

**CURRICULAR MODIFICATIONS TO MEET THE 2005
CCC–SLP STANDARDS IN A RURAL CSD PROGRAM**

**(or: Into the Coal Mine...
...without a light)**

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For those who do not know me, or do not know me well, I would like to provide a bit of background, or perhaps a bit of warning. This quote from Samuel Butler sums it up: "The one serious conviction that a man should have is that nothing is to be taken too seriously." Perhaps I do not take things seriously enough for some people. If so, I apologize to anyone I may offend with my comments. Because I was not at this meeting last year, I will be taking a bit of editorial license. By that, I mean I will be talking about the nature of the new standards as I discuss our implementation of them. That is because I read the proceedings from last year's meeting in which the presenters were nearly universal in their praise for the new standards. I do not share their unbridled enthusiasm. In fact, I had two different working titles for this paper. The first was "Bob and the Standards: A Love Story." My latest is "Into the coal mine...without a light" because that is largely what the new standards require us to do.

Another quote that sums up the new standards quite well is "the number one cause of problems is solutions." "Problems?" you might ask. Well, yes – I think we all have to be honest about what we are getting into. As we undertook implementation of the new standards, and studied the standards, a number of potential problems became apparent. The first of these, I think, is quite obvious. Stated succinctly, the new standards say that SLPs will know everything and be able to do everything and they will learn this in their graduate programs. That is because the skills validation study on which the new standards, in part, were based basically went out and asked practitioners what SLPs need to know. Each practitioner feels that what s/he does is important and that students entering practice should know those skills. The problem is that we are expected to turn out students who make *all* employers happy; that is, students who

know how to work in any setting – and the new standards reflect that. I do not believe that any program will be able to *fully* meet the new standards. We may be able to make it *look* like we are meeting the new standards, but I doubt if we will be able to do all that the standards ask. I believe that one of the major unintended consequences of the new standards will be the continued de-emphasis of certain disorder areas, such as fluency, voice and orofacial anomalies. Yaruss (1999) and Yaruss and Quesal (2002) provided evidence to suggest that the 1993 standards changes had a serious impact on fluency disorders coursework and practicum, and the 2005 standards will continue this erosion. In keeping with the title of this talk, I refer to fluency disorders as “the canary in the coal mine.” I am aware that many individuals in the profession are not all that concerned about the de-emphasis of stuttering. But I believe that in the next few years, other disorder areas will be similarly threatened, as our profession continues to move away from the “old” notion of helping people to the “new” notion of being sure we are reimbursed – and reimbursed well – for what we do. How else can we explain the growth of dysphagia – which has absolutely nothing to do with communication – into such a large part of our practice (to the point where the word “fluency” appears twice in the new standards and “swallowing” appears seven times)? We have a substantial amount of anecdotal evidence that as programs work to bring their curricula in line with the 2005 standards, fluency is one of the first areas to be cut. But others are following and will continue to follow. I believe that as a result of the new standards, our profession will look considerably different ten years from now than it does today.

Another problem that will arise from the new standards will be considerable differences between programs. Right now, I think it is safe to say that most CSD programs are *similar*. But the breadth of the new standards and the flexibility they provide will lead to considerable variability from program to program, as programs “play to their strengths.” I am sure other problems will arise that I (and we) have not even considered. But in my response to the call for comments regarding the new standards two years ago, I referred to them as “a train wreck waiting to happen” and I have not seen a whole lot since then to change that opinion. In fact, at this meeting, I have heard

things that suggest the train may be heading for a cliff (if I may be allowed to mix metaphors).

In the face of all this, you might ask why did WIU even bother to try to change its program to meet the new standards? Let me share another quote, this one from F.

Scott Fitzgerald:

The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time, and still retain the ability to function. One should, for example, be able to see that things are hopeless and yet be determined to make them otherwise.

We saw this as an opportunity to “play to our strengths” and do a serious evaluation of our program and curriculum. Frankly, we were pleasantly surprised by our findings. In some ways, we have been quite fortunate in terms of the timing of events around this curriculum restructuring. We had our CAA site visit in the fall of 2000 and around that same time we made the decision to no longer offer the Master’s option in audiology. We had some faculty retirements, so the “lifers” finally were gone and we could begin to look at the curriculum with the fresh eyes of new faculty and faculty who did not have the long history of the retirees.

We used a simple process as we undertook our curriculum revisions. We applied the Feynman Problem-Solving Algorithm, a simple three–step process:

1. Write down the problem
2. Think real hard
3. Write down the answer

Seriously, we did not do anything particularly profound. We undertook a very systematic process, in which an ad hoc committee was formed and reviewed the existing curriculum in light of the 2005 standards. The committee met weekly from January through early May of 2001. During that time, they consulted with all faculty, particularly about areas that the faculty currently taught or had interest in. They developed a preliminary new curriculum proposal, which detailed how each class in the

curriculum would meet the new standards. This proposal was presented to the faculty during a retreat in early May of 2001 and we spent a full day discussing the proposal. At the end of that retreat, faculty all seemed to be in agreement with the new curriculum.

