

# WELCOME TO LUNCH AND LEARN!!! TODAY'S TOPIC IS:

## The Role of the Speech-Language Pathologist (SLP) in Education

**Historically speaking.....**The field of speech-language pathology has been in existence for more than 100 years. Early on, practitioners worked primarily on speech difficulties, such as stuttering and lisping. The profession has evolved tremendously since its beginnings and now SLPs are trained to work on a variety of areas relevant to communication.

**What is meant by "communication?"** Communication encompasses a wide variety of areas, including the following:

- Speech (correct sound production, intelligibility in connected speech, fluency of speech/stuttering, etc.)
- Comprehension of language (receptive language)
- Expression of language (expressive language)
- Pragmatics (the **use** of language in everyday contexts)
- Literacy (reading and writing)

**About SLPs:** All SLPs hold Master's degrees and are trained to work with a variety of age groups and communication challenges. All SLPs are required to be licensed by a professional order and are bound to a code of ethics. SLPs practice their profession in many different contexts, including schools, clinics, hospitals, rehabilitation facilities and in private practice.

**About school SLPs:** School-based SLPs typically work with elementary students, but some also work with high school students. In Quebec, SLPs are mandated to prioritize students with severe receptive-expressive language disorders in their case loads. These students are validated by the MELS and assigned a handicapped code (Code 34). The ministry allocates funding so that school boards may allocate resources for these students (2 to 3 hours per week of a combination of SLP support and other school-based resources). Students coded 34 present with the following communication profile:

- Moderate to severe receptive language delay; severe expressive language delay
- Moderate to severe receptive language delay; severe verbal dyspraxia (a specific type of speech disorder)

Some students coded 34 also present with speech disorders, and most present with literacy disorders. Students with oral language difficulties can be expected to exhibit difficulty with reading comprehension and written expression.

**Why focus on students code 34?** The MELS recognizes that students with this learning profile are at significant risk for academic failure. However, if they receive appropriate instructional interventions focused on building their communication skills and using compensatory strategies to get around their difficulties, these students have a good chance of acquiring the necessary credits to graduate from high school.

**What about students who do not present with severe language disorders?** Frequently, school SLPs receive referrals for students with speech disorders, literacy disorders, autism and other developmental disorders. It is necessary for SLPs to prioritize their caseloads based on many criteria, including (but not limited to):

- Severity of the disorder
- Effect of the disorder on the student's academic and social functioning
- Prognosis
- Scheduling and caseload considerations

**How can school SLPs best service the needs of students with communication challenges?** The options for providing service delivery to school-age clientele are the following:

- Pull-out intervention (individual or small group)
- In-class intervention (individual or small group)
- Flexible service delivery

Many parents and educators believe that the traditional pull-out model of service delivery is the most effective. This is largely true for formal evaluation and in cases where highly specialized and focused intervention is required to work on specific communication goals. However, experts in the field now advocate a more flexible model whereby the location of service delivery is determined by the needs of the client at every stage of his/her intervention process, whether for evaluation or intervention.

**Who decides?** When it comes to speech and language intervention, the SLP alone has the expertise to identify the conditions that will optimize the student's response to intervention. The client (if developmentally ready to participate in the decision-making process) should also have direct input into the decision.

**Communication development is not a location, but a process.** Effective communication skills are most frequently required in the classroom, not in an office with an SLP. Teachers spend

much more time in direct contact with students than do SLPs. Therefore, it is essential that educators and SLPs work collaboratively to identify goals, as well as to craft instructional methods and interventions, that will ensure that students are developing and using their communication skills where they are most likely to need it...in the classroom.