The Paraprofessional’s Role in School-based Telepractice
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Background

Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) involved in school-based telepractice programs depend on on-site support personnel, known as paraprofessionals or facilitators, for assistance during therapy sessions. According to ASHA, it is the SLP’s responsibility to train and supervise paraprofessionals to ensure that telepractice therapy meets the standards as in-person (ASHA, 2005a).

The purpose of this project is to:
• collect information through a Qualtrics survey administered to EC Department paraprofessionals and paraprofessionals actively involved in school-based telepractice programs. The survey consisted of seven to eleven open-ended short answer questions that focused on personal experiences with paraprofessionals and their role in telepractice.
• develop a manual to discuss the following topics:
  • Benefits & Limitations of Telepractice
  • General TeleSpeech Policies & Procedures
  • Telepractice Equipment
  • TeleSpeech Space in the School
  • Documentation & Methods of Communication
  • Basic Speech-Language Therapy Format
  • Potential Student Population
  • Therapy Materials
  • Facilitating TeleSpeech & IEP Meetings
  • Behavioral Management
  • Telepractice Paraprofessional Skills/Qualities
  • The Paraprofessional’s Impact on therapy sessions.

Survey questions were developed for school administrators, SLPs, and paraprofessionals actively involved in school-based telepractice programs. The survey consisted of seven to eleven open-ended short answer questions that focused on personal experiences with paraprofessionals and their role in telepractice.

Survey responses indicate that paraprofessionals involved in telepractice programs have unique responsibilities due to distance and equipment. In NC, EC departments hire paraprofessionals, and SLPs are responsible for their training and supervision. Paraprofessionals are expected to follow telepractice and specific policies and procedures; they may serve as the therapists’ eyes, ears, and hands on location during sessions.

In the future, the online manual will promote:
• increase in school administrators knowledge of telepractice
• refinement of the recruitment and hiring process for telepractice paraprofessionals
• enhancement of supervision and training of the paraprofessional.

Methods

Participants

• Four SLPs (three female, one male)
• Three school administrators (two female, one male)
• One paraprofessional (female)

The survey became available to members of ASHA’s SIG 18 as a word document in mid-October 2012. Flyers were distributed at North Carolina’s ASHA convention in mid-November to promote project awareness. Emails were then sent directly to five school administrators, five SLPs, and three paraprofessionals involved in the University of North Carolina at Greensboro’s North Campus telepractice programs. In early January 2013, the survey became available and was distributed electronically through Qualtrics.com. Additional prospective participants were contacted through telephone calls, emails, and webposts. Follow-ups were conducted via telephone.

The manual will serve as a training resource for schools, SLPs, and paraprofessionals.

Color-Coded Sample Survey Responses

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Paraprofessional</th>
<th>SLP</th>
<th>School Administrator</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q: What criteria would you establish for individuals who want to be paraprofessionals?</td>
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<td>“They need to be well organized, prompt, and able to communicate with the SLP, students, and staff.”</td>
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<td>Organized, punctual, professional speaking and writing skills, positive and enthusiastic attitude, able to compromise and work as a ‘team player’, willing to problem-solve, resourceful, willing to approach new responsibilities with a positive attitude, knowledgeable of the site and resources at the site where telepractice will be provided.”</td>
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<td>The person needs to enjoy the population served… [and have] willingness to follow policies and procedures and protect people’s personal health information.”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“A two year degree and criminal background check.”</td>
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Tips/Suggestions for effective behavioral management and equipment use:

“I watched the behavior of the student for a couple of sessions, then gave my opinion on what things we could do to improve the behavior for that student…”

“You need good computer service. Having a big screen TV is helpful. Find a quiet sound proof room you can stay in and not be moved. You also need to have access to a fax machine and restroom.”

“Under the direction of the SLP the paraprofessional can check with the teacher about ways to handle behavior problems… make changes to the environment to minimize distractions or enhance attention, such as moving the child closer to the monitor.”

“It is essential that the paraprofessional receive training about how to give adequate feedback about the quality of the image and sound to the SLP and technology support personnel…”

Discussion

Survey responses indicate that paraprofessionals involved in telepractice programs have unique responsibilities due to distance and equipment. In NC, EC departments hire paraprofessionals, and SLPs are responsible for their training and supervision. Paraprofessionals are expected to follow telepractice and specific policies and procedures; they may serve as the therapists’ eyes, ears, and hands on location during sessions.

In the future, the online manual will promote:
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References