I wrote the paperwork for the new curriculum in the fall of 2001. Although the paperwork was fairly extensive, there were relatively few major curricular changes. We did introduce a few new classes and eliminated a few others. For the classes that were eliminated, it was felt that the basic content could be covered in other classes, as suggested by the new standards. We also took the opportunity to apply some “cosmetic” changes – some changes in class hours, course titles, and course descriptions. With all these changes, the overall program only increased from 45 to 47 credits. As with our site visit in 2000, this curriculum revision served as an educational process for others on campus. For example, once again, I got to explain why a “clinical” major like CSD needed a research component. The 2005 standards were very helpful throughout the process, because during the curricular approval process, all we had to do was show the standards, specifically Standards III, IV, and V–A, and folks pretty much stepped aside. Most outside observers wonder how we will meet all of those standards. Gee, so do I.

Some of the highlights of our new curriculum include the fact that fluency disorders was spared in our graduate program – at least until I retire or am fired. We (swallowed hard and) added a separate class in dysphagia, an “oral–motor” class, and an “Audiology for the SLP class,” the latter to maintain an “audiology presence” in our graduate program. To maintain some flexibility, we included a “seminar” that can address anything we want, so as the profession changes, we can offer topical classes. We also decided to add a required research component in lieu of comps, because the new standards emphasize assessment so much and we feel that we will be assessing student learning on an ongoing basis. We may also “require” the Praxis on a de facto basis, since the standards do require a passing score on that exam. However, that is not a formal requirement at this time. Instead of comps, students will do either a clinical research project that will result in a journal-style (not necessarily journal-quality) paper

or they can do a traditional thesis. This decision was also made in response to the primary concern expressed by the CAA site visitors.

As we reviewed the standards, we felt that the best way to document student performance was via a portfolio. We have formed an ad-hoc portfolio committee who is nearly done with their work. The portfolio will serve a number of purposes:

1. It will help students to document and observe growth in their knowledge and skills throughout their program.
2. It will allow us to document that students have met the knowledge and skills requirements set forth in the 2005 standards.
3. It will give the students something tangible to show to prospective employers documenting their education much more extensively than a transcript can.
4. It will allow the faculty, who will review the portfolios each semester, to see how the various courses in the CSD curriculum relate, and should result in a more integrated curriculum
5. There are probably other benefits that we have not thought of yet.

Of course, such extensive documentation will need to be stored someplace. We will probably need to locate a warehouse to serve as a repository for the portfolios – that should last for at least five to ten years. Seriously, the current plan is to have the portfolios contain a *sample* of student work, not all of the students' work. There is a possibility that we may choose some other archival format, such as CD, but because of the rapidly changing nature of technology, that might not be a good long-term solution. (We will put the CDs with our 8-tracks and microfiche.)

In spite of my cynicism, there are a number of potential benefits to the new standards that we can see. As I have mentioned, the faculty has to look at the curriculum as a whole and see in which classes we will teach and assess the various knowledge and skills. Of course as the standards point out, this teaching may occur in

multiple classes, and should, but faculty will still need to consider their classes in the context of a larger whole. The outcomes-based nature of the standards should encourage more active learning on the part of students, and will challenge faculty to develop different activities for their classes that will require students to apply knowledge. That is not to say this is not already being done, but an external “incentive” never hurts.

Of course, with these potential benefits come potential pitfalls. If faculty are not willing to change the way they have done things, it will be difficult to shape a curriculum that will adequately address the new standards. This reluctance may be particularly problematic for tenured faculty who do not always respond well to external “incentives.” Time will tell if faculty are willing to come aboard or not, or to what extent they are willing to come aboard. Of course, this is true in all programs, not just ours.

The biggest problem, of course, is that the standards provide both too little and too much. Too much to teach, too little guidance as to how to teach it. Yes, there are multiple ways to do so. Yes, the flexibility provided by the new standards has the potential to have significant value for WIU and all other programs. But let’s be honest: there are *many, many gray areas* in these standards and even as we meet here today, many of those gray areas have not been addressed. CFCC and CAA are undertaking a noble effort in trying to develop guidelines to help our programs to determine what we need to do to ensure that we do in fact turn out students who meet the requirements for the CCC–SLP. However, I am certain that over the next 5 years or so, at least some portion of this meeting will be addressed to “innovative ways to meet the 2005 standards” or “problems arising from the 2005 standards.” When we convene our CAPCSD meeting in Macomb in 2007, I wonder what we will say about the “benefits” of these standards for our programs? I see two possibilities:

- Victor Frysinger’s perspective: “This [was] an ineffective solution to a nonexistent problem.”

–or–

- The three classic stages of denial:

1. That could never work.
2. Sure you can do it, but why would you want to?
3. I said it was a good idea all along

Right now, as I wander through the coal mine, I waver between the first and second stages of denial. And I worry that Frysinger may be right. But at WIU we have forged ahead because it is the right thing to do, and I believe we have done it well. And if a program in the cornfields with a cynic at the helm can do it, there is no reason why all programs should not be able to do it.

References

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