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### **Speech/Language Pathologist Interview**

#### **Speech/Language Pathologist:**

*Jeanne Genereux, SLP at Clinton Elementary School*

**Q: Please briefly describe your work setting and caseload. (School, clinic, special program, inclusion, consult, pullout, co-teaching, arena assessments, ages of students, # on caseload, kinds of cases)**

A: I work in a public elementary school in Central MA., encompassing Grades Pre-K to 3. There are approximately 750 students in the school. My caseload at this time consists of 40 students in Grades 2 and 3, ages 7 to 9. The majority of my day is spent doing “pull-out” therapy, although, on any given day, I may observe students in their classroom, sit in on a “Morning Meeting” in a classroom, work with a child at an activity within their class, etc. Diagnoses include speech and/or language delay, PDD-NOS, Asperger’s Syndrome, ADHD. I also spend quite a bit of time evaluating students to determine eligibility for services (this is part of the special education process).

I am also on the Child Study Team at my school. We meet once weekly and teachers present student cases to the Team. At their assigned appointment time, the teacher presents background information (e.g. pertinent medical and/or academic history) and concerns about the student. From there, the Team brainstorms possible interventions/solutions in discussion with the teacher. At the conclusion of that

appointment, we may schedule a follow-up several weeks later to determine if the interventions are working or we may refer the child directly to special education for evaluation. Some interventions include additional reading time, observation by another professional (OT, PT, SLP, Guidance), etc.

**Q: What are some of your biggest challenges? (Scheduling, kinds of cases, team interaction, parent involvement, materials, etc)**

A: The biggest challenge in this setting has always been time, including time to consult with teachers and other professionals, time to fit in testing students while managing a full caseload of students, time to complete paperwork. I would say that another challenge is effective team consultation/interaction. There is little time to be “proactive” in servicing students, that is, we often react to something that has happened or something we have noticed during a child’s therapy session, because there is little time to plan and collaborate with regular education teaching staff. I think another challenge is the overall budget. We have plenty of materials and we always seem to be able to procure the tests we need; however, we have lost one-two days of SLP therapy time in our building over the last several years, which impacts caseloads. In addition, we all would like to add technology to our repertoire but we have limited capability here. We recently procured one ipad through a grant; however, there was no budget money for apps. So, we have to be creative on how we procure money for apps. As an SLP Team, we reviewed a variety of speech/language apps, made a list of desired apps, and then I went to our parent-led Enrichment Fund and requested a small amount of money, which they approved. We really could use another ipad so that we have two to share among the five of us, rather than one, and have put that into the budget for next year...we shall

see!

**Q: How do you assess articulation skills? Please show me a test you would use.**

A: To assess articulation skills, I generally utilize the Goldman-Fristoe Test of Articulation-2 (GFTA-2). In addition to this test, I will also listen to a child's spontaneous speech (e.g. conversational speech) to see if the errors evident on the GFTA-2 are also present in a child's spontaneous speech. I will then make a judgment on their level of intelligibility in spontaneous speech (e.g. "mild, moderate, or severely impaired"). In addition, I will also talk with the teacher to see how well the teacher and peers can understand the student in the classroom setting.

Over the last decade, SLP's have become more involved with assisting in the evaluation of reading disabilities. We are not responsible for the actual evaluation or treatment of a reading disability; however, we can provide information/data about how a child "processes" the sound system of our language. This is called phonological processing. We are able to administer tests such as the Comprehensive Test of Phonological Processing (CTOPP) or the Phonological Awareness Test – 2 (PAT-2) to look at a child's ability to understand words at the phoneme, or sound level, and if they can "hear" the different sounds or syllables within words. In addition, the CTOPP looks at a child's "working" memory for sound and number sequences and if they can rapidly name (retrieve) letter and number names. All are considered the "underpinnings" for successful development of reading.

