

# COLLABORATIVE SERVICE DELIVERY IN THE SCHOOLS: MAKING IT WORK



Sharon Halldorson, Sc.D., CCC-SLP  
Director of Educational and Clinical  
Support Services  
Seven Oaks School Division  
Winnipeg, Manitoba

There is a buzz in school-based service delivery lately. It has to do with the changing role not only of the speech-language pathologist (S-LP) in the school, but of the whole school-based support team. Resource teachers and guidance counsellors, as well as social workers and psychologists, are also beginning to work with whole classrooms and to assume less and less of an “expert” role (Brownlee and King, 2000). S-LPs have taken a lead role in this evolution because we understand that language is not an isolated skill or set of skills and that communication permeates all that happens everywhere in the school.

The notion of authentic assessment has been at the forefront of education for some time now. It has spilled over into speech-language pathology in some exciting ways (Secord, 2005; Wiig and Secord, 2006). Integrating formal test findings and informal authentic observations results in a more balanced view of the communication profile and is much better for setting appropriate goals for intervention.

The intervention has changed too. It is no longer the “take out, fix and return” model that many of us learned in our training programs. It is more balanced, with a collaborative team designing and implementing strategies for student communication success. In the Seven Oaks School Division our S-LPs use a collaborative, curriculum-focused and often classroom-based approach to intervention for students with language-learning differences (LLD). While there are priority cases for individual therapy (eg. unintelligible speech, fluency and voice), most of our students are seen in the classroom and all are seen using curriculum content. Volunteer programs are used for stimulatory articulation cases. Ongoing program planning for special needs students is maintained. Our priority is to make the learning of communication goals meaningful to students. How do we do this?

Since 1996, the Seven Oaks School Division has supported a collaborative model of service delivery. Our school division has always been a centre for inclusion and success for all learners regardless of their cognitive or physical ability levels. With a focus on inclusion at Margaret Park School, our assistant superintendent and special education coordinator promoted a school-wide service focus for both the S-LP and the psychologist. The success of the model at Margaret Park has spawned innovative phonological awareness / balanced literacy programs throughout the 14 elementary schools in the division. While they may take different forms, these programs have all had input from S-LPs as consultant or participant. We have also implemented strategies such as story retelling, guided retelling, book clubs, classroom-

based language and reading strategies (eg. levelled word maps), math-focused language and literacy activities, writer’s workshops and drama. The result of this kind of programming has been improved communication for all students. Another benefit has been teacher capacity-building in oral language. Our teachers tell us they have learned about language development and its connection to literacy through the collaborative programs they do with S-LPs. As clinicians, we in turn learn about the provincial curriculum and how language goals can be met at the classroom level.

Of course, teaming is the key. Our model for teaming (Bubnowicz and Halldorson, 2003) was developed based on our work at Margaret Park School. Of prime importance is support from the school and divisional administration. In addition to administrative support, team members must trust each other, be willing to share ideas and resources, and believe in a common goal. We cannot have different outcomes in mind when we work collaboratively. Understanding the skills and expertise that each person brings to the table is also essential and is usually the result of ongoing teamwork. Good teaming requires organizational skill, flexibility, and commitment. In addition, the ability to extend thinking and to be creative helps to foster the collaborative process.

Collaboration can work if there are committed people willing to put effort into working together toward common goals. Those goals are communicative success, academic success and social success for our students. In the Seven Oaks School Division, our collaboration results in achievement of our goals.

## REFERENCES

- Brownlee, F. and King, J. (2000). Learning in safe schools: creating classrooms where all students belong. Markham ON: Pembroke.
- Bubnowicz, A. and Halldorson, S. (2003). The flowship of the ring: collaboration, differentiation, comprehension. Paper presented to the Seven Oaks School Division, Winnipeg, MB
- Secord, W. (2005). Classroom language assessment and intervention. Paper presented at the annual Child Guidance Clinic conference. Winnipeg, MB
- Wiig, E. H. and Secord, W. (2006). Clinical measurement and assessment: 25 year retrospective. ASHA Leader, February, p. 11.