Effective collaboration between early childhood educators and speech pathologists to address children’s communication difficulties

Together We Grow – Connecting Communities
Early Childhood Education Conference 2016

Presented by
Tara Shem
PhD candidate, BSpPath (Hons)
Flinders University, South Australia
tara.shem@flinders.edu.au

Chris Brebner, Angela Lawless & Michelle Swift
Flinders University, South Australia
COLLABORATION

HOW?  WHAT?

NATIONAL GUIDELINES
BEST PRACTICE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD INTERVENTION

Flinders University
inspiring achievement
At the end of this workshop we will:

- Have explored the roles of ECEs and SLPs in the identification and management of young children’s communication difficulties
- Discussed positives and negatives of working collaboratively in supporting children
- Discussed and identified strategies to engage in collaborative partnerships between ECEs and SLPs in the community
Communication skills

• Vital skills, required for:
  – Early education
  – Social development and engagement
  – Later life activities (i.e. employment)
  – Everyday living (Law, Boyle, Harris, Harkness, & Nye, 1998; Law, Todd, Clark, Morz, & Carr, 2013; Mustard, 2008)

• Some children experience difficulties developing these skills
  – Best practice: early intervention to mitigate future problems and long term issues (World Health Organization, 2012)
• Difficulties with communication skills have been managed by families, early years professionals, SLPs

• SLPs diagnose and treat difficulties with communication (speech, language), social communication, swallowing, fluency and voice (Speech Pathology Australia, 2016)

  – Various service delivery methods (e.g. 1:1 direct therapy, consultative models) (Baxter et al., 2009; Glover, McCormack, Smith-Tamaray, 2015; Hartas, 2004)

  – Often limited opportunities to work together
Whose role is it to support children’s development?

- Knowledge and expertise is shared
- Policy currently outlining a ‘team’ approach
  - Developing and supporting children’s development and academic outcomes requires teams of professionals working together (Anderson, 2013)
  - *Early intervention guidelines and research recommendations:* responsibility of both early childhood education and health professionals (Field, 2010; Oberklaid, Baird, Blair, Melhuish, & Hall, 2013; Speech Pathology Australia 2014)
  - SLPs do not have a track record of collaboration in practice
Why work together?

SLPs could bring support:

- For creating/maintaining language rich learning environments for all children
- To target learning activities for children with and without communication difficulties

ECEs bring knowledge and expertise:

- In child development
- Regarding individuals in their care
Why work together? Cont.

ECEs desire to support children

- case study research with South Australian ECEs
- Identified they had a responsibility and important role in supporting and identifying children’s difficulties (Shem, Brebner, & Coles, 2014)

Children spend a significant amount of time at ECEC

- ECEs are recognised, along with parents to be the main providers of early learning opportunities and learning environments (Dunst, 2007)

NQF and ELYF - children are effective communicators

(Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009)
Reflection: your current practice

Are you currently connecting/working with speech pathologists?

- Some educators do have access to SPs in their services
- Have access if parents bring in what their child is doing/let services know (e.g. communication book between family and professionals)
- Some educators don’t have any direct access to SPs
- Some parents don’t want to refer to SP (parent resistance)
- In Melbourne and rural areas there are wait lists and limited time influencing being able to work together

How do you connect with these professionals?

- Parents paying for child's speech therapy, they come into centre
- Early intervention services – kindergarten
- Testing children for referral
What is collaboration?

• Professionals working towards a common goal
• Sharing of practices, knowledge and problems

Collaboration means each professional in a partnership is respected for their perspective and insights into children and families (Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, 2012)
What does collaboration look like?

• Conceptualised differently between researchers but have features with similarities

Types of collaboration:
• Co-operation
• Co-ordination
• Cross-fertilization
• Integration (Watts et al., 1994, 1997)

Models for practice:
• Multidisciplinary
• Interdisciplinary
• Transdisciplinary (Kilgo, 2006)
What does ‘working together’ look like in your service?

