

COPE Newsletter

September 2007

Update

- A very successful lunch meeting was held in Sydney at the Conference in May. Members had the opportunity to contribute ideas to the development of the ongoing strategic direction of the network.
- All states and territories in the *COPE Reference Group* have completed collating information from each state on services available to support school age students with special needs in communication and this is being combined into a data set representing the whole country.
- With the focus for 2007 being the formation of local contact groups to support each state/territory representative to have a local group of contacts of COPE members some progress has been made however you may be contacted by your representatives so please become involved if you can.
- The WA group, which has been operating for some time, has made initial progress with the task of 'scoping' the topics which undergraduate teachers should know in relation to communication disorders.

Challenging Government Decisions

Early in 2006, the State Education Department in Victoria ceased funding for children with Severe Language Disorder. At this time, Speech Pathology Australia provided support to the Speech Pathologists in education. This support included coordination of a paper, under the auspices of Workplace Government and Portfolio. This paper held for the writer some interesting information. Representations were also made to the Minister responsible for Education.

Background

In Victoria, the Department of Education and Training (DE&T) states its commitment to providing "inclusive" education. Until December 2004, under the guidelines for the Program for Students with Disabilities, students who met the criteria in the category of Severe Language Disorder were provided with additional funding. This funding enabled schools to purchase appropriate support services, supporting these students to access the curriculum. For students to be eligible for the funding, their language scores had to be 2 or more standard deviations below the mean on two recommended language tests. There had to be no intellectual,

hearing, social or emotional disabilities.

In 2005, DE&T changed these guidelines. In the initial guidelines for the Program for Students with Disabilities 2006, the Severe Language Disorder Category was omitted. It was later re-instated, with the criteria being adjusted to 3SD below the mean. Again no intellectual, hearing, cultural social or emotional disabilities were to be present and it was a requirement that there be demonstrated critical educational needs. This effectively restricted funding to less than 0.1% of the student population.

DE&T introduced an initiative called the Language Support Program (LSP) in 2005. This program aimed to increase language learning opportunities in the classroom for children with language disorders. This program is a general enrichment program for students. Concerns have been that the program is not designed to meet the needs of children with severe language disorders throughout their years of schooling. Also of concern is its ability to meet the needs of students with specific mild to moderate speech and language disorders. Another concern is the impetus for teachers to attend the LSP training and impressions are that uptake has been inconsistent across the state.

In 2006, a discrimination claim was made against the State Education Department by the parent of a 15 year old student with a severe language disorder. The case has been heard by the Victorian Civil and Administration Tribunal (VCAT). A

full transcript of the findings is available through the VCAT website for those interested in reading in detail about the case.

In the conclusions to the case, VCAT Deputy President, Cate McKenzie, stated that 'there are a number of serious shortcomings in the different aspects of the Department's Program for Students Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD), particularly the language disorder category of that program. There seems to be an urgent need for comprehensive and expert review of the program.'

The conclusions also state that 'the implementation of the LSP is ongoing and its success rate unknown'. The failures of the teachers were 'more due to factors such as inexperience, lack of specialist training, lack of understanding of her disability and needs, and ad hoc rather than planned educational measures.'

The findings also stated that the evidence is that there are so many difficulties and shortcomings with the eligibility criteria under the PSD....this factor does not make the requirements or condition reasonable'. Also 'by imposing the requirement or condition which it did, the State indirectly discriminated against (the student) by limiting her access to these benefits.'

The DE&T was to undertake a comprehensive review of its program for students with disabilities.

I am sure that most Speech Pathologists in education are wondering what impact this court

decision will have on the funding for students with a severe language disorder. What will the changes be if any and if so, how soon and to what extent?

When funding criteria changes we know that neither the students nor their difficulties miraculously disappear. Let us see what transpires!

A team of authors!

Have you read this one?

Whitmire (2002) The evolution of school-based speech language services: A half century of change and a new century of practice.

Since their inception nearly 100 years ago, speech language services in schools have undergone profound fundamental changes in scope and focus. This article reviews the legislative/regulatory, societal, professional and demographic influences that shaped and defined school-based speech-language pathology over the past half century and then describes school-based speech-language practice as it is today. Particular attention is paid to the fundamental elements of contextually based assessments, educationally relevant intervention plans, and increased collaboration/consultation. Finally strategies are presented that can help to facilitate the changes needed to move from past practice patterns to those that reflect current legislation, research, and practice guidelines. (p68. Whitmire, 2002)

During participation in a Graduate Certificate (Flinders University) looking at my own practice, I was interested to come across this article by Whitmire (2002) who was the director of school services for ASHA at the time of writing. It encapsulated for me the areas of development and change that I felt I needed to embrace in my own professional practice in education.

However, after reading this article several times I realised that one of the underlying messages was not about where it would be good to go with speech pathology in education but how things were not changing terribly fast, and this message was repeated in several other articles (a selection mentioned below).

