Lisa Archibald

Welcome to the SAC Shining Lights: S-LP Schools Podcast. I'm your host, Dr. Lisa Archibald from the University of Western Ontario. As you know, many speech-language pathologists in Canada are employed in schools. Their job is to support children with communication disabilities in accessing the curriculum and achieving their academic and personal potential –it's a challenging job! So many schools, so many students, and not many S-LPs! Across the country, S-LPs are finding unique solutions to providing the best possible services to the students and school teams with whom they work. In this podcast, our guests describe their innovations in school-based speech-language pathology. Thanks for listening as we shine a light on some brilliant projects!

Welcome to the SAC Shining Lights, S-LP Schools podcast today and I'm so pleased to have my guest Jillian with me today. Jillian, would you briefly just introduce yourself and describe your service delivery model where you work?

Jillian Gordon

Sure. My name is Jillian Gordon and I'm a speech-language pathologist in a growing district in the lower mainland of British Columbia, so we're in Chilliwack, BC. It's one of the only districts that are growing, so they've just built new schools here, and of course, our caseloads are growing anyway. But with the influx of new students and families to the area, that will only increase.

I work in a team with six other speech-language pathologists and we're also very fortunate to have speech-language assistance with us as well. We also have one AAC specialist teacher with whom we work really closely. It's a great team.

Lisa Archibald

Very nice. And how would you describe your service delivery model overall, Jillian?

Jillian Gordon

So, our services range from the kindergarten age. We have a universal screening process that we do for some early identification of those kids coming into kindergarten, which has been really helpful even during COVID because a lot of our services for the younger kids were compromised during that time or there's positions that are unfilled. So, we already have an idea in September of who the kids coming in and what their needs are. And then, we follow kids – we have elementary schools that go up to Grade Five now, and so we follow them throughout that journey. Our AAC specialist teacher does all grades, works closely with students from K to 12 and occasionally, she'll bring us in for one of her students. Or occasionally, we'll get a referral from a middle or a high school student when there's a team around a student that can give them the follow up that we recommend. But we mostly focused on the elementary school.

Lisa Archibald

And does that involve consultations and direct services? What would be the range of services there?

Jillian Gordon

Well, that's a great question Lisa, because as our caseloads get bigger and bigger, we tend to do more consultation. We've done a lot of work in our district around educating people that S-LP services are not only one-on-one direct therapy services. Recently, well – not recently, sorry – a few years ago, the RTI model was introduced into our district, and we really embrace that as a department. So now, when I make recommendations on my report, I'll give Tier One recommendations, Tier Two recommendations, and Tier Three recommendations, and that's really helpful to kind of share the responsibility and even

showing that even putting together a home program, or even by giving strategies to a classroom teacher or parent, that is meaningful service as well.

Yeah, so to answer your question the speech-language assistants do a lot of our direct therapy for us, but because that's a favorite part of the job, we like to be able to do that too. So, around this time of year, we're kind of finishing off our assessments and our consultation, and we're starting to bring on a few therapy kids.

Lisa Archibald

Nice.

Jillian Gordon

Yeah, it is nice.

Lisa Archibald

Can you – just so our listeners get a sense – can you tell me how many schools a full-time speech pathologist might have in your board?

Jillian Gordon

Yeah, so there's 21 schools in our district this year and there are seven of us, which works out to about three schools. I would say we each carry a caseload of approximately 150 students.

Lisa Archibald

And then how many assistants would be working with you?

Jillian Gordon

So, we have four in our district and what happens is each one is allocated each term to one school. So, by the end of the year, each school has had an SLA block or a term where they go in twice a week and deliver that more intensive therapy. They're worth