

**Statewide Collaboration for Recruitment and Education of SLPs:  
A Partnership Including the Ohio Department of Education,  
The Ohio Public School Supervisors Network and Nine State Universities**

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The partnership of the nine state universities (Bowling Green State University, Cleveland State University, Kent State University, Miami University, Ohio University, The Ohio State University, The University of Akron, The University of Cincinnati, and The University of Toledo), the Ohio Department of Education (ODE), and the Network of supervisors of public school clinicians was initiated based on our desire to solve a problem in the State of Ohio. Many states have had this problem and have developed collaborative efforts to solve it.

Our problem (like yours) included:

- Shortages of School Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs), especially in rural and inner city areas
- January 1, 2002 deadline for elimination of SLPs without master's degrees working in schools on temporary certificates
- Over 300 school SLPs without master's degrees working on temporary certificates
- Lack of geographic access to graduate programs
- Need to continue current employment creating a time problem for entering a graduate program.

**The Ohio Master's Network in Education (OMNIE): How we began**

The Ohio School Public School Supervisory Network was very concerned about the shortages that they faced in their local school district, region, or Special Education Regional Resource Center. One of their strategies for helping to alleviate the personnel problem was to contact University program directors through our annual meeting held at the Ohio Speech-Language-Hearing-Association annual convention. We held a joint meeting at the OSLHA

convention, and as a result of this meeting of the two groups, we agreed to work together to address the problem of the SLPs on temporary teaching certificates in the State of Ohio. At the encouragement of the Supervisory Network, a small group of representatives from both the Program Directors and Supervisors met with the Ohio Department of Education Director of Special Education to suggest a plan for providing distance learning master's degrees for the non-degreed SLPs in the State of Ohio. We asked for funding for this project, and we got it!

### **The Collaborative Distance Learning Master's Degree Program for SLPs in the Schools: How we proceeded**

The state universities in Ohio agreed to develop a distance learning master's degree program that included a commitment to two cohorts of 48 students, beginning in two consecutive years, and a lock-step three-year curriculum/program for each cohort. Criteria for admission (group agreement), which included individuals currently working in the schools as an SLP on a temporary certificate, along with traditional success factors for graduate admission -- no university was required to accept a student who was not acceptable based on the program's criteria. Students were assigned to a home university at one of the participating programs based on geography, student preference (which was typically based on geography), and an equal number of students assigned to each program, which meant that the programs had the final decision in determining which students were assigned to which university. A lock-step single core curriculum was developed by the nine programs to meet the typical requirements for program across the state. Each program had the option to add requirements for the students who would receive their degree from that program. Thus, it was important that students understood that in addition to the distance learning courses, they might have additional requirements, such as an additional research course, a graduate or practicum seminar, etc. to fulfill their graduate degree.

An annual whole group one-day meeting to calibrate requirements, provide an opportunity to meet all instructors of the distance learning courses,

ask questions, have fun, and develop camaraderie among the students was provided for each cohort. Students completed two required courses each semester and during the summer. The opportunity for an equal number of core courses to be taught by each participating program was integral to this effort. The curriculum included 18 courses so that each program was offered two courses in the original plan.

Additional pay was offered to faculty volunteers who developed and taught the courses. These fiscal incentives were provided by the university, but the group brainstormed and shared examples of how each of our programs might be able to provide incentives. This provided the opportunity to say to a Dean, Provost, Registrar, etc, "X Ohio Program is able to do this. Why can't this work here?"

A variety of distance delivery methods were employed in this program. We did not have statewide technology resources in Ohio like those available in some other states. For example, we did not have statewide ISDN connections. Some of us (e.g., The University of Cincinnati) were even trying to develop our own.

Local area group meetings for students were offered for every course. The number of students in each group was determined by geographic proximity. Meetings were held in local schools, Special Education Regional Resource Centers, or homes.

Practicum activities and requirements were managed by the home university, and were supported by the students and the supervisory network who were able to find practicum sites in their local areas. There was an agreement to count appropriate undergraduate hours and allow 75 hours for current job experience if required supervision was in place, including the appropriate credentials of supervisor and time requirements necessary for supervision. The student, supervisor, and university agreed on a plan for new learning during the school practicum experience; such as working in the classroom, collaborating with teachers, targeting literacy or fluency, or some area of new or advanced experience.