- with speech pathologists and/or external professionals

• Long day care service
  - 1:1 session with a child, private SP
  - Changed approach after initial sessions as children all around her to group work/small group work with peers

• Kindergarten
  - SP specialist has provided educators with a checklist to collect the information they want
  - One sided and they dictate the information sharing

• Transition to school
  - SPs have given us a lot of information but they are not engaging with the families and children
  - We want SP in our groups directly

• Worked with SPs from early intervention services through team meetings to make plans for specific children and directing them to special schools
Collaboration

• Currently no guidelines for establishing this type of work between these professionals

• Studies examining collaboration of:
  
  Health professionals (Suter et al., 2009)

  Health professionals and educators/teachers (Garvis, Kirkby, McMahon, & Meyer, 2016; Glover et al., 2015; Hall, 2005; Hartas, 2004; Hong, & Shaffer, 2015; McCormack, & Easton, 2014;)

• Research has examined features of collaboration and identified competencies/capabilities partnerships should have
Collaborative Practice

Facilitators

Barriers
Connecting and working with SLPs in your centre

WHAT WORKS WELL? FACILITATORS

• The focus is the best interest of the child
• Communication
• Sharing of professional knowledge
• Availability
• Mutual respect
Connecting and working with SLPs in your centre

WHAT DOESN’T WORK?
CHALLENGES/BARRIERS

• There are not enough SPs
• SPs sometimes come to us but we can’t take children to SPs – need to bridge the gap
• Waiting lists
• Availability – when we are on the floor they are in our centre and when we are available they are not
• Funding for our services and children can’t afford to go privately
  – Local council needs to be more involved
• The systems are broken – there are gaps and the communication between groups is unclear and not organised
### FACILITATORS

- Communication
- Time and availability
  - Regular contact
- Understanding
  - Being on the same page
  - Understanding each other
- Professional respect
  - Individual and knowledge
- Relationships
- Supportive organisation/organisational structure
- Shared beliefs and values
- Willingness to adapt and/or learn
- Desire to collaborate
- Shared goals
- Knowledge

### BARRIERS

- Time commitment/constraints
  - Opportunities to collaborate
- Lack of communication
- Lack of support to collaborate from organisation
- Rigid organisational structure
- Lack of interdisciplinary culture
- Different frameworks guiding practice
- Professional status/hierarchies
  - Lack of equality
  - Lack of clarity (role, responsibilities and contributions)
- Different priorities and views
- Knowledge
- Personality clashes

(Anderson, 2013; Baxter et al., Garvis et al., 2016; Glover et al., 2015; Hall, 2005; Hartas, 2004; Hong, & Shaffer, 2015; McCormack, & Easton, 2014; Wright, & Kersner, 1999)
Collaborative practice cont.

- Collaborative practice has complexities
- Transdisciplinary model
- Further research based evidence is required to underpin collaboration
  - Especially in ECEC sector
  - For frameworks to be established
Where to from here?

(Glover et al., 2015)
What do I as ECE want to gain from collaborating with speech pathologists?

- To help children before they start school
- Prevention – working on it before problems arise (families and educators)
- SPs are good with theories and knowledge but we, ECEs want to know how to put that knowledge into our practice/services
- Referral system – long day care can’t refer to SPs. Need steps to work by, SPs provide us with information on this
- Have SPs who can come out to us
Do you want to connect with SLPs?

Does your service have connections and networks?

Do you have personal and professional networks?

Speech Pathology Australia

Fact sheets and information

‘Find a speech pathologist’

TAKE HOME MESSAGES

• We all bring expertise, skill and knowledge to supporting children’s development
  – Team approach is being directed by policy

• Need research based evidence to underpin teamwork

• Key to successful collaboration:
  – Communication
  – Professional understanding
  – Respect
  – Desire to work together

• Consider organisational structure

• Consider/explore power and status
Voluntary Tasks

Task 1
• You are invited to answer 3 questions, in dot point form. The questions reflect on collaborative practice between early childhood educators and speech pathologists.

Task 2
• The workshop facilitator will be formulating a reflection/field note from today’s workshop. You are invited to review the field note once it has been written and provide feedback/comments on its contents and views.

Participation in these tasks is completely voluntary. If you wish to participate in either of these tasks, please complete the consent form.
REFERENCES