**Q: How do you assess expressive language in terms of linguistic structure (grammar, morphology, syntax)?**

A: To assess expressive language, I use subtests of various language tests such as the “Formulated Sentences” subtest of the Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals – 4<sup>th</sup> edition (CELF-4). In addition, I will take a language sample of the child’s spontaneous expressive language and look at how they formulate sentences there. I am looking for grammatical errors (e.g. verb tense errors, plural errors). In addition, I am looking for how they put their sentences together (e.g. length of sentence or utterance, word order).

**Q: How do you assess receptive language in terms of linguistic structure and auditory processing/comprehension?**

A: To assess receptive language, I use various subtests of the CELF-4. For example, the CELF-4 has a subtest entitled “Concepts and Following Directions”. If a child has difficulty with receptive language and, perhaps, auditory memory, he/she will have difficulty recalling the oral directions I have presented on this subtest where they have to listen to one presentation of an oral direction and point to the corresponding pictures. Another CELF-4 subtest is entitled “Sentence Structure”. On this subtest, a child looks at four pictures, listens to my orally presented sentence, and selects the picture that best fits my sentence. If a child experiences difficulty here, I may add a test called the Test of Auditory Perceptual Skills-3 (TAPS-3). This will help me determine if the student is having difficulty with understanding the linguistic concepts or if the student is having difficulty remembering what he/she has heard. In addition, I will do informal assessments around following oral directions, comprehend a variety of linguistic concepts (e.g. spatial concepts, such as “in, on, under”), and talk with the teacher

regarding his/her views on the child's comprehension level.

**Q: How do you assess semantics/vocabulary skills?**

A: To assess vocabulary skills, we often use two tests, the Receptive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test (ROWPVT) and the Expressive One-Word Picture Vocabulary Test (EOWPVT). Sometimes, if I know a child has solid vocabulary, I will use the ROWPVT and the "Expressive Vocabulary" subtest of the CELF-4, which is a bit faster than the EOWPVT. (Sometimes I use both expressive vocabulary tests if I feel there's an issue there that I need to explore further.) In addition, I will consult with the teacher to see how the student is acquiring the curriculum vocabulary (based on reading program tests).

**Q: How do you assess pragmatic skills?**

A: Pragmatic skills are generally evaluated informally, again, via my own observation and teacher consultations. We have the Test of Pragmatic Language but it is often more beneficial in this area to have first-hand observation and data collection in this area. I may also consult with the Guidance staff regarding this area. In this area, we are looking at social language skills, such as eye contact, turn-taking in conversation (are there frequent interruptions?), topic maintenance, etc.

**Q: Would there be any tests that you do not have but would like to order? Which ones?**

A: We have a wide array of tests available to us and we generally have been able to procure what we need. I think the only test I would like is the Test of Narrative Language. At this time, I often informally evaluate a child's personal narratives (e.g. do their stories contain an introductory sentence, several supporting details, time order words, such as "then, next, after", and a closing sentence?) and it would be beneficial to have a standardized instrument to support my informal observations (or my "gut" feeling after 30+ years of working). However, several of our frequently used tests are being revised (e.g. the CELF-5 is coming out in September) and we need to purchase the new editions prior to purchasing the TNL.

**Q: Do you evaluate English language learners and if so describe that process?**

A: This has been a difficult issue in our school district in past years. We now have a bilingual speech/language pathologist on staff so it has become much less of an issue for us as we frequently consult with her regarding ELL students or refer students to her for testing. Prior to her hiring, we met as a SLP Team and decided/agreed that we could not ethically evaluate these students and determine a disability. We looked at our testing as a "baseline" of their English language capabilities. This was not a popular decision with many teachers as they felt we "should" service these students, but learning English as a Second Language is not a disability. In addition, our School district now also has an ESL program in place which was not the case a decade ago.

