Children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs: Challenging the role of Educational Psychologists

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Children with Speech, Language and Communication Needs; challenging the role of Educational Psychologists

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Aims of the presentation:

To introduce a framework to support EPs in developing provision for children with SLCN

- Rationale
- Methodology
- Examples of how the results from Phase 1 and Phase 2 were integrated
- Next steps
Who are the children with SLCN:

- Umbrella term used to describe a range of difficulties:
  - Expressive difficulties
  - Receptive difficulties
  - Pragmatic difficulties
  - Speech difficulties
  - SLCN as a secondary need:
    - ASC
    - Cerebral Palsy
    - Hearing Impairments
    - Acquired brain injuries

- DfE definition is a primary educational need of speech, language and communication *but excludes those who have associated difficulties, e.g. ASC*
  - Is this a shared definition of SLCN amongst schools? Local Authority?
Why consider children with SLCN?

• Nationally, 30.6% of children with SEN identified of having a primary need of SLCN in state funded primaries (DfE 2013)
• In the local area, in 2013 there were 1149 children identified as having a primary need of SLCN at SA+ or Statement
• SLCN can impact on:
  – Academic attainment
  – Ability to acquire literacy skills
  – Writing
  – Numeracy
  – Working memory
  – Executive functioning
  – Increased prevalence of psychiatric disorders
  – Peer relationships
  – Self-esteem
  – Behaviour
    • Important to think about the nature of the need
The implications of the SEND reforms on children with SLCN

• Changes to classification may mean that children with SLCN are not identified on the SEN register
• Increases variability and inconsistencies in how children with SLCN are supported between local authorities
• Emphasis on effective quality first teaching and evidence-based interventions, is this possible for children with SLCN?
What do we currently know?

- The negative outcomes associated with SLCN
- Not a homogenous group
- Mainly educated in mainstream schools
- Oral language skills can be supported through
  - High quality language learning environment
  - Opportunities to develop and practice skills, with peers and adults
  - Interactions with adults which enhance expressive and receptive language skills
- Children with SLCN value being happy, having fun and friends (not interested in school based targets)
- Parents of children with SLCN value their children having opportunities to be included, for them to be happy and to be independent
- Difficulties in joint working between health, LA and schools
- Difficulties in LAs collecting meaningful data
- EPs have little involvement, especially past the assessment stage
What do we know less about?

- What does effective provision look like?
- Is the abundance of research into SLCN translated into practice?
- If so, how?
- If not, what is then actually happening in the classroom?
- What are the different influences which are impacting on provision?
Investigating provision for children with SLCN

• Systemic viewpoint

• Three main research questions:
  
  – RQ1: What are the characteristics of effective provision for supporting children with SLCN?
  
  – RQ2: How is provision for children with SLCN realised in practice?
  
  – RQ3: How can the characteristics of effective provision and how provision is realised in practice inform a framework for EPs in supporting provision for children with SLCN?
Overarching Methodology

Phase 1 - Exploring Professionals’ Perspectives
- EP Focus Group
- SaLT Focus Group
- STT Focus Group

Phase 2 - SLCN Provision in Practice
- Questionnaires for children with SLCN
- Parental focus groups
- School based questionnaires
- Classroom observations

RQ1
RQ2
RQ3

Framework for EP Practice
Rationale for developing the framework:

- To facilitate the EP role in working with a highly prevalent population of children
- To give EPs a structured approach to consider the effectiveness of existing provision for children with SLCN
- Structured to take into account the complex, inter-relating systems which influence and impact on provision
- To bridge the theory into practice
Institute of Education

- school ethos
- responsibility for children with SLCN

- professional support
- awareness and understanding of SLCN

- home/school relationships
- parental strengths
- roles and responsibilities

- classroom support
- interventions
- child’s views
- peer relationships

- teacher talk
- classroom environment
- literacy
- opportunities to develop language

- language learning over time
- peer relationships

- increasing demands
- support over time
Micro-system: Interventions

• Phase 1:
  – Differences as to what constituted an intervention
  – Differences in recommendations of interventions, classroom practice versus named interventions
  – Inclusion versus withdrawal or response to intervention?

