007, 2012) awarded by the U.S. Department of Education to the Virginia Department of Education in partnership with the University of Kansas Center for Research on Learning.

Two key uses of this list are as a:

- Self-reflection document that could help SLPs working in secondary schools self-evaluate their models of service delivery, content of and approaches to intervention, interactions with and integration into the secondary educational context, and composition of their workload/caseload.

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- List of goals and objectives that SLPs could include as part of their annual evaluation plan. The statements could become discussion points with supervisors/administrators in order to increase their awareness of the roles of SLPs in adolescent language and literacy and service delivery approaches in secondary-school settings.

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Value-Added Activities Statements

1. I provide services in school settings that are congruent with the settings in which most students learn in secondary schools; therefore, the majority of my direct student intervention takes place in ecologically valid settings.
2. I regularly collaborate with general education and special education teachers to deliver my interventions for students in their classrooms and to participate in team- and turn-teaching models of service delivery and instruction.
3. I regularly ask students' teachers what they would like their students to be able to do better with regard to their class content and performance and use their responses to inform my services for their students.
4. The students' teachers can articulate the impact of my services with regard to impact on their teaching.
5. I explain each student's IEP to each of the student's teachers and explain the relevance to each teacher's content area and nature of the disciplinary language associated with the content.
6. My services to students and the school are visible to and considered valuable by teachers, specialists, support personnel (e.g., counselors, school psychologists), and administrators. They know what I do and how I do it; I see and hear them articulate these to others.
7. I always use the word "language" in referring to my title and my work in both spoken and written communication with students, teachers, parents, and administrators.
8. I am familiar with relevant and most recent ASHA position statements and scopes of practice; I understand that these mean I regularly "break out of old routines" by evaluating my practices for consistency both with these and with evidence.
9. I know (and implement services according to) federal and state mandates and initiatives (e.g., RtI, Multi-tiered System of Supports, IDEA, Common Core); my knowledge and the services that I deliver as a result of that knowledge are based on fact and evidence and are not the result of administrators' and supervisors' interpretations of mandates and initiatives.



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10. I use every opportunity to inform administrators and supervisors about intervention evidence, relationships between language-literacy and students' performance, and current and accurate meanings of federal and state mandates and initiatives.
11. I use my knowledge of language-literacy links and language underpinnings of learning demands and learning strategies to help students learn language skills they need to access the curriculum and learn strategies that they can use.
12. I develop my IEPs by creating goals/objectives that are individualized for the unique needs of each student with regard to acquiring language underpinnings and strategies that will support the student in accessing curriculum.
13. My intervention with students always incorporates a metalinguistic approach.
14. I develop IEPs that are based on evidence-based practices with regard to goal selection, child and adolescent learning, intervention settings, doses and distribution of learning, progress monitoring based on data collection, and prognosis.
15. I use my knowledge of language-literacy links and language underpinnings of learning demands to identify students entering middle and/or high school who are at risk for encountering language and literacy struggles but who have not been previously identified.
16. I work with SLPs providing services in elementary schools to coordinate continuing and appropriate services for those struggling with language and literacy as they transfer into the secondary schools.
17. I work with SLPs serving high schools, if I serve a middle school, to coordinate continuing and appropriate services for those struggling with language and literacy as they transfer into the high schools.
18. The students with whom I work are able to tell others (e.g., their teachers, parents) what they do with me and how it helps them with their school performance; I involve them in setting their goals and evaluating their own progress.
19. The parents of students with whom I work are able to tell others (e.g., teachers, administrators) what I do with their adolescent and how it helps their adolescent do better with school performance.