The State Supervisory Network collaborated to:

- mentor/monitor group meetings,
- find sites to meet,
- monitor exams,
- find supervisors for school-based practicum,
- help in development of other practicum sites including health care,
- celebrate the students' success,
- contribute to annual group meetings and a graduation party,
- provide goodies for beginning and continuing students along with lots of encouragement.

### **Outcomes of the Master's Degree Program**

Eighty (80) students in two cohorts graduated over a four-year period. Essentially all of these SLPs are working in the schools in the State of Ohio. All passed the PRAXIS exam, which required a score of 620 to work in Ohio schools. We met the 2002 deadline for appropriately credentialing these 80 SLPs to work in the schools and meet the academic and practicum requirements for the ASHA Certification of Clinical Competence and State of Ohio licensure.

### **Why it worked**

We agreed that all programs could participate equally in every aspect of the program; an equal number of students and an equal number of courses to be offered. However, in the end, not every program had participated in every project at the same level or in the same way. One program did not participate in this master's degree program, but continued to remain in touch with the overall efforts and joined the next venture.

Representatives from each of the eight universities met regularly with representatives from Ohio Department of Education (ODE) and the Supervisory Network to:

- determine our needs and develop a budget,
- develop procedures, including admission criteria,

- develop the curriculum,
- share strategies for “doing something different at each of our universities”, including funding mechanisms,
- submit our proposal to the Ohio Board of Regents (OBR)

Aspects of the program, which required OBR approval, included the statewide consortium and transfer of credits across universities. This also required local approval at the individual university level, but OBR approval facilitated this process.

The Ohio Department of Education (ODE) provided funding to hire two half-time SLPs to coordinate and manage the program. These individuals were retired from school supervisory positions. One person also had experience in working in a university clinic and thus was familiar with university issues. Both were excited about this project and eager to make it succeed.

The Supervisory Network gathered data on school personnel needs and SLP needs for graduate education. The Network also advertised the program to eligible school personnel and recruited students.

### **Primary Program Benefits**

The best parts of this program were a renewed energy and a sense of purpose for our statewide university collaboration. Developing collaborative courses and using our “best” faculty resources for these courses was rewarding. When developing the curriculum, we often said, “I would like to take this master’s degree program with these great courses!” Further, we were able to enhance our reputation with the Ohio Department of Education. Because we were successful and timely in delivering the first product (80 qualified SLPs), the ODE was willing to fund succeeding efforts. Additionally, we solved a problem. We felt good about the fact that we were able to be a part of solving a problem within our state.

## **The Next Step**

Based on the success of this program, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) was willing to fund continued efforts to support speech-language pathology services in the State of Ohio schools. There were still shortages of SLPs in Ohio schools and many children in need of services. The group decided to collaborate on a new venture to enable Ohio SLPs without school certification to get the necessary coursework and experience to transition into school settings. The timing of this proposal was right because of the Balanced Budget Act, which motivated some SLPs to consider transitioning to school settings.

## **Funded Coursework for Healthcare SLPs to Transition to School Settings**

This project was directed toward providing the necessary coursework and practicum experience for school credentials to SLPs who were working in healthcare and who did not meet these requirements. The Ohio universities offered on-campus or distance learning courses to meet the Ohio school license requirements.

The School Supervisory Network found supervisors for the school practicum requirement and the ODE funded a half-time program manager (one of the two staff members from the first project). The ODE provided up to \$5000 scholarships for students to complete the required set of courses at any participating university, with a required commitment to school employment. Additionally, the ODE provided stipends for school practicum supervisors for these students.

At the current time, 50 Speech-Language Pathologists have completed or are completing the required coursework and/or school practicum experience and are moving into school settings. Yet, there is still a need for school SLPs in the state. As a further attempt to meet this need, we have developed a campaign to recruit students into the profession. Again, this was a joint project of the Ohio Department of Education, the Supervisory Network, and the university programs.

## **Recruitment of Students into the Profession**

For this third collaborative initiative, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) funded a half time project manager, the production of recruitment DVDs, and faculty stipends of \$5000 for development of a distance-learning course.

