

Collaboration: A Solution for Speech-Language Pathologists

By Megan-Lynette Richmond, M.S., CCC-SLP

Are you overwhelmed with the number of students on your caseload, yet you constantly receive more referrals? Are your students progressing toward their goals fast enough? Do you notice that your students respond better when interacting with their peers than with you? Are your students transferring their goals to the classroom setting? There is a solution for all of these concerns: *Collaboration*.

Moving out of a pull-out therapy setting and into the classroom can prove to be beneficial for students, teachers, and speech-language pathologists (SLPs). Changing settings to provide therapy develops a relationship between the classroom teacher and the SLP. This relationship offers a creative solution to many of the questions posed above. Below are some tips that will allow the SLP to provide services in the general education classroom.



- **Offer to Co-Teach** — All curriculum areas have language components. Through collaboration with a general education teacher, the SLP can target comprehension and aid students in answering questions. This not only keeps the SLP up-to-date on what is happening in the classroom but also helps the teacher understand how to highlight language targets while instructing an entire class. If you have several students on your caseload in one classroom, you will be able to monitor their participation and transferring of goals. One helpful tip is to arrange a brief weekly meeting with the teacher to plan activities and outline responsibilities. The SLP or teacher can take the lead in preparing a lesson, and then both can participate equally in implementing the plan. During implementation, the teacher or SLP can drop back to observe and document student behaviors, check for understanding, and assess the learning environment.
- **Drop in Routinely** — If your schedule will not permit you to present an entire lesson, ask the teacher to spare a few minutes of instructional time for you to teach a special mini-lesson. These lessons can target your students' language and communication goals—from developing listening and study skills to interacting with peers. The teacher may also suggest topics that students are having problems with to help you reinforce your lessons.
- **Make Regular Appearances** — Make regular appearances in your students' classrooms. Assist the students with generalizing skills that would normally be a target goal in a pull-out setting. Ask the classroom teacher for the opportunity to interact with other students in the classroom. Show attention to other students to assure that you do not bring negative attention to the target students. While in the classroom, help students locate and

understand difficult vocabulary words, prompt students to ask and answer questions, and encourage students to ask for help when they need it. You may also have a chance to work with or screen students that have referrals for evaluation and/or services.

- Spearhead a Long-Term Project** — Initiating and implementing a long-term language/communication project in the classroom fosters a language-rich setting. Projects can include daily reading and discussion of articles in current newspapers/magazines, helping students write and produce plays, or working with students to find and correspond with pen pals from another school. These types of projects give SLPs the opportunity to work with target students individually on their assignments and still allow the students' participation in large group and classroom activities. Group activities target students that need to develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills. With these types of activities, students also have the chance to interact with their peers which encourages and reinforces the use of appropriate social skills. Assigning a "buddy" — a higher functioning student — helps students learn from their peers and increases motivation.
- Help Develop Materials** — Work with the classroom teacher to develop new materials and/or modify existing materials to adapt classroom instruction for students with speech and language needs. Adding therapy materials to the classroom further assists students to progress toward reaching their goals. For example, you can add pictures to the daily classroom schedule or suggest children's literature that contains targeted speech and language structures. Another idea is to modify classroom handouts/study guides to help students manage lengthy assignments more easily.



The caseloads of SLPs and classroom teachers are overwhelming. A collaborative effort between the two can ease the workload, lighten the stress, and help meet the goals of all students. The role of the SLP in the schools is constantly changing. Caseloads are becoming larger and expectations for students are increasing as well. Collaborating with classroom teachers creates an opportunity to know your students better and gives you the ability to monitor their work so that obtaining their goals is more manageable.