

# HEARSAY

Journal of the Ohio Speech and Hearing Association

Vol. 13, No. 1, 1999

## CONTENTS

### INVITED ARTICLES

**5 How Are We Doing? Overview of Outcome Measures in Speech/Language Pathology and Audiology**

Barbara Weinstein

**12 Database Applications in Clinical Practice**

Jerry L. Northern and Ken Schofield

### RESEARCH FORUM

**15 The Effects of Therapy Settings, Patient Motivation, and Caregiver Involvement on Functional Independence Measures**

Fofi Constantinidou, Barbara Weinrich, and Cammy Dickens

### SCHOOL FORUM

**23 School Clinicians as Researchers**

Anita M. Visoky

**25 Practitioners as Researchers: An Expanding Role for Speech-Language Pathologists**

Monica Gordon Pershey

### COLUMNS

**30, 32, 33 Clinical Grand Rounds**

Susan Stanton; Gayle Riemer; Susan Stanton, M.Z. Cashman, and J.M.N. Nedzelski

**40 Technology in Communication**

Yvonne Gillette

**47 Speakeasy**

Melinda Chalfont-Evans

**49 Book Review**

Linda A. Hodgdon

### DEPARTMENTS

**36 Legislative Breakfast 1998 Highlights and Photos**

**1 In This Issue**

Laura W. Kretschmer

**52 Next Issue**

Laura W. Kretschmer



# *Practitioners as Researchers: Expanding Role for Speech- Language Pathologists*

## *Monica Gordon Pershey\**

Monica Gordon Pershey

### ABSTRACT

School speech-language pathologists can research by writing personal journals, participating in collaborative projects, conducting formal research studies, preparing publications, or giving presentations. Special needs service settings are natural "laboratories" for observation, reflection and inquiry.

Have you ever said to yourself:

"I see so much progress in a child in my language group. This would make such an interesting case study!"

"I'm observing unusual speech behaviors in the children who I work with in a special needs class. I've looked at a lot of research but I can't seem to find a discussion of this sort of behavior. How can I establish information about what I'm seeing? How can I find out if others see this, too?"

"I know I'm a good therapist, but I can't seem to articulate my knowledge. I'm thinking very deeply about my work, but I need to find a way to gather my thoughts. How can I organize my knowledge, just for my self?"

"Working with children with communication disorders can be so emotionally draining. I need time to reflect, regain my strength, and reassess the rewarding aspects of my work. How can I share my feelings with other therapists so that we can reassess how affirming our work really is?"

"I've tested so many kids with language delays! Do these test results show anything in common in this population? Do the scores that are achieved on retesting reflect my interventions?"

"Our team works so hard to facilitate inclusion. I wonder if the children from regular education realize this? I'd like to find a way to document their perceptions of their special needs peers. I wonder if these findings could help us establish a better inclusion policy?"

Questions such as these can become the basis for practitioner research, as can the diverse questions that speech-language

pathologists have about their practices, their careers, their work settings, and their own feelings. Speech-language pathologists who research, either individually or collaboratively, may acquire approaches for effective therapy, document phenomena, realize their own voices, and gain autonomy as practitioners. Any service setting is a natural "laboratory" for exploration and research. The joy of discovery through participation in spoken and written discourse may be experienced by any practitioner. Observation, reflection and inquiry can be undertaken by speech-language pathologists at any stage of their careers.

Practitioner research has its origins in the *teacher as researcher* movement which is presently popular among English (language arts) teachers. Branching off from naturalistic inquiry and ethnography is action research, research that does not separate the investigation from the actions needed to solve a problem (pioneered by Kurt Lewin in the 1940s, as described by McFarland and Stansell, 1993). It seems plausible that the successes that teachers of English have experienced can be shared with and emulated by speech-language pathologists.

### WHAT DOES PRACTITIONER AS RESEARCHER MEAN?

Practitioners who research learn to see their jobs and profession through an inquiry stance. Often practitioner research is stimulated by a need to understand the individuals, actions, events, and policies that make up one's work environment (Patterson and Shannon, 1993). A practitioner researcher may wish to examine her own professional decisions, learn about herself as a therapist, or learn about the experiences of the persons for whom she provides therapy. Goals are likely to include a desire to improve therapy practices and therapy environments and to improve career satisfaction and professional development.

