

Biographical Article

Bio

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FEATURE STORY 08/15/2005 Author: Julia Elliott A Career Rich in Fulfillment

Helping children learn to communicate effectively so they will become confident adults is one of the things Dora Campbell, MA, CCC-SLP, loves about her job. That, plus a natural love for children, helps make her job as a private practitioner specializing in school-age children with language learning disabilities ideal for her. Campbell considers her work a "calling" rather than a job.

Campbell provides diagnostic and treatment services for children with learning disabilities and differences. She strives to improve their quality of life through treatments that encourage language literacy development, articulation, motor speech, vocal resonance, phonological processes, narrative development and expository discourse. She sees patients on a referral basis through schools that contract with her, and by parental request. Her professional responsibilities include diagnostics, treatment, consultations with teachers and parents, and attending and reporting at team meetings.

During her initial consultations with her young patients, Campbell must tease out specific diagnoses and develop treatment plans. To evaluate literacy, she examines phonology, phonemic awareness, vocabulary, word retrieval, story-grammar development, comprehension and written language to determine the therapy needed.

"As I go about my daily work of diagnosis and therapy, both the student and I have fun," says Campbell. "The clinical aspect of this exercise is not apparent, and as a result, the child is eager to participate." To assess the child's current level of comprehension, Campbell likes to have the child bring in a book that he or she is currently reading. If children have difficulty answering questions about the story, Campbell will work with them on story grammar and/or expository text structures including sequence, cause/effect and compare/contrast.

Campbell has found a career she loves, although she did experience one false start after high school. "I left high school and entered a nursing program at a junior college," she explains. "There were certain aspects of nursing that I really liked, such as the human element." Shortly after she entered the program, however, she realized that the field was not really what she had in mind.

An avid communicator, Campbell discovered that she would be limited in the time she could spend talking with patients as a nurse. Other things made nursing seem like a less-than-perfect fit for her, too. While she liked the hands-on involvement of patient care, she found life-and-death situations unsettling.

During her second semester of nursing studies, Campbell discovered speech-language pathology. She observed a therapy session conducted with a stroke patient, and was immediately intrigued. "I had to look up something in the nursing journals in the hospital library," she recalls. "and as I proceeded down the hall, I noticed the speech-language journals. I started to read these journals, and found it fascinating."

Campbell soon left the nursing program to complete a two-year liberal arts degree in preparation for speech-language pathology studies. Although she recalls that her parents warned her to think long and hard before giving up plans for a nursing career, she was undeterred.

Fortunately for Campbell, her nursing credits transferred when she enrolled in the bachelor's-level speech-language pathology program at Elms College in Chicopee, MA. "The advisors looked at my transcript and said it was a wonderful background that would complement the speech-language field," she remembers.

The birth of her daughter put Campbell's studies on hold until her little girl was ready for school. "As my daughter entered kindergarten, I went back to college," she says. "I completed my BA part time. Returning to college as a continuing education student was an esteem-building experience."

After graduating from Elms College, Campbell worked for a year as a classroom teacher assistant at Children's Language Institute, a private school for students with language disorders. She also brushed up on her algebra and geometry skills so that she would be ready for the GREs. After enrolling in and successfully completing her graduate studies at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, Campbell completed her CFY at the Children's Language Institute as a classroom teacher/SLP in a self-contained classroom. Although her position serving as SLP and classroom teacher simultaneously was rigorous, Campbell says her experience helped her empathize with her young students as they faced various educational challenges.

After completing her clinical fellowship, Campbell worked in a public school for two years before joining the staff of the Curtis Blake Day School, which is affiliated with American International College in Springfield, MA. Although Campbell enjoyed working with students in both the public and private school settings, she wanted more control over her hours.

In 1997, she transitioned to full-time self-employment, taking her private practice into the home and school. "The hardest part of this was taking a leap of faith to do it," recalls Campbell. "To leave secure employment with benefits and venture out alone was a big step." Following the advice of other successful private practitioners, Campbell then opened her own office. "Now, I have to pay my own health insurance and overhead, but because it is a labor of love, it is worth it."

