

understanding figurative language. I went to his classroom and taught the entire class this skill while planning a lesson around the book *Amelia Bedelia*. It was a lot of fun for everyone.

I often start with students learning and practicing social skills. I then share with other teachers the skills under development, and together we find ways for the children to practice the skills throughout their school day. One of my students, who had been diagnosed with Asperger syndrome, was having a difficult time at lunch interacting with his peers and choosing appropriate topics to discuss, and was frequently bothering his teacher with unnecessary comments and requests. His classroom teacher, his special education teacher, his paraprofessional, and I met to help him with this problem. I taught him appropriate topics to ask about and discuss with his friends at lunch, and encouraged him to only talk to his teacher when absolutely necessary. We all took turns having lunch with him and his classmates so that we could prompt him to ask questions and participate in the natural conversation at the table. We were also able to help him with deciding what things did or did not need his teacher's attention, giving her a much-needed break. More important, this student was able to maintain and strengthen friendships with his classmates that were previously deteriorating. His mother also gave permission for the teacher to discuss her son's condition with his classmates. This made a tremendous difference. The children responded positively and openly to his uniqueness. I know that working collaboratively made a tremendous difference in this child's daily experiences at school.

I have also seen successful collaboration in our sensory motor group. This is a small group of students that meets with the occupational therapist, the special education teacher, and myself. This is an hour-long group where the children practice proprioceptive, vestibular, and balance activities. The pupils also listen to short stories that encourage proper questioning

and responses in addition to learning vocabulary, recalling of events, and sequencing skills. We finish with a craft activity that addresses their individual sensory and tactile issues.

Participating in grade-level planning meetings is important as well. This has been very helpful in planning my own lessons for the children. I am able to plan lessons dealing with the same science and social studies topics that they are learning in the classroom, making the time they spend in therapy a more meaningful experience. Meeting with teachers regularly keeps me informed of how my students are performing in their classroom.

### A Concluding Thought

While I sometimes find a need for a few of my students to practice articulation, language, and social skills in my classroom, I also find a very real benefit in providing therapy in inclusive settings.

Doing so provides appropriate peer models for the pupil with a speech and language impairment, and it allows me the opportunity to work with all the students while being a consultant to the other teachers and paraprofessionals on my team. Children are able to learn in their least restrictive environment and have more opportunities to practice skills while being full-fledged members of their classrooms. Their peers also learn to be understanding of individual differences, and all of the children benefit from the extra adult support in the classroom. I believe that I have learned as much as my students have from my inclusive education experience. I have developed so much professionally by watching my colleagues in action. Inclusion has helped me to become a better speech-language pathologist.

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