\*Monica Gordon Pershey, Ed.D., CCC-SLP is an Assistant Professor of Speech and Hearing at Cleveland State University in Cleveland, Ohio. She is the new editor of School Forum for *HEARSAY*.

Practitioner research differs from clinical research because of one main element: practitioner research involves personal reflection on one's own professional practice. Schon (1988) describes three ways that reflection on professional practice typically occurs. First, a practitioner may *reflect in action*. This occurs when we see ourselves in the middle of a professional action. For example, while working on articulation therapy with a child, a therapist may decide that her decision to move from reinforcing a sound in the word initial position to introducing the sound in inter-syllabic position has proven too difficult for the child. She may decide to continue to work with the child on producing the sound in the initial position for the rest of the session to offer the child a sense of success. When a therapist is carefully watching what is going on during practice and either maintains or adjusts her procedure, this is *reflection in action*.

Schon (1988) also describes *reflection on action*. A common example of this happens during the daily drive home from work, as we reflect on the day's events and plan for the next day: "We had great participation in the preschool language group, I think I'll use the same approach to maintain their attention tomorrow . . . the kindergartners are ready for medial /s/ . . . I need to think of something new to try with the second graders . . ." Reflection after practice has occurred is *reflection on action*.

A third type of reflection is *reflection on practice*. When a practitioner considers larger issues that affect her own practices as well as that of other practitioners she has *reflected on practice*. These include concerns such as departmental budgets, policies to place children out of district, school assignments for district SLPs, governmental regulations that affect district inclusion policies, or caseload size legislation.

## INFORMAL REFLECTIVE RESEARCH

In response to these forms of reflection, a practitioner may choose to research informally by engaging in further reading, talking, and writing about professional practice. The research may include solo written reflection, such as keeping a personal journal, creating a professional portfolio, or writing memoirs. Or it may involve writing and group reflection, as in a dialogue journal or polylog (a notebook for collaborative reflection on practice, passed from therapist to therapist). Through these means therapists think about, learn from, and analyze their professional experiences in order to optimize growth for themselves and facilitate clients' progress. Subjectivity as well as objectivity are valued. This reflective inquiry may be an end in itself or may serve as a preliminary stage to preparing essays or presentations that share one's own reflections or to formulating more formal research questions.

Basic to most ethnographic research is a journal that is kept by the researcher to record observations, events, and reflections. As Isakson and Williams (1996) describe, journals can have various "jobs" such as:

*Bookkeeper:* to keep track of what one has done and aims to do better, e.g., enhancing service

*Mentor/friend:* for self-reflection, confiding thoughts and feelings

*Peer learner:* to serve as an example to others and see their examples (dialogue, polylog)

*Detective:* searching to see what makes sense in therapy practices; seeking the answer to phenomena in the environment

*Cheerleader:* to keep one going when feeling down, losing sight of progress—to maintain one's self as a practitioner

*Story teller:* the story of trying something new; the story of a child or family; the story of how a child learned or made progress; autobiographies

*Think books:* write reflectively and repeatedly on a certain topic with later analysis and editing for recurrent themes

## WHAT (OR WHO) ARE THE SUBJECTS OF MORE FORMAL PRACTITIONER RESEARCH?

Reflective inquiry may guide speech-language pathologists to research people and events in their own settings or those of others. A decision on the degree of subjectivity and objectivity that is appropriate for a given study needs to be made. In general, school therapists are likely to explore:

*Therapy practices*—(materials, strategies, models, interventions, curricula);

*Children*—single children or populations of any number (to generate numerical data or anecdotal observations of performance);

*Environments*—(therapy settings, classrooms, schools, districts, peers or teams, policies, families, communities);

*Program evaluation*—(outcomes, supervision and/or evaluation practices, time usage and scheduling patterns, data sets like test scores);

*Artifacts*—(items in the therapy environment, such as curriculum guides, policy statements, children's work samples or portfolios, IEPs; also building layout, room arrangement, contents of therapy room; other documents on hand).

