

## *Speech Pathology Students' Acquisition of Competence in Literacy Instruction*

Final Report for Summer of 2014 CELT Summer Instructional Design Grant

Pam Britton Reese

IPFW Department of Communication Sciences & Disorders

### **I. Introduction and Background**

In the summer of 2014 I was pleased to receive a CELT Summer Instructional Design grant which I used to create a new class and clinic experience (Language and Literacy Project or LLP) in the Communication Sciences and Disorders (CSD) department. Students who participated took a three hour class in Language and Literacy and, during the same summer session were assigned children who were struggling readers to help in a Summer Literacy Project camp held for the first time.

While many people think of speech language pathologists in the role of speech sound correction, as recently as 2007 the American Speech-Language and Hearing Association (ASHA) listed literacy (reading, writing and spelling) as one of the professional activities that speech language pathologists are prepared to manage. Within the past ten years, articles that address literacy instruction with children with communication disorders have appeared; however, there is little or no evidence that examine how CSD students learned to use evidence based literacy strategies with children with and without communication disorders. In other words, the basic pedagogical practices in our field—academic course work accompanied by applied experiences in the field—do not yet appear to have been adopted in the field of literacy education.

Finally, since educational literacy theorists continue to debate the relative superiority of phonics and “whole language” literary strategies, I have come to prefer evidence based (rather than completely atheoretical) approaches as the superior means to inform the LLP. As I believe that reading is a constructive process, it follows that the human brain is constantly seeking meaning out of texts. Therefore, I chose to use meaning making strategies (Goodman, 1994; Allington, 2005; Cox & Hopkins, 2006; Damico, Nelson & Bryan, 2005) with the LLP.

In addition, following a Vygotskian perspective, I would use the LLP class to help scaffold the CSD students as they worked in the LLP camp. Clinical education, or training, is different from traditional classroom education. Related fields of human service (teaching, counseling, and physical therapists) have all incorporated some clinical experience into the preparation of professionals along with the transfer of knowledge in the classroom. Clinical education has been investigated in the fields of physical therapy (Strochein, Hagler & May, 2002); teacher education (Clifford, Macy, Albi, Bricker & Rahn, 2005; Turunen & Tuovila, 2012); and psychology (Kolz, 2008); to name a few. Again and again these researchers emphasized the importance of a hands-on clinical opportunity for training students. Common themes among these studies emphasize the importance of integrating theory and clinical experience in the field; the role of reflection and collaboration between the student

and the supervisor; and the matching of supervisor roles to students' needs in both clinical competence and interpersonal relationships.

## **II. Project Description**

### *A. Rationale*

Due to the lack of evidence in instruction of CSD students about literacy, this project was the beginning of a large, long-term ethnographic case study into CSD students' literacy instruction. The LLP project will be repeated each summer in the future and will follow participating IPFW CSD students.

### *B. Course Description*

CSD 399 Language and Literacy is a course designed to teach CSD students about evidence based literacy strategies. Students will learn about meaning based systems. Combining real world pragmatism with a constructivist theoretical perspective, the course will focus on how language is used to create reading and writing and how this can be applied to a child struggling to learn to read.

The course objectives are:

1. The student will develop lesson plans for individual and small group literacy session and provide the rationale for the strategies used.
2. The student will plan and execute relevant literacy sessions in order for a client to reach his/her determined literacy goals.
3. The student will develop report writing skills to provide information about a client's progress in literacy acquisition.
4. The student will develop skills to organize and deliver information orally to a client/client's family concerning an evaluation or progress made with reading and writing.
5. The student will demonstrate shared reading strategies to the client's family to promote literacy in the home.

### *C. Implementation*

Children from the Ft. Wayne community were recruited by phone calls to principals, flyers, web announcements and phone and email contact with interested parents. Six children were expected to attend from July 3-July 31 2014. One child never appeared, and another stopped coming in the fourth week. Children attended between 10:00 and 12:00 Monday-Thursday for five weeks. Their daily schedule included a large group reading aloud by me and the CSD students; individual shared reading sessions between each child and his or her

assigned CSD student; collaborative small group sessions with one or more of the CSD students and Writing Workshop.

