

Clinical Conundrum

Addressing questions related to ethical and clinical practice issues in speech-language pathology and audiology

The original question that prompted this new column was sent via email earlier this spring...

Question (Abridged): I am a kindergarten teacher who teaches in... As I'm sure you are aware, there is a shortage of SLPs in our area. Recently, our school contracted an SLP to test children in K-3 for funding purposes. This SLP was only contracted to test; she is not available to provide any other services. The testing concluded that the students all have needs ranging from severe articulation to mild language delays. These children now qualify for funding from the government. An IPP must be created for these students. I have been asked, as a kindergarten teacher, to create language goals based on the SLPs reports. I have been asked to monitor these goals and assess them at the end of the year. I was told by the school's Special Education Coordinator that my knowledge of the kindergarten curriculum should qualify me for this task. My question to you is this: As an association, do you feel that I, a kindergarten teacher, am qualified to write language goals and assess them?

Answer from Heather Sample Gosse, R.SLP, on behalf of ACSLPA (Abridged): Your question is one that both SLPs and classroom teachers ask frequently and refers to a situation that is often misunderstood in both the education and speech-language pathology communities. Based on the information you have given me, while it appears that your students would benefit greatly from ongoing speech-language pathology services, their education program is somewhat of a separate issue. Even when students qualify for additional funding based on diagnosed speech-language needs, input into the development of the IPP by an SLP is not required by Alberta Education, it is encouraged. Alberta Education strongly supports teaming by teachers and SLPs when SLPs are available, and this teaming can include working together to develop student IPPs. Ultimately, though, Alberta Education states that the classroom teacher is responsible for the education program and the IPP. A key part of this is the difference between education programming and "clinical" speech-language programming. Alberta Education representatives have indicated to me that education programming would involve working toward/meeting the outcomes of the Program of Study which would include the Kindergarten Program Statement. They have also consistently noted that IPP language goals (and goals in other developmental domains) should be written in "educational language" (i.e. using terminology that is easily understood by the teacher, teacher assistant and parent and in a way that shows that there are strategies being implemented within the classroom). "Clinical" speech-language programming, on the other hand, is guided by specific goals and objectives designed by SLPs to remediate any speech-language needs interfering with a student's academic and social development.

Based on the above information, the request for you to write "language goals" for your students' IPPs appears to be an appropriate one – provided that you write the goals in "educational language" and base the goals on the Kindergarten Program Statement. It would be very appropriate for you to use information in the SLP's reports on your students to determine which parts of the Kindergarten Program Statement individual students are most likely to have difficulty with and how you will need to adapt their programs to help them meet the goals of their educational program.

Based on the information you have shared with me about your students' diagnosed speech-language needs; however, it is unlikely that their needs will be completely met by adapting their education programs. I encourage you to continue to advocate for ongoing speech-language pathology services for your students by contacting your local health region and continuing to address your concerns with your administration.