**Q: How would you define your collaboration role in the school setting? What could teachers do to help this collaboration?**

A: I believe that I offer a high degree of collaboration with teachers. I am constantly checking in with them (via email or personal contact) regarding how a student is doing, a behavior I have observed, a cuing strategy that was effective or ineffective, etc. This happens on a daily basis. As I mentioned earlier, the biggest issue is time. I do not have common planning time with either grade level that I work with; therefore, it is difficult to sit down and talk with teachers at length about any given student. The SLP Team also has a high level of collaboration. The 5 SLP's in my building meet once weekly and discuss issues, such as schedules, who is overloaded with testing and how we can help each other, caseload numbers, budget, etc.

### **Reflection**

There were three main themes that stuck out when I interviewed Jeanne. The first was the amount of judgment or “gut” that still goes into Speech/Language Pathology. The second was the constraints that are put on speech and language pathologists like time, budget, and collaboration. Third, I was incredibly impressed with the amount of work that is done, and the sheer importance of that work. It was very valuable for me to talk to Jeanne about what she does. It was certainly more useful than simply reading a textbook. I really got to understand what a speech and language pathologist does, the struggles they face, and some of the tools they use to do their job. It was to hear real-world examples and situations, and from someone who has been a speech and language pathologist for over 30 years.

One thing I noticed when interviewing Jeanne was that data plays a huge role in the daily job of a speech and language pathologist. By testing and observing, they are able to collect a handful of great data to inform their decisions and potential diagnoses. However, on numerous occasions Jeanne mentioned that she still uses quite a bit of “gut

feeling” to inform her decisions. For example, she mentioned after the GFTA, “I will then make a judgment on their level of intelligibility in spontaneous speech (e.g. “mild, moderate, or severely impaired”)” It seems there is no defined measurement here and that Jeanne’s experience and knowledge are the informing factors in her decision making. Jeanne mentioned the Test of Narrative Language and said that in its absence she will, “often informally evaluate a child’s personal narratives”. She goes on to say that, “it would be beneficial to have a standardized instrument to support my informal observations (or my “gut” feeling after 30+ years of working).” This implies a fair amount of judgment calls and personal interpretations still happening despite how many tests are available to test students.

Second, Jeanne talked several times about the constraints that she faces. She mentioned time, budget, and “effective team consultation/interaction”. Speech and language pathology can be a critical tool to help students in their development. While Jeanne said she often gets the tests and resources she needs to evaluate students efficiently, there are still tools that she could use to help with treatment. I think time and budget are similar because more of a budget for speech and language pathology could lead to another full time pathologist who could share the case load. But Jeanne’s example of getting an iPad but not having money to buy apps is really unfortunate. An iPad has been shown to be VERY useful in the treatment of language and speech difficulties. However, it is not very useful by itself. It’s imperative that applications be purchased to use it to its fullest potential. In addition, sharing one iPad amongst 5 speech and language pathologists is not efficient either. While budgets are a problem across education as a whole, it would be a good idea to look into grants or charitable organizations (like Jeanne did) to help fund the applications or another iPad. In terms of effective team consultation/interaction I think this is a matter of time constraint. Teachers



are bogged down with their normal teaching load and often don't have the time to dedicate to offering their points of view to a speech and language pathologist. Jeanne mentions that she does her best to connect with teachers of her students via email or in person, and I think this is great. It seems to me that Jeanne is going as far as she can and the teachers need to recognize the importance of working with Jeanne to help the students.

Third, as Jeanne was explaining what she does and how she goes about doing it, I was very impressed with the amount of work that a speech and language pathologist does. Not only that, but the importance of the work of the speech and language pathologist is notable as well. They can work with students to develop proper speech and language skills which can have a lasting lifelong impact. Not only will working with students at a young age help them to succeed in elementary and secondary education, but in Higher Education and in the workplace as well. The tests that they conduct, and the subsequent treatment and therapy is often invaluable to the students.

Ultimately this was a very insightful interview and an excellent complement to the readings and discussions we have been having. I look forward to doing my field assignment and seeing the work of a speech and language pathologist in person.