Four IPFW CSD children signed up for the LLP. The students completed pre-project questionnaires and participated in a two day orientation before the LLP began. In addition, one of the CSD students was working on an honor's research project with me that involved looking at children's responses to the intervention strategies. Student's attended CSD 399 Language and Learning seminar with lecture and discussion of assigned readings about evidence based literacy activities. At the end of the LLP, the students completed a post-project questionnaire. See the Appendix A for pre- and post-questionnaire questions.

### **III. Results**

#### *A. Goals*

My research questions, with IRB approval, were:

- a. How do IPFW CSD student learn to employ a particular approach to literacy to assist struggling young readers?
- b. How do these CSD students describe their literacy beliefs and their experiences with literacy prior to participation in the research project?
- c. How do these beliefs and experiences change from participation in the Language and Literacy Project?
- d. Did the Language and Literacy Project impact their development as literacy specialists?

#### *B. Results*

- a. How do IPFW CSD student learn to employ a particular approach to literacy to assist struggling young readers?

On the post-project questionnaire students discussed the importance of the clinic experience of the LLP occurring at the same time as the Language and Literacy class. This information combined with data analyses below reveals how CSD students best learn to use a meaning based literacy approach. In the classroom, the students read and discussed articles that discussed theories in reading education, supported meaning based literacy strategies and cooperative learning. They then took part in 40 hours of supervised clinical experience with literacy during the LLP. During this clinical experience they participated in reading aloud a book of their choice to a large group of children and peers; they chose books and planned for shared reading experiences with one or two children; they planned with and without peers to facilitate cooperative small group literacy activities; and they took part in Writing Workshop. I believe that it is this combination of classroom and clinic experience that helped the students learn about a particular approach to literacy.

- b. How do these CSD students describe their literacy beliefs and their experiences with literacy prior to participation in the research project?

Three questions from the pre-project questionnaire addressed the students' literacy beliefs. The first of these asked them to describe any experiences that had reading with children and the second question asked them to describe how they thought children learned to read. The third question asked them if they thought SLP's should teach children to read. Results are found in Table A.

We see from this table that half of the students had no previous experience reading to children and half of the students did not believe that literacy was something SLPs should do. As to reading therapy, half of the students named phonics as the approach; one wrote of practicing reading with a skilled other, and one wrote of a process beginning in infancy and involving first pictures and favorite books being read before learning about sounds and sight words together.

**Table A**

Participant			
P1	Yes	Phonics	Yes
P2	No	Practice	No
P3	Yes	Process	Yes
P4	No	Phonics	No
	Experience?	Reading theory?	SLPs should?

c. How do these beliefs and experiences change from participation in the Language and Literacy Project?

Evidence of change was found in the post-project questionnaire in several different ways. First was a question asking students to name reading strategies they used in shared reading sessions. The second question asked them to compare their thoughts and feelings at the end of the project to their thoughts and feelings at the beginning of the project. The third question asked them to comment on whether they met their pre-project literacy goals. The fourth question asked them to describe three skills they believe they learned in the LLP. The fifth question asked if the clinic/classroom integration was beneficial to their training as an SLP. Answers to these questions are summarized below, with actual responses to found in the appendices.

- Strategies learned. The students named six different shared reading strategies: using pictures, predicting what might happen, guessing at unknown words, skipping unknown words and reading to the end of the sentence, pointing to words as needed and “fading out” to let the child read more and more.
- Beliefs changed. All students were able to respond to this question and list changes in their thinking. The student responses to the question about changes in thoughts and beliefs are found in Appendix B.
- Skills learned. Two or the students listed teamwork as one of the skills learned, the remainder of the skills listed were a wide variety. Answers

to the questions about skills they learned and goals they accomplished are found in Appendix C.

- Goals achieved. Students did not remember their pre-project goals, but were able to write what they thought they had learned or accomplished. One student, whose child stopped coming, did not think she had met her pre-project goals, but was still able to list skills she had learned. The other three were able to describe what they had learned. This is found in Appendix D.
- Class/clinic connections made. Two of the students referred to strategies learned in class and articles read in class. Two students wrote of applying knowledge to an authentic experience. One student reported that she would have preferred to have the class first, and then the clinic experience. I know from earlier research that this is often a suggested modification. Another student made an extension and wrote of using books in speech and language therapy. Appendix E contains the students' reported connections between class and clinic.

d. Did the Language and Literacy Project impact their development as literacy specialists?