• Phase 2:
  – Named interventions suggested by the professionals did not appear to be used, or perceived to be effective
  – Evidence base relatively unimportant
  – Important that children are motivated and have a positive relationship with facilitators
  – Parents often unaware of the additional support the child receives
Interventions Dimension

- What additional support is available for children with SLCN and what informs the additional support they receive?
- For the additional support that is provided, what steps are taken to establish the evidence base?
- What steps are taken to monitor / investigate the child’s response to the additional support?
- How are the desired outcomes for the additional support discussed with the child and their parents?
Micro-system: Literacy

• Phase 1:
  – Professionals identified the link between language difficulties and literacy difficulties

• Phase 2:
  – Children identified that writing was difficult
  – School staff identified that literacy was an area that children with SLCN may find difficult
  – In the classroom, opportunities to develop and practice literacy skills were not always utilised, e.g. interactive book reading or literacy-specific areas
Literacy Dimension

- How are teachers’ and children’s concerns about literacy progress for children with SLCN recorded, and what measures are in place to address any issues that are reported?
- How is the classroom environment utilised to promote literacy skills?
- What different opportunities are there during the school day to develop literacy skills, and how do you know that children with SLCN are being exposed to this?
Meso-system: Home/School Involvement

• **Phase 1:**
  – Professionals described that it was important that parents could be involved in children’s learning
  – Professionals described that the relationship between home and school was often negative and that schools did not appear to seek the views

• **Phase 2:**
  – Parents described how they appreciated being involved with school but did not always know the best ways to support their children at home
  – Parents often unaware of the provision, but this does not seem to matter as long as the child is making progress
Home/school Involvement Dimension

- What steps does the school take to obtain the parents perspective of their child’s provision?
- In what ways does the school involve parents with opportunities to support their children with learning at home, and what support does the school give the parents to help them do this?
- What processes are in place to resolve negative feedback from parents?
- In addition to parent’s evenings, what regular feedback is in place to ensure the provision is meeting the parent’s expectations?
Exo-system: Awareness and Understanding of SLCN

• Phase 1:
  – Professionals felt that it was important that school staff have a thorough understanding of SLCN
  – But, does this lead to effective provision?
  – Professionals felt that training was crucial
  – But, does this lead to a change in practice?
  – Important that knowledge is disseminated to other professionals

• Phase 2:
  – School staff had mixed views as to the impact of SLCN
  – School staff did not appear to feel particularly confident or knowledgeable
  – Espoused theory versus theory in use, for example the use of visuals
Awareness and Understanding of SLCN Dimension

- What steps does the school take to track the skills of school staff and identify any potential gaps in knowledge related to SLCN?
- In what ways does the school raise awareness and knowledge of SLCN, and how do they monitor the effectiveness of this?
- When school staff have received additional training, what steps does the school take to explore how the training and impacted on changing practice?
- What support does the school offer staff in order to ensure that knowledge is disseminated to other members, how do they know that this has happened?
Macro-system: Responsibility for children with SLCN

• Phase 1:
  – Professionals appeared to have differing perspectives on whose responsibility it is to support some children with SLCN
  – Issues with inappropriate referrals

• Phase 2:
  – Parents identified that they would like to see teachers taking a greater responsibility in supporting their child’s needs
Responsibility for Children with SLCN Dimension

- In what ways does the school liaise with the Local Authority and NHS to identify the agency responsible for SLCN provision?
- What local and national guidance does the school have access to which aims to support SLCN provision?
- What changes need to occur at a whole school level to allow teachers to have greater responsibility for children with SLCN?
Next steps:

- Feasibility study
  - Review and reflect on the dimensions
  - Review and reflect on the questions
  - User feedback
- Iteratively refine questions based on real world usage
- Assessing applicability to other local authorities
What this research adds:

- An assimilated view of provision for children with SLCN
- A means of positioning Educational Psychologists in supporting children with SLCN
Thank you for listening!
Any questions?

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