## WHAT ARE SOME OF THE MOST COMMON FORMS OF RESEARCH USED BY PRACTITIONERS?

Practitioner researchers explore their worlds through a variety of means which may include:

**Case studies:** Observations of a child, a group of children, a class, or a school are recorded and analyzed. The researcher may be an outside observer or a participant in the setting where the study is taking place. Data collection should entail more than one form of observation and address how observations correlate. For example, video tapes of a child's behaviors are analyzed and correlated with performance on certain test items. Comparisons of two or more cases may yield additional information.

**Opinion research:** Interviews, discussions, conferences, surveys, questionnaires, opinionnaires, and inventories are conducted to document how students, parents, peers, and other professional associates perceive issues and practices. The findings are analyzed and reflected upon by the researcher.

**Developing and implementing new models of therapy:** Speech-language pathologists, either alone or on a team, establish a model that they believe they'd like to adopt. Initial consultation with users and researchers of this model may take place. Therapists may read about the model and attend conferences or workshops; electronic news groups may be consulted to solicit other views; parent input may be considered. Minutes of meetings and summaries of interactions and readings are kept. The strength of these data will suggest whether the decision to implement a new model is based on well-founded information. Presentations to administrators or parent groups should be solid. This is persuasive as well as informative evidence that can lead to program design, development, and implementation. (See Donahue, 1996.)

**Materials analysis:** To evaluate the utility of new material(s), practitioners prepare a summary of interviews with children, parents, and other practitioners which describe their impressions of the materials. This may be done prior to adopting new materials or may be a pre-post usage comparison.

**Vignette writing:** Persons who have participated in an experience designed to bring about some form of development or enhancement write out a short vignette that recounts a key episode in this experience and reflect on what this event has meant to them. For example, participants in a parent group write a vignette about the most important thing they learned in parent group, how they felt on that day, and why it made the parent group meaningful. Researchers analyze the vignettes for common themes and use this information to enhance future programming.

**Outcome data analysis:** A collection of data is analyzed and overall comparisons and trends are determined. For example, an intervention team meets to review children's test and retest scores over the past three years. Gains in a particular area, for instance, receptive vocabulary, are noted since special needs teachers have started using a computer-based reading-writing program. Team members review published research on this program and compare all of their outcome data with published reports, noting overall comparisons and trends.

**Manuals, therapy materials, websites, etc.:** Speech-language pathologists may develop innovations to enhance practice and make these available to a wider audience via publication or internet posting.

**Single subject experimental research (Neuman & McCormick, 1995):** This form of research differs from a case study in that the researcher deliberately manipulates conditions, for example alternating treatments, to generate causal or correlational information.

**Historical studies:** These comparison of past and present practices, issues, beliefs, etc. may shed light on present day events.

**Literature reviews:** A synthesis of published research on a given topic or question to offer a summary of current information.

**Focus groups:** Practitioners who are invested in an issue, practice, or plan meet for discussion and preparation of a monograph, report, position paper, or article on the matter. This is informative rather than persuasive writing and may require that the researcher include opinion research, literature review, data analysis, or case information to complete their report.

**Outreach:** Newsletters, letters to the editor, articles in the popular press, and posting internet information on important speech-language topics require considerable research and preparation to achieve accuracy and provide information value.

## HOW DOES ONE FIND AND FRAME A RESEARCH QUESTION?

Hubbard and Power (1993) suggest that practitioner researchers *wander to get in touch with wondering*. Thinking freely, allowing curiosity to lead to exploration, and reflecting on action and on practice alone or in conversation with colleagues may lead a practitioner to discover a question that he or she would like to try to answer. A practitioner may journal or note take for a while and look for themes that keep coming up. Questions may gradually and take on different forms as they are reconsidered over time. Pointers to stimulate reflection may include:

1. Observe a situation and look for trends that may lead to research.
2. Consider a current dilemma; think about what is causing tension.
3. Acknowledge questions that arise regarding models of practice, testing, inclusion, materials usage, writing IEPs, etc.
4. Ponder what is important to one's service delivery—address a felt need.
5. Think about visions of change.
6. Think about comparisons that can be made.
7. Consider big issues as well as smaller, more specific problems.
8. Explore what staff development initiatives are happening at work? What aspects of staff development matter most at this worksite?
9. Does a professional association have research needs?
10. Think about what is effective practice and what is not—how is this documented and described?
11. Are there relationships between events that can be examined?
12. What new approaches might be tried as an experiment?