Based on student answers to questions about the literacy project on the questionnaires, and personal observation made by the researcher, the LLP did have a positive impact on their development as literacy specialists. All students expressed more confidence as well as a belief that literacy was under the provenance of SLPs.

C. *Lessons Learned and Changes*

a. Interviews, reflection journals and questionnaires.

As I struggled to submit a successful IRB application, I changed from interviews and reflection journals to using questionnaires. With questionnaires I finally gained approval. I had not created questionnaires before, and based them on my interview questions. (This fall I participated in Coursera web based class on questionnaire design for social scientists. I hope to improve my questionnaire in the future, perhaps including a Likert scale). With a small number of subjects (n=4) I have not found the mountain of data that I found using interviews and reflection journals with my dissertation research. Also, a difference was found between my dissertation data collection as a relatively powerless graduate student and my data collection as professor and supervisor and researcher. It was difficult to keep all three roles separate and some of the undergraduate student responses read as less informative. I don't know whether that is due to the difference in using video recordings and questionnaires or the difference between being a lowly graduate student and a more powerful professor and supervisor. Another cause of the difference could be found in differences between undergraduate education and graduate education. (See Section b).

- b. Undergraduate students and graduate students.  
The graduate LLP I was imitating was held between a CSD graduate student's first and second year of graduate school. In the first year the students got therapy experience by being assigned two or more clients in the university clinic. In the second year, the CSD students go to schools and hospitals and clinics off-site. The summer between the two years was seen as a bridge to prepare for the off-site experience. CSD students got experience with group therapy in the fields of literacy, aphasia and dysfluency. Undergraduate CSD experience is different. CSD students are assigned one or two clients in the spring of their senior year before graduating. Their senior year they take pre-clinic in the fall in preparation for their spring clinic experience. In my summer LLP experience, seniors have graduated and do not take part. I am left with juniors who have not yet taken pre-clinic. This was more of a problem than I thought it would be and leads to changes in orientation (See Section c).
- c. Orientation.  
Orientation needs to be longer or more different from the orientation that the graduate students received. Orientation needs to be a "boot camp" of pre-clinic skills, as well as more up-front information about 1) choosing books, 2) shared reading strategies, 3) planning cooperative literacy groups and 4) examples and instruction about Writing Workshop.
- d. Collaboration.  
Students had no concerns about collaborating before LLP began. Seventy-five percent of the students in their post-project questionnaire indicated that they did not collaborate as much as they expected and also expressed a desire for more pre-project planning. Part of this was due to my error in not realizing that 4 students is not the same as 12 students. It became evident almost immediately, once the children arrived, that 4 students together could plan small groups. One decision they made was to each take a day of the four day week. That meant there was very little cohesion in themes for the small group activities planned. Each one did her own. The only true collaboration came when they all became excited about a pirate theme and treasure hunt for the last week. Each still planned her own small group activity, but they did brainstorm ideas together and together created materials for the treasure hunt.
- e. Theoretical Differences.  
This year this only became a problem when one parent pulled her special needs child from the project because we were not using the same method the mother used at home, which was very phonics driven. I need to probably make more evident what type of theory we are using in the LLP before children enroll.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Based on the data from the student pre- and post-questionnaires, I believe that the new CSD 399 class Language and Literacy connected with a clinical experience (Language and Literacy Project). This combination taught undergraduate CSD students about the role of SLPs in literacy instruction, provided theoretical evidence of the use of meaning based literacy strategies to aid struggling young readers, and led to changes in their beliefs held prior to beginning the LLP.

The task of recruiting children, recruiting CSD students, and finding and arranging the environment and materials needed for the LLP was a significant one. In was greatly aided by the SID grant that I received. The small study that was completed serves as a preliminary study. I would hope that making some of the changes outlined above will lead to data collected in the future will precede published research in the field of CSD. As I noted above there is a need in understanding how CSD students best learn to practice literacy intervention. My research will add to the understanding of this in the near future.

