

Speech-Language Pathologists: Key Players in the Development of Reading and Writing

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The connections between written and spoken language are well established. Spoken language provides the foundation for the development of reading and writing. Speech-language Pathologists (SLPs), therefore, play a pivotal role in the development of literacy skills across all grades. SLPs' knowledge of language acquisition, and their clinical experience in developing individualized instruction and intervention for children and adolescents, prepare them to assume a variety of roles related to the development of reading and writing.

Spoken and written language have a reciprocal relationship. Starting early, and continuing throughout school into adulthood, spoken and written language grow together. It is not unexpected therefore, that children with spoken language challenges frequently have difficulty learning to read and write. In fact, approximately 50 per cent of children with speech-sound disorders have difficulty learning to read or write. Language disorders are present in approximately 10 per cent of our student population. It is often the case that children who have been identified with reading or writing difficulties, including dyslexia and specific learning disorders, have underlying language disorders.

Language and Literacy Connections

In recent years, there has been a focus on strengthening students' early literacy skills through word recognition and spelling instructional practices. SLPs contribute to these foundational literacy practices by collaborating with teachers and offering valuable knowledge of the phonological system of language. This focus on providing evidence-based, systematic and explicit phonics and phonological awareness instruction is having positive impacts on students' automatic and fluent word recognition and spelling.

It is important to remember that while fluent word reading and spelling is essential for reading comprehension and written expression, it is not sufficient. Teaching reading comprehension strategies can have positive effects, but when students do not understand the language, strategy

instruction will be useless. To improve reading comprehension and written expression, it is necessary to strengthen oral language skills. Skilled reading and writing require the blend of background knowledge, complex syntax, vocabulary, inferencing, and discourse structures, all of which are language skills. SLPs have a unique knowledge base of these language components and furthermore, have experience with a variety of tools and strategies to support their development.

How can Speech-Language Pathologists help?

There are a variety of ways SLPs can work in schools to support reading and writing. These include:

- Supporting implementation of instructional practices that strengthen language acquisition and emergent literacy.
- Identifying students at risk for reading and writing difficulties.
- Assessing students with language or literacy difficulties.
- Providing recommendations for individualized adaptations, instruction and/or intervention.
- Collaborating with colleagues such as classroom teachers, School Psychologists, and others who support reading and writing development.
- Advocating for evidence-based literacy practices.

The scope of practice of Speech-Language Pathologists stretches far beyond addressing speech-sound disorders, although this is



commonly misunderstood. Please connect with a Speech-Language Pathologist in your region if you would like to learn more about what can be offered.

Did you know?

Speech-Language Pathologists prevent, assess, diagnose, and treat speech, language and swallowing disorders in children and adults. In Nova Scotia, Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) work with children and adults in a variety of public or private settings. Hearing and Speech Nova Scotia offers publicly funded speech and language services to pre-school age children and adults. Speech and language services for school-age children and youth are provided by SLPs employed by the Regional Centres for Education and the CSAP. Each SLP provides services to a circuit of schools. To work in Nova Scotia's public schools, SLPs obtain a Special Teaching Certificate and are members of the Nova Scotia Teachers Union, under the same contracts as teachers. In recent years, approximately 30 per cent of SLPs in schools work year-round in a 12-month (225 day) contract.

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