13. Are there problems for which solutions might be found?
14. What training or skills might be acquired—how might a practitioner write about this process?
15. Think about questions that have more than “yes” or “no” answers.
16. Draft questions using good openers: “What happens when . . .” “What is the role of . . .” “How do . . .” “What procedures . . .” “What is the difference . . .”

And then ask yourself:

Does the question fit with local conditions?

What sort of workplace support is there for this inquiry? Time? Money? Assistance? Equipment?

Specifically, how broad or narrow is the question? What are the parameters of the investigation? What is beyond the scope of this investigation?

Are these questions somewhat proximal to your current level of learning? Does your knowledge, by and large, approach what you will need to know to begin?

Are your expectations reasonable—not too big?

Does your inquiry pose any risk?

How will you celebrate your benchmarks and successes?

Who can you get to review and react to your work while it is in progress or when it's completed?

How and where will you share your findings?

## **THIS SEEMS LIKE A LOT TO TAKE ON—WHY ARE PRACTITIONERS BECOMING RESEARCHERS IN THEIR OWN ENVIRONMENTS?**

As the saying goes, knowledge is power. The benefits of practitioner research are many, but foremost a practitioner researcher may find new understanding, contribute to the knowledge base of the profession, and participate in the discourse of the profession. (See Mohr, 1996.) Professional growth, career satisfaction, and credibility in the eyes of education administrators and community members appear to be three main reasons why practitioners are engaging in research. A practitioner researcher's goals may include:

### *Professional growth and career satisfaction*

To collaborate to achieve success; to work together to achieve outcomes that are more difficult to achieve alone

To build a reflective professional environment

To be empowered to ask why (or how, what, etc.) on one's own terms

To make a difference

To enjoy work more—workplace enhancement

To engage in lifelong learning and model this to children, to colleagues, to parents

To renew inspiration—a need for rejuvenation

To bring variety, challenge, growth

### *Credibility*

To find voice, communicate, and be heard in a school community

To enhance visibility for speech-language pathology in the eyes of the administration and/or community

To affect bureaucratic and policy decisions

To foster change and utilize new approaches

To examine the effects of practices

To evaluate professional performance of one's self, peers, subordinates, or superiors

To critique practices and policies

To document outcomes.

## **WHAT RESOURCES (ARTICLES, BOOKS, AND OTHER PUBLICATIONS) CAN BE CONSULTED TO LEARN HOW TO BECOME A PRACTITIONER RESEARCHER? WHAT SOURCES OF SUPPORT EXIST FOR PRACTITIONER RESEARCH?**

ERIC has published tens of thousands of entries that, in some way, address practitioner research in educational environments. It is also possible to: Form consultation networks with peers; enroll in college courses; attend seminars and conferences; join professional organizations and help meet their research needs; seek research awards and grant funding at the local level; access information electronically through websites, newsgroups, e-mail list serves.

Practitioner research can improve both the practices used with children with speech and language needs as well as the learning environments in which these children are receive services. It can improve job satisfaction for you and for your colleagues. It can serve to verify efficacy of treatment for other clinicians, for administrators, for the general public. In short, it may provide just the intellectual and affective renewal that's needed to keep the clinician looking forward in the challenging environment of today's schools.

## **REFERENCES**

- Donahue, Z. (1996). Collaboration, community, and communication: Models of discourse for teacher research. In Donahue, Z., Van Tassel, M.A., & Patterson, J. (Eds.), *Research in the classroom: talk, texts, and inquiry*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Hubbard & Powell (1993).

Isakson, M.B. & Williams, D.D. (1996). Allowing space for not knowing: A dialogue about teachers' journals. In Donahue, Z., Van Tassell, M.A., & Patterson, L. (Eds.), *Research in the classroom: talk, texts, and inquiry*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

McFarland, K.P. & Stansell, J.C. (1993). Historical perspectives. In Patterson, L., Santa, C.M., Short, K.G., & Smith, K. (Eds.), *Teachers are researchers: Reflection and action*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Mohr, M.M. (1996). Wild dreams and sober cautions: The future of teacher research. In Donahue, Z., Van Tassell, M.A., & Patterson, L. (Eds.), *Research in the classroom: talk, texts, and inquiry*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Neuman, S.B. & McCormick, S. (1995). *Single subject experimental research: Applications for literacy*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Patterson, L. & Shannon, P. (1993). Reflection, inquiry, action. In Patterson, L., Santa, C.M., Short, K.G., & Smith, K. (Eds.), *Teachers are researchers: Reflection and action*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Schon, D.A. (1988). *Educating the reflective practitioner*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