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## Appendix A

### Pre- and Post-Questionnaires

#### *Pre-project Questions*

1. Have you had any experiences reading with children?
2. Do you remember learning how to read? Where did you learn?
3. How do you think children learn how to read?
4. Do you think SLPs should teach children to read?
5. Name and describe 3 goals you want to achieve in relation to the Language and Literacy Project
6. To what extent do you believe the research articles you will read for class will enhance the Language and Literacy Project experience?
7. To what extent do you believe the lecture material will enhance the Language and Literacy Project experience?
8. To what extent do you believe clinic/classroom integration is beneficial to your training as a SLP?
9. Provide a brief explanation of the rating you provided for question #7
10. List and describe three skills you hope to develop (or further improve) through your participation with the Language and Literacy Project.
11. To what extent do you believe the Language and Literacy Project will foster team building?
12. How well do you believe the members of your team will work together?
13. Do you have any concerns before the Language and Literacy project begins?

#### *Post-Project Questions*

1. Describe the preparation that went into shared reading sessions? Small group sessions?
2. Where did you get ideas for themes used in the small group sessions?
3. Describe how you and your buddy planned small group sessions together?
4. Describe literacy strategies you were able to use with each of your children.
5. Describe how you felt when a supervisor came in to share reading? Was it helpful if the supervisor modeled reading with the child?
6. Were you able to use any information from the Language and Literacy project orientation? Can you give examples of information you used?
7. Describe your thoughts on Writer's Workshop with your children.
8. How do your thoughts and feelings at the end of the project compare to your thoughts and feelings at the beginning of the project?
9. What was your favorite part of the literacy experience?
10. At the beginning of the quarter, you set 3 goals in relation to the Language and Literacy Project. Which goals did you meet/not meet? Describe why you met or did not meet the goals you set at the beginning.
11. To what extent do you believe clinic/classroom integration is beneficial to your training as a SLP?
12. Provide a brief explanation of the rating you provided for question # 8

13. List and describe 3 skills you developed (or further improved) through your participation with the Language and Literacy Project.
14. To what extent do you believe the Language and Literacy Project fostered team building?
15. How well do you believe you and your “reading buddy” worked together?
16. Additional comments/suggestions for the Language and Literacy Project.

## Appendix B

### Reported Changes in Students' Thoughts and Beliefs

*Participant One:*

"I have a greater understanding of how we learn to read and how spelling is learned. I am more confident in my ability to help children learn to read and write".

*Participant Two:*

"I feel at the beginning I really didn't know much about literacy development and I definitely feel more passionate about literacy".

*Participant Three:*

"I had a very good time with this project. It wasn't at all what I expected (with my child)".

*Participant Four:*

"At the beginning I had a more superficial view of reading; I didn't realize fully how important or involved the process is. Now, after reading lots of articles, having lectures over the past few weeks, and working with C. my ideas about the importance of reading has really changed".

## Appendix C

### Reported Skills Learned

#### *Participant One:*

- Team building
- Leadership skills
- Co-learning with children and adapting to their specific needs

#### *Participant Two:*

- Skills working with children
- Some research skills
- Critical thinking skills

#### *Participant Three:*

- Picking the right books
- How to promote writing and reading
- Pronunciation/correct words not always the most important

#### *Participant Four:*

- Meaning based share reading strategies
- Shared writing strategies
- Teamwork

## **Appendix D**

### **Goals Met**

*Participant One:*

“I did gain experience working with children one-on-one and in groups. I honed my skills as a student bridging theory to practice. I have a much better understanding of the reading process, especially what works and what doesn’t.”

*Participant Two:*

“I feel I have developed more critical thinking skills as well as specific knowledge about language & literacy”

*Participant Three:*

“I lost my child after three weeks, so I didn’t achieve the goals I set. The mother wanted to focus more on phonics and the sounding out of words and focus on individual words”.

*Participant Four:*

“I believe it is very beneficial to have the classroom experience and then be able to actually use what you learn in class in a clinic setting”.

## Appendix E

### Class/Clinic Connections Made by Students

*Participant One:*

“Review strategies learned about in class”.

“Absolutely valuable to have hands-on experience.”

*Participant Two:*

“The article about it being okay to make mistakes as long as you are prepared helped throughout the project”.

“I believe that clinic/classroom integration is very beneficial. Learning needs an authentic context”.

*Participant Three:*

“I believe the integration of books/reading into therapy would be greatly beneficial. It would not only help in language development but also vocabulary development”.

*Participant Four:*

“I believe it is very beneficial to have the classroom experience and then be able to actually use what you learn in class in a clinic setting”.