

Primarily PAC: August 2021

By: Rolando J. Vasquez, MS, CCC-SLP, TSHA Political Action Committee Chair



Are you interested in joining the Texas Speech-Language-Hearing Association (TSHA) Political Action Committee (PAC)? Do you have an interest in social and governmental policy that can have an impact on how you practice in your profession? Do you have the desire to volunteer your time to help raise money for donations to candidates running for legislative seats? TSHA PAC is looking for strong candidates to help fill current vacancies on the TSHA PAC Board. If you are interested in learning more about the TSHA PAC and what is required of board members, please email me at rjvas2027@gmail.com.

TSHA PAC needs your help! Please consider donating funds to the TSHA PAC. Donations made to the TSHA PAC not only benefit you but also your fellow colleagues and the clients you serve. Donations to the TSHA PAC are given to key candidates running for governmental offices who, if elected, are able to help TSHA when it comes to key issues like Medicaid reimbursement, provisions of applied behavior analysis (ABA) including funding of services, the audiology and speech-language pathology interstate compact, newborn hearing screenings, and telehealth.

There is a significant incentive to raise funds during the next two years because the Texas Sunset Advisory Commission is meeting in 2023 to review our licensure. It is important that we have a voice at the table to advocate for us. TSHA PAC is always open to discuss with you any concerns you have or that you may be experiencing in your workplace that may need legislative action. We can try to push those issues through our TSHA Legislative Team. If you would like to contribute, please visit our PAC page on the TSHA website at any time. Your contribution also can be made when you renew your TSHA membership and when you register for next year's Convention. Make your contribution online today at https://www.txsha.org/donate_to_the_tsha_pac.

CLD Corner: Teamwork Considerations When Conducting Multidisciplinary Evaluations

By: Mayra Morales-Valdez, MA, MEd, Guest author



A symbiotic relationship is defined as involving an interaction between two different organisms living in close physical association. This relationship is often mutually beneficial to the organisms involved. In the world of school assessments, this symbiosis is often found in the interactions between the speech-language pathologist (SLP), the educational diagnostician, and/or the licensed, specialist in-school psychologist, as well as other related assessment staff. The dynamics between these groups of assessment specialists can ultimately determine the effectiveness of the campus-based assessment team. However, how must these dynamics be adapted when conducting evaluations of culturally and linguistically diverse students? What are some of the factors that should be considered when conducting multidisciplinary assessments?

SLPs are often the first line of defense in determining which students would benefit from psychoeducational or multidisciplinary evaluation, be it for a specific learning disability, other health impairment, autism, or something else. Delays in communication are often more obvious and

noticeable than academic and/or social-emotional difficulties. When these concerns are present in a student from a different social, cultural, or economic background, it becomes even more imperative that campus-based assessment teams work together, like a fully evolved organism. The focus should be on conducting comprehensive, culturally and linguistically competent evaluations while avoiding completing “standalone” evaluations that focus on one specific area or deficit.

Haas and Mortensen (2016) identified four components that are necessary to ensure team effectiveness. A strong effective team must have a compelling direction, a strong structure, a supportive context, and a shared mindset. In the world of educational evaluations, these components are especially necessary.

The campus team must have a compelling direction or goal. The goal of every campus assessment team is ultimately to answer the question “Is there an educational need for specialized instruction?” All team members are tasked with answering this question. The goal is the same when evaluating individuals from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds. These evaluations just have the added facet of having to determine if academic, behavioral, and or social-emotional difficulties have a cultural/linguistic component to them that would make them an exclusionary factor. A strong campus-based team will not allow itself to be confused or misdirected by the student’s unique background.

A strong campus-based assessment team will focus on the common question and will work together by exchanging ideas and information to answer it. This requires that all members of the campus-based team have some knowledge of each other’s roles and know the factors each discipline considers when making determinations on educational needs as well as the different cultural norms that may affect an individual’s development. All members of the team should have some knowledge about how language is acquired and how it influences communication as well as overall cognitive and academic development. The evaluators should consider the complex processes that differentiate true disabilities from learning differences or acquisition of a second language. How a student utilizes language in an academic setting can be completely different from how they interact socially. This information should be utilized to determine which assessments are best to use when conducting the multidisciplinary evaluation (Alvarado, 2011; Ibarra & Hughes, 2019). This knowledge also can be used to help determine whether or not an evaluation is even necessary and whether the student’s difficulties are possibly due to language acquisition.