The Supervisory Network developed & distributed a recruitment DVD and accompanying materials. The DVD is titled "Don't Miss the Bus". It describes the work of speech-language pathologists in schools and portrays the range of roles that SLPs have in that setting. The DVD is also available for recruitment outside the State of Ohio.

A network for recruiting high school and undergraduate students to the profession was formed. School SLPs introduced the DVD to career counselors in their own high schools and other high schools in their district. They visited nearby junior colleges, community colleges, and other universities and colleges without a CSD program to share the DVD and to introduce speech-language pathology to career counselors. Those SLPs who were active in the project recruited other SLPs around the state to broaden the recruitment effort.

University programs developed a set of anywhere/anytime web based undergraduate prerequisite courses to deliver to undergraduate students at universities/colleges without CSD programs, working college graduates with a desire to enter the profession, and students in our own programs when appropriate. The decision to allow CSD undergraduates majors to take these courses rather than the regular on-campus major course was left to the discretion of each program. Most programs decided to allow students to take these courses only when a clear need was demonstrated.

Faculty received \$5000 from the ODE to develop a course. In return, we each agreed to offer the courses twice per year for 3 years. Students enroll at the university that is offering the course at that institution's tuition rate. The program manager is able to provide information to prospective students about the available courses and the contact person at each university. She refers them to

that source for information about registration. The following courses are currently being offered:

- Introduction to Communication Disorders
- Phonetics
- Speech Science
- Anatomy of the Voice and Speech
- Hearing Science
- Anatomy of Hearing
- Audiology
- Aural Rehabilitation
- Speech and Language Development
- Multicultural Issues

One measure of the success of our program and the confidence of the Ohio Department of Education is that they included a request for Ohio Master's Network in Education (OMNIE) funding in Ohio's State Improvement Grant. A second measure of this confidence is that they are willing to fund future efforts if we come forward with a plan to increase the number of speech-language pathologists or to otherwise serve Ohio's children. Given this challenge, the question to the OMNIE university program directors was, "What next?"

Given the national, state, and professional interest in literacy, we decided to develop a literacy education program for speech-language pathologists and other professionals in the State of Ohio. Funding is being provided by the Ohio Department of Education, and is pending from the Ohio Department of Health.

There are two major facets to the program, which is just getting underway:

#### **1. Family Education**

This aspect of the literacy program includes development of a DVD for families that describes and demonstrates by video clips appropriate language and literacy enhancement activities for children from birth to 5 years. The plan is to distribute the DVD to maternity hospitals, pediatrician's offices, health clinics, Head Start programs, and the Help Me Grow Early Intervention Program.

## **2. Professional Education for SLPs and Other Professionals**

The professional education programs includes web-based one-hour continuing education presentations developed by faculty around the state and housed on the National Center for School Speech-Language Pathology web site, which is a collaborative effort of the University of Cincinnati and Miami University in Ohio. The one-hour presentations include audio and PowerPoint slides. One-credit courses based on these one-hour presentations will be developed based on these presentations by the faculty member, using the web-based course management platform at their home university. Courses will be offered by that faculty member's university. Thus, professionals in the State of Ohio have the option of eight to ten one-hour literacy continuing education presentations or university credit based on these presentations.

One exciting aspect of this collaboration is the opportunity to provide professional education for early intervention home visitors to help them use the DVD effectively with families during their home visits. This project has results in collaboration among:

- Nine Ohio CSD programs
- The Ohio Department of Education, including the divisions of Special Education, Early Childhood Education, Literacy Improvement
- The Ohio Department of Health
- Help Me Grow Early Intervention Program

Based on the success of our efforts, we are discussing other possible opportunities. For example, having developed this partnership, we might expand it to include Ph.D. education collaboration within the state. We have six Ph.D. programs in the State of Ohio, including six in speech-language pathology and four in audiology. There is, of course, variance in size, areas of expertise, and resources. Collaboration could enable us to expand the experiences that we are able to provide for doctoral students.

We are excited about what we have been able to do in the State of Ohio and are happy to share our experiences with other states – or perhaps to extend our collaboration across state lines!