Having been in this field for a long time, it provoked me to reflect more carefully on what might be factors maintaining the status quo. Whitmire discusses a range of structural elements that would support change and states that the required changes can be costly for individuals and systems in terms of staff time and effort; financial resources and support; and the necessary shifts in beliefs, thinking and practice. (p.74).

Certainly many things have changed and there are some inspiring and innovative projects being done by my colleagues in South Australia but I don't think there has been a fundamental shift in the overall conception and practice of service delivery? Is the change required at a systems level or is there individual or small group change that we can support with each other? Does it require both?

I have no answers but I think it is an important ongoing conversation. For some inspiration, look up the article about the Finnish education system.

Happy reading.

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Apel, K. (1999) Checks and balances: keeping the science in our profession, Language, Speech and Hearing Services in Schools, 30, 98-107

Kamhi, A.G. (1999) To use or not to use: factors that influence the selection of new treatment approaches, Language, Speech and Hearing Services in Schools, 30, 92-98

Ruoho, K. & Kivirauma, J. (2007) Excellence through special education? Lessons from the Finnish school reform, International Review of Education, 53, 283-302

Wallach, G.P. (2005) Part 1: a look across 25 years (foreword). Topics in Language Disorders, 25, 288-291

Whitmire, K.A. (2002) The evolution of school-based speech language services: A half century of change and a new century of practice. Communication Disorders Quarterly, 23, 68-76.

Have you thought about....?

How do we measure outcomes in educational settings?

What are outcomes?

Outcomes are the changes following treatment provided by practitioners in typical treatment settings with typical clients under typical conditions.

Generally in the speech pathology field we would measure the changes in communication.

Why measure outcomes?

Outcomes demonstrate the value of the service provision. It can demonstrate the effectiveness of the

speech language therapy service for clients and employers.

What might outcomes look like in an educational setting?

If outcomes are the changes that follow treatment, then outcomes of our service may be specifically communication related eg relating to language or a specific area within language. They could also be related to the functional changes that we are working towards within education eg student learning outcomes.

How do you measure outcomes in DETA Queensland?

We're currently trialling a project where we are asking SLPs and teachers to decide on an educational outcome at the beginning of a service. The outcome may be a specific learning outcome from the syllabus, it may be a specific individual education plan goal or it may be a specific learning behaviour that enables the student to access the curriculum (can be the wider whole school curriculum). The SLP then looks at the communication skills required to achieve that outcome, and works in a way to best support the student achieving the outcome. For further information about the outcomes project visit the Speech Language Pathology Professional Learning Community at: <http://www.learningplace.com.au/deli-ver/content.asp?pid=35444>

This is still only a trial, and we have probably not got it right yet- so please read with care!

Gaenor Dixon, QLD

I wouldn't leave home without...

My "Chipper Chats"

"Wh" Chipper Chat is a fun and extremely motivating language processing game which consists of coloured, laminated individual game boards (10 different scenes with 5 individual boards per scene). Suitable for prep to Grade 5, students will develop their ability to process and answer "WH" questions. Each scene has a lesson plan with 100 "Wh" questions of differing levels of difficulty (20 each of Who, What, When, Where, and Why). Each game board centres on the use of magnetised chips and a magnetic wand. Students earn chips by making correct responses. The boards are versatile and the excitement begins when the students use the magnetic wand. The students love to see the chips "fly up" to the wand as they remove the chips from the board.

Phonological Awareness Chipper Chat is a comprehensive resource of activities and games designed to improve phonological awareness skills at the word, syllable and phoneme level for both pre-readers and readers. The game covers 12 different phonological awareness skills, including rhyming and segmentation skills, analysis and synthesis of phonemes. It is similar in design, to the "Wh" Chipper Chat described above, comprising game boards, magnetic wand and chips allowing for group work and much enjoyment! There are 12 Quick Assessments included –one for each phonological awareness skill. The prep teachers and speech pathologist assistant at the school where I am based, think this resource is so wonderful that they

use it daily and could barely part with it long enough for me to do this blurb. Praise and recommendation indeed!

Social Skills Chipper Chat is similar in format to the above two but focuses on helping students aged 5-12 discuss and understand appropriate ways to deal with numerous social situations. Each scene has two levels of stories. The A level is a short, simple story containing basic facts describing the action in the scene, whereas level B has additional facts and caters more for students with greater attention spans and the ability to grasp main ideas and inferences. Four question/discussion statements follow the stories. "Waiting Your Turn To Speak"; "Saying I am Sorry"; "My Space Your Space"; "Be A Polite Loser"; "That Hurts my Feelings" are examples of some of the story titles.

The Chipper Chats come in brightly – coloured, handy satchels. They were written by N.Crist and R.Sheedy and published by Super Duper Publications in 2002,2004,2006 respectively. They are available from Brainstorm Educational and Special Needs Resources 1300 65 35 90 or website www.brainstormed.com.au as well as from Unicom which is now part of ACER in Melbourne.039 835 7447.

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