

Making Inclusion Work

I realized I wanted to pursue a career as a speech–language pathologist when I was a high school senior working with a young neighbor. I earned an undergraduate degree in speech–language pathology as well as a master's degree in elementary education from the University of Montevallo. I am currently pursuing a second master's degree in special education. I have worked in public schools for many years teaching speech to preschool children and elementary-grade students. The children I have worked with had articulation disorders, delayed language development, and social skill deficits in addition to speech dysfluencies that hindered proper communication. I have led social groups to help pupils learn how to appropriately communicate and interact with their peers. I have been greatly blessed to be a part of the lives of these children and their families, and I will always be grateful that I have been able to walk with them on this journey.

I find that the most important thing I can do to help my students is to develop a good rapport with their parents. I invite parents to become a part of my class and to observe therapy with their children. I send frequent progress reports home and respond quickly to any notes, phone calls, or e-mails. As much as I am dedicated to being an effective speech–language pathologist, I deeply care about the daily stresses and struggles these parents encounter in raising their child. It is not an easy task, but every educator needs to remember that parents are the experts, and they need to be respected as such. In most instances, they have invested their entire lives in helping their son or daughter, and they often know what does and does not work with their child. After all, they were their child's first teacher.

Strategies for Inclusion and Collaboration

Collaboration begins with the referral process. While the special educator is often the team member who writes

the individualized education program (IEP), information and observations from other teachers, therapists, and paraprofessionals are gathered to construct an appropriate and individualized IEP.

Working and planning collaboratively with all of the teachers and professionals who are a part of the student's day help the child to work on speech and language goals throughout the day in his or her natural settings. I frequently meet with my students' teachers to share IEP goals and the progress each child has made. When teachers are aware of the success a student has had in learning a particular speech sound or language skill, they are able to follow up and help the student in their classroom as well.

The general education teacher is not the only person who works with the student who has a speech and language impairment. I inform all of the individuals who work with my students of ways that they can help support the child. Physical education teachers, lunchroom workers, the teacher in the computer lab, the media specialist, the guidance counselor, the music teacher, and any other therapists who work with my pupils are all aware of the strategies and techniques that they can use to support and encourage my students. In this way, the children are able to practice the skills that are needed in more than one environment. Furthermore, I believe it helps others who work with these children to be more compassionate and understanding.

Speech–language pathologists often remove pupils from their classroom due to the students' need for individualized and specialized therapy; however, a great deal can be accomplished in the general education classroom. I often teach language skills as a whole-class activity, and all the children benefit from the experience. In one instance, I had a child working on