## RELATED READINGS

Bissex, G.L. & Bullock, R.H. (Eds.). (1987). *Seeing for ourselves: Case-study research by teachers of writing*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Blum, R.E. & Arter, J.A. (1996). *A handbook for student performance assessment in an era of restructuring*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Caine, R.N. & Caine, G. (1997). *Education on the edge of possibility*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Carroll, D. & Carini, P. (1991). Tapping teachers' knowledge. In Perrone, V. (Ed.), *Expanding student assessment*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Colorado Council for Learning Disabilities. *Research in the classroom. Fifth annual report of research projects conducted by educators in their classrooms*. Denver: Colorado State, Dept. of Education, Div. of Special Education Services. (ERIC Document ED347765)

Dahl, K.L. (1992). *Teacher as writer: Entering the professional conversation*. Urbana, IL: NCTE.

Fulwiler, T. (1987). *The journal book*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

Glesne, C. & Peshkin, A. (1992). *Becoming qualitative researchers: An introduction*. White Plains, NY: Longman.

Guice, S., Don Vito-Mac Phee, V., Whipple, M. (1996). Suggestions for fostering teacher researchers. *Reading Today*, 13(5), p. 14.

Hargreaves, A. (1997). *ASCD Yearbook: Rethinking educational change with heart and mind*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Jacobs, H.H. (1997). *Mapping the big picture: Integrating curriculum and assessment K-12*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Jalongo, M.R. & Isenberg, J.P. (1997). *Teachers' stories: From personal narrative to professional insight*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Joyce, B. & Showers, B. (1988). *Student achievement through staff development*. New York: Longman.

Lincoln, Y.S. & Guba, E.G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Marzano, R.J. & Kendall, J.S. (1996). *A comprehensive guide to designing standards-based districts, schools, and classrooms*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Merriam, S.B. (1997). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Miller, J.L. (1996). *Creating spaces and finding voices: Teachers collaborating for empowerment*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Nelson, N.W. (1996). Seven habits of highly effective change agents (with apologies to Stephen Covey): Focusing on the needs of school-age students. *Hearsay, The Journal of the Ohio Speech and Hearing Association*, 11(1), 11-25.

Patterson, L. (1996). Reliving the learning: learning from classroom talk and texts. In Donahue, Z., Van Tassell, M.A., & Patterson, L. (Eds.), *Research in the classroom: talk, texts, and inquiry*. Newark, DE: International Reading Association.

Perrone, V. (1991). *Expanding student assessment*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Pershey, M.G. (1997). Research in literacy: A report of the 1996 conference session presented by the Studies and Research Committee of the Ohio Council of the International Reading Association. *Ohio Reading Teacher*, 31(4), 96-100.

Pershey, M.G. (1997). *Teachers as researchers: An expanding role for special needs educators*. Paper presented at the annual conference of the International Dyslexia Association, Minneapolis, MN, November 15, 1997.

Pershey, M.G. (1997). Research in literacy: A report of the 1997 conference session presented by the Studies and Research Committee of the Ohio Council of the International Reading Association. *Ohio Reading Teacher*, in press.

Pomperaug Connecticut Regional School District. (1996). *A teacher's guide to performance-based learning and assessment*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Silliman, E. et al. (1993). Documenting authentic progress in language and literacy learning: Collaborative assessment in classrooms. *Topics in Language Disorders*, 14(1), 58-71.

Sparks, D. & Hirsch, S. (1997). *A new vision for staff development*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Thomas, S. & Oldfather, P. (1995). Enhancing student and teacher engagement in literacy learning: A shared inquiry approach. *The Reading Teacher*, 49, (3), 192-202.

Wells, G. et al. (1994). *Changing schools from within: Creating communities of inquiry*. Toronto: Ontario Institute for Studies in Education Press.

Witherell, C. & Noddings, N. (Eds.). (1991). *Stories lives tell: Narrative and dialogue in education*. New York: Teachers College Press.