

Southeast Regional Psychology Meeting Minutes

Date: September 29, 2023

Location: Sunrise School Division

Hosts: Laura Sander, Jonathan Cooper, Christy Geith, Kim Young, Julie Comte, & Chantal Shilliday (remote)

1. **Selective Mutism Presentation:** Laura Sander gave an outstanding presentation for the group that included pertinent information from the research literature, along with first-hand experience about the therapeutic process using two case studies. After reading the book “Unlocking the Mystery of Selective Mutism and Social Anxiety” and studying an accompanying 6-hour DVD, both by Aimee Kotrba, Laura started treating students with the disorder. She recommended a systematic behavior therapy method, not a CBT approach. Several therapeutic components include: (a) building rapport, (b) psychoeducation, (c) teaching self-assessment of anxiety, and (d) desensitization, which includes gradually shaping verbal behavior using games, patiently waiting, and positive reinforcement, followed by gradually fading environmental stimuli to help generalize new verbal behaviors across different people and settings. In addition, reducing inadvertent parental accommodation of their child's avoidant behaviors, and adaptations (e.g., selective seating, videotaping, transitioning) are helpful.
2. **Literacy Approaches:**
 - **DSFM:**
 - Slowly transitioning from *Balanced Literacy* to *Structured Literacy*.
 - Psychology is not heavily involved/consulted in this transition process.
 - Psychology created an informal screening assessment process, with components such as phonics, colour identification, etc. DSFM also started using the *Phonological Awareness Screening Test (PAST)* to screen children (the reading clinician translated the PAST to French).
 - Many of the kindergarten students are not fluent in French – DSFM had to take a more immersion approach to screening and teaching.
 - Manitoba Education may be mandating a phonics screening for all kindergarten students in the coming months – not sure what screening tool they'll use.
 - **LSSD:**
 - LSSD is still very entrenched in the *Balanced Literacy* model with *Reading Recovery* as the chosen reading intervention in the division.
 - Ron Teffaine suggested that Reading Recovery should be replaced. It minimizes phonological awareness and fails to systematically teach phonetic decoding with decodable books. These components are vital for most poor readers and are supported by the new science of reading and *The Reading League* in the United States. Starting this September, the government of Ontario has mandated the use of phonics for all students (grades 1-9) and has provided \$109 million for reading, including early literacy screening and specialist reading teachers to help those who may struggle. Download Ron's article called *Better Instruction for Struggling Readers* on the school psych regional website under *Materials*.
 - **PSSD:**
 - PSSD has a mini-reading committee
 - Geographically vast – difficult to get stakeholders together to talk about best practice in literacy.
 - Using the *Shifting the Balance* book (2021) by Burkins & Yates, which brings the science of reading into the Balanced Literacy classroom, and

The University of Florida Literacy Institute (UFLI) website (has programs, webinars, and resources for teachers).

- PSSD is a very data-driven school division – (e.g., tracks letter-sound knowledge for early readers. Able to pull up a class profile and see how many students are below expectations, emergent, and proficient).

- **HSD:**

- Had an early literacy committee with psychology, SLP, reading clinician, and 2 upper admin. However, things fizzled out and the committee is no longer running. Clinicians were working with teachers for a few years to screen children during the latter half of kindergarten or beginning grade 1 with emergent literacy skills (e.g., phonological awareness, rapid letter naming, orthographic awareness, vocabulary, etc.) and students were compared to local norms. As time went on, the elementary reading clinician believed it was preferable to shift the responsibility of screening onto teachers alone using the Heggerty program.

3. Well-being Activity:

- The group went on a nature walk outside near a local graveyard that featured beautiful trees, rocks, and pathways. This provided some time to connect with colleagues and discuss various topics in an informal manner.

4. Anxiety PD hosted by WSD:

- David was the only one who attended the Anxiety PD hosted by WSD.
- It was a good refresher.
- However, he felt it was mostly from a private practice perspective.

5. Discussion Re: Modification vs. Individualized programming

- Difficulty differentiating moderate vs. severe severity – The DSM-5-TR adaptive functioning descriptors for moderate severity sounds like an IEP
- Discussion regarding if and when we should reassess students before we sign off on the *Curriculum Modification Plan (CMP)*.
- Children with genetic disorders such as Down Syndrome are coming into school without a Global Developmental Disorder (GDD) diagnosis or information regarding their cognitive abilities, therefore, they will not qualify for a CMP or IEP.
- New M vs. I documentation indicates that children diagnosed with GDD qualifies for an IEP. However, group discussion indicates that they may qualify UP TO an IEP and they should also qualify for CMP.

6. Practical Tips for Counselling Children using Cognitive Behavioral Therapy:

- This is an online webinar by Rebecca Comizio, one of three school psychologists who host the “School Psyched Podcast.”
- Ron Teffaine showed the group some handouts from the webinar, which costs about \$35 dollars CDN to view online. You can also get a certificate at the end after a brief quiz.
- In counselling, Rebecca spends time establishing rapport using games & choices. She stresses unconditional positive regard. She co-creates the agenda with the student, and she empowers kids to define goals and try out possible solutions. She uses the “Rollercoaster Story” to teach them that students can have different experiences about the same event because of how they think about it. She uses a lot of questioning vs. telling so kids come to discover truths for themselves. She also uses stories and pictures to help kids externalize their own situations onto cartoon characters. In this way, the

investigation of problems is not as threatening. She also teaches feeling words so kids have more ways to discuss how they and others might feel in different situations. One of the main tools Rebecca uses is the *CBT Triangle*, which includes a big thought bubble (automatic thoughts), a large heart picture (feelings), and a large hand picture (actions), with arrows in between to show the reciprocal relationship of the components. She uses this to map out the concerns and later to show other coping thoughts and alternative actions that can be used to improve situations of concern.

7. Next 2 meetings:

- December 8th (need a volunteer to host)
- March 15th (Hanover School Division committed to host this meeting)