

(NA)PLAN for Success

October 27, 2015

Term 4 is in full swing and the anxiety surrounding NAPLAN tests (May 2016) seems far away. However, sobering results from the latest research by Charles Sturt University may get you thinking:

- Children with speech and language problems scored achieved much lower scores on all areas (reading, writing, spelling, grammar and numeracy) at years 3, 5 and 7 compared to their classmates. This remained true even when taking into account hearing problems, disability, language background other than English, socio-economic position and sex.
- Students with both expressive (using) and receptive (understanding) language difficulties had the poorest results.
- Children with speech and language impairments across the country achieved lower scores, and the ‘gap’ in outcomes did not appear to close over time.
- Most students with communication difficulties had not seen a speech pathologist.

In Speech Pathology Australia’s (SPA) recent submission to the Senate on access and attainment for school students with communication disability and the impact of inadequate support for these families, the authors differentiate between individuals whose only disability is speech, language or communication and those who have complex communication needs, ie. additional difficulties. Although ‘disability’ is a confronting label when describing ‘invisible’ communication problems, it should be considered appropriate as there is overwhelming evidence that the effects are significant, wide-ranging and long-term.

- Read the earlier article ‘Language: The Key to Unlocking Life’s Doors’ for more details about the consequences of language impairment.

In Victoria, it is currently very difficult for students with severe language disability alone to receive individualised targeted funding support through the Program for Students with Disabilities (PSD) as the child must show problems across several areas, instead of significant difficulties in one area (language). The requirements are at odds with national and international recommendations for diagnosis of a severe language disorder. The government does provide funding through the Language Support Program to support schools to educate students with communication impairments however how the money is spent is not closely regulated.

A widespread issue within the education system is that considerations and modifications often only apply to students with disability who receive funding. This disadvantages ‘unfunded’ students and places significant strain on schools and support staff to manage the educational requirements of all students with disabilities with only direct funding for a few.

Current access to the education systems, as measured by enrolment of students with communication disability, is generally good. Participation, however, requires improvement. While no single adaptation or strategy for educating these students can be appropriate or compulsory, SPA recommends that speech pathologists and other support team members be included in planning when reasonable adjustments are being made for a student. Feedback from Australian “speechies” indicates that there is huge variability in the standard of

transition planning for students with disability. Important transitions include transition from preschool to Prep and transitions from year to year.

In Victoria, the creation of 'transition statements' by kindergarten teachers/parents or use of the English Online Interview are examples of highly important processes that support children with disability (and indeed all children) during the transition into Prep. The one-to-one interview between teacher and student (in person, not on the internet) allows the teacher to identify the child's needs and establish what modifications may be required to improve access and participation in primary school. The crucial step however is that the new teacher reads and understands the transition statement or the teacher interprets and uses the outcomes of the English Online Interview to make adjustments for that child.

To be continued...



<http://www.smh.com.au/nsw/naplan-controversy-forces-change-to-writing-test-20150211-13bl6x.html>

Reference:

Speech Pathology Australia's submission to the Senate Education and Employment References Committee

<http://www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/library/submissions/SPA%20Feedback%20Senate%20Inquiry%20Students%20with%20Disability%20final.pdf>

Vince Borg, Sarah Young, Vicky Andrews and Emma Lorenzin all have a special interest in speech development and language difficulty. Book your child an appointment with a speech therapist at Box Hill Speech Pathology Clinic on (03) 9899 5494 or direct your child speech therapy questions to enquiries@speech-therapy.com.au.

By Nicola Anglin (Speech Pathologist)