It is important to remember that every comprehensive evaluation requires that the evaluator, be it formally or informally, assess a student’s cognitive, social-emotional, and/or adaptive functioning. This only can be done effectively if evaluators have some knowledge of each other’s specializations and feel comfortable asking questions of their campus-based team members when questions arise. Every member of the campus-based assessment team brings to it their own specialized training and skills. Roles should be clearly defined and understood, but, above all, roles should be respected. A strong team will acknowledge differences in each individual’s roles and perspectives and find commonalities within the differences. A strong team will remember that different does not mean negative or wrong. Different perspectives can lead to different solutions as well as multiple solutions to the same problems. Acknowledging these differences can help all team members interpret the data differently, which can lead to the development of diverse yet integrated goals and objectives.

Viewing the campus-based assessment team as an organism, with its own unique culture and set of values, may prove insightful when evaluating students from diverse populations. Never assume that because an evaluator has a similar background as the student being evaluated that their beliefs and culture are the same. While there may be some overlaps, life experiences influence development. As such, someone of Mexican descent raised in the United States will not have the same culture or even language as another individual, also of Mexican descent, who just immigrated to the United States. An effective campus-based assessment team can serve to provide checks and balances to these differences. How these differences are acknowledged affects how the evaluation is approached.

Campus-based assessment team members should be supportive of one another. This is based on the idea of respect and acknowledgment that all individuals bring their specialized skills to the team. Data should drive determination of all eligibility. This is often a muddy process since all group members are interpreting the available data from the focal point of their specialization. Teams will not necessarily agree on a conclusion 100 percent of the time. However, if the group respects one another and takes the time to listen to one another's perspective, the "why" behind their views, and all the data collected, they are more likely to reach agreements that are beneficial to the student being evaluated.

Campus-based assessment teams need not lose sight of the fact that they have a common goal or a shared mindset, which is determining educational need. As long as the team doesn't lose sight of this goal, they should be able to confront and overcome most obstacles that arise. Even those that arise when evaluating someone from a culturally diverse background can be overcome. Eligibility determinations are evidence- or data-based. This requires that all members of the team work as one organism toward the mutual goal. Members of the team need to communicate with one another and actively listen to each other as they determine how best to proceed. They need to exchange ideas as well as data. Teams that do not share these components will likely be parasitic in nature—a relationship in which one organism gains, while the other suffers. An example is a team in which its members are all out for themselves and have lost sight of the common goal, which is helping students regardless of their background. A team that works as a cohesive organism is more likely to ensure its decisions have taken into account cultural and language differences.

References

Alvarado, C. (2011). Best practices in the special education evaluation of students who are culturally and linguistically diverse. Pearland, TX: Education & Evaluation Consultants.

Haas, M. and Mortenson, M. The secret of great teamwork, *Harvard Business Review*, June 2016; 70-76.

Ibarra, D., & Hughes, A. (2019, September). The Other View: Multicultural Evaluations Among Other Professionals. *Communicologist*. <https://www.txsha.org/blog/cld-corner-the-other-view-multiculturalevaluations-among-other-professions>

The CLD Corner was created in an effort to provide information and respond to questions on cultural and linguistic diversity (CLD). Please follow the Communicologist and TSHA's website in order to obtain new information provided by the CLD Committee. If you have specific questions or topics you would like for us to cover in future issues, please email publications@txsha.org.

EBP Edge: Functional Treatment Interventions for Aphasia in the Skilled Nursing Facility

By: Danielle Connor, MS, CCC-SLP



Clinicians practicing in skilled nursing facilities (SNFs) and long-term care facilities often have a variety of patients on their caseload with varying medical diagnoses and therapeutic needs. It is within the speech-language pathologist's scope of practice to assess and develop a plan of care to address each individual's needs and goals in order to achieve the highest amount of independence possible. When it comes to aphasia, determining which evidence-based and functional therapeutic approaches will be most beneficial to the patient will be based on the type and severity level of aphasia with which they are presenting.