Her current caseload consists mainly of after-school therapy clients, although she still makes school visits as well. She values the interaction with parents that accompanies the after-school appointments. "One of the big differences now is that I can talk to the parents all of the time," says Campbell. "I talk to them before and after I see the child, and we develop very close relationships. I am constantly modeling for them, suggesting what they can do at home to help their child have consistent support and help. During my one-hour sessions with these children, I provide speech and language literacy remediation and articulation therapy on a one-on-one basis. I encourage parents to take the time to talk and really listen to their child every day. Many parents are familiar with the importance of talking to their babies to help with language development, but they must understand that this daily intention should continue and is just as important as the child enters school. Nothing takes the place of real parent/child language interaction and results in a long-lasting effect as they enter society."

Campbell enjoys keeping abreast of new clinical developments. One area of special interest to her is how widespread computer use has changed communication for virtually all of us. The shift to a less formal written grammar is a development that she watches intently. In order to help her clients develop and/or maintain the ability to identify the elements of a traditional written story, she relies on a manipulative tool called the Story Grammar Marker(R)(SGM). The SGM was invented by one of Campbell's former colleagues, along with a former professor and mentor named Mary Ellen Moreau. The SGM is a scaffolding tool, with icons representing each part of a story, such as the characters and settings.

Campbell credits Mary Ellen Moreau with having been a constant source of support and guidance. "I was fortunate to have Moreau as a professor 15 years earlier, and proud of the fact that she was taking a leadership role in the dramatic progression in SLP, taking an active role in literacy development," she says. "In fact, I still consult with her from time to time." Additionally, she credits her friend and colleague, Mary Ellen Berselli, SLP, for her upbeat and positive outlook on their shared profession. Campbell states that Mary Ellen Berselli's expertise in the field has been invaluable. Berselli, she says, encourages her to be an advocate for the students she serves.

Although Campbell cautions that her business model will probably not lead to monetary wealth, she considers herself rich in fulfillment and autonomy. "I am happy doing what I love," says Campbell. "If I

were in this from a business aspect, I would say I am planning to expand, but I feel I give a quality service now, and if I were to expand, it might affect the quality of the service I provide. I have worked in private schools and public schools, but none of that can match the contentment that I feel as a private practitioner.

"I have been in every type of school setting, and it has paved the way and given me the assurance to open this practice," she continues. "That, along with helpful colleagues and resources including AAPPSPA, (American Academy of Private Practice in Speech Pathology and Audiology) and their wonderful listserv, has been a supportive and knowledgeable source when I am faced with issues of which I am unsure. I have also taken advantage of SCORE, which is the Service Corp of Retired Executives. They offer workshops and individual counseling for those who want to start a small business, and were another great resource and help for me in my transition to private practice. Finally, I continue to receive individual business counseling from Massachusetts Small Business Development Network, an organization that provides free, confidential management assistance to new, existing and expanding small businesses."

From keeping up with the latest Dr. Seuss titles to perusing Macbeth, Campbell enjoys learning new things along with her students. She also hopes to model a lifelong love of learning for students grappling with language and literacy difficulties. "To handle this challenge, I try to avoid negativity in my own thinking and to take a proactive, cooperative approach to find solutions," she explains.

After all these years in practice, Campbell also knows how to pace herself to keep her sense of job satisfaction fresh. "I also follow the advice of other business owners to take vacations and make time for myself because it refreshes and renews, allowing me to give my all while I am doing my work. Along with the challenges, I would like to share that the speech-language pathologist's role working with literacy issues is an appropriate and rewarding avenue to take in our field.

Dora Campbell, MA, CCC-SLP, owns a private practice in Longmeadow, MA, providing diagnostic and therapy services to children with language learning difficulties. She obtained her BA in communication disorders from Elms College in Chicopee, MA, graduating summa cum laude in 1986. She earned her MA in SLP from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, in 1989. Campbell is ASHA-certified and licensed in Massachusetts. Her memberships include AAPPSPA, ASHA and MSHA.

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