An Interdisciplinary Training Program in Stuttering: Raising Awareness and Changing Attitudes

Stephanie Hughes, Ph.D.; Rodney Gabel, Ph.D.; Christopher Roseman, Ph.D., PC-CR; Derek Daniels, Ph.D.

INTRODUCTION

Research has consistently found that PWS of all ages are viewed in a negative and stereotypical manner by a variety of professionals, including speech-language pathologists (SLPs), teachers, and rehabilitation counselors, as well as the general population (Craig, et al., 2003; Evans, Heath, Kearny, & Yaruss, 2008; Hughes, Gabel, Irani, & Schlacheg, 2010). Little data exists regarding the perceptions of school counselors toward PWS, though St. Louis and Lass (1981) found that most university students in a speech-language pathology program did not believe that school counselors were aware of the psychological ramifications of stuttering and believed that counseling children who stutter (CWS) should be the exclusive domain of SLPs.

This perception is unfortunate, as CWS could benefit from the support of numerous school professionals. Students who stutter seem to be at particularly high risk for poor social relationships with fellow students. Peers perceive CWS to be less popular than classmates who do not stutter (Davis, Howell, & Cooke, 2002), and a growing body of research indicates that the lives of CWS are adversely affected by school bullying (Blood & Blood, 2004; Davis et al., 2002; Hughes-Jones & Smith, 1999; Langevity, Bortnick, Hammer, & Weibe, 1998). Children who are bullied tend to experience depression, physical illness, anxiety, and sleep disorders (Fero, McCullian, Rissel, & Bauman, 1995); they also have high absenteeism rates from school (Swearengin, 2011) and at increased risk for poor academic performance (Glew, et al., 2005).

PURPOSE

This project used an intensive stuttering clinic for CWS as a means of collecting data not only on the effectiveness of the clinic, but on the ways in which collaborative relationships between SLPs and school counselors can be facilitated in graduate training programs. The overarching goals of the project were to educate graduate students in SLP and school counseling programs about stuttering in general, help them to recognize the potential for collaboration between SLPs and school counselors, and provide them with the opportunity to see firsthand the social and emotional effects of stuttering for CWS and their parents.

METHODS

Description of the Fluency Program

The Intensive Stuttering Clinic for Children and their Families (ISCCF) provides services for children ages 8-12. As is consistent with the evidence-base for providing treatment for children who stutter, the program teaches children about stuttering, addresses negative attitudes and feelings about speaking, teaches better means of coping with stuttering, and helps children learn techniques for speaking more fluently (Runyan & Runyan, 2007; Langevity, Kuly, & Ross-Harold, 2007). The ISCCF also seeks to foster social skills development, promote emotional resiliency, and ameliorate the negative effects of bullying for children who stutter (Langevity et al., 2007; Murphy, Yaruss, & Quesal, 2007a, b). Enjoyable activities such as crafts, scientific projects, and games were integrated into group and individual therapy.

Student Participants and their Roles in the Clinic

SLP Students

8 graduate students (all female) assigned to the ISCCF as a clinic placement participated in the study.

• Prior to the study, they completed a pre-clinic survey and attended 1 hour seminar on the roles and responsibilities of school counselors presented by the 3rd author, a licensed clinical counselor.

• They conducted 6 hours of therapy daily during the 8-day clinic.

• Students completed a post-clinic survey and wrote a reflection paper at the end of the clinic.

School Counseling Students

8 school counseling graduate students (2 male, 6 female) were recruited from counseling classes taught by the 3rd author.

• Prior to the study, they took the pre-clinic survey, watched the video “Transcending Stuttering” and viewed a narrated PowerPoint presentation on stuttering basics presented by the 1st author, an SLP.

• Students observed 10 hours of therapy, often engaging in hands-on activities with the children (e.g., serving as conversational partners, playing games).

• Students completed a post-clinic survey and wrote a reflection paper at the end of the clinic.

Data Analysis

Data were primarily qualitative (open-ended pre- and post-clinic survey questions and reflection papers); however, some questions on the post-clinic survey were quantitative. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data is ongoing, though a review of students’ post-clinic reflection papers indicated some commonalities that are presented in the results section.

RESULTS

Both qualitative and quantitative results are presented here. Note that direct quotes from student participants are for some of the thematic analysis.

Overall, students felt more prepared to work with CWS after participating in the clinic:

SLP students received support from student counselors:

• “When I had concerns about my client’s home life, they were there to answer my questions…it was very nice to have an additional support system for those topics that [SLP] students are not as familiar with.”

• They also were very helpful on the day that bullying was addressed. They assisted in setting up role-playing activities which were very beneficial for the children.”

• “Overall, I had a good experience with the counselors and felt they had great ideas for getting the children involved in activities related to bullying.”

• “I learned a lot about stuttering from them, both technically and emotionally. I am hoping to take this experience with me and remember what I need to implement in my school as a future counselor.”

• “Before I began my observations, I was under the impression that individuals who stutter had this disorder due to social anxiety. I admit I was a bit naıve to the mechanics of the disorder and had little experience with it. Within the first 15 minutes at the clinic when the clients were playing group Jeopardy I discovered that I was dead wrong.”

DISCUSSION

School counseling and SLP graduate students seemed to develop a new appreciation for each others’ disciplines during an intensive clinic for CWS. Both groups of students expressed an interest in working together in the future and agreed that both school counselors and SLPs can play a role in helping CWS navigate the school environment.

Despite possible responses to the collaboration, students of both disciplines offered suggestions for improvement, which are presented here as considerations for faculty at other universities who may wish to implement a similar program:

• Clarify the roles of the student counselors for everyone. Are they to observe only, serve as conversational partners, or counsel students only?

• Counseling students are trained to value rapport-building and appropriate termination of services. Carefully plan introductions of students to each other and to clients, as well as leave taking of counseling students

• Student clinicians and CWS may become overwhelmed if too many school counseling students become directly involved in therapy at one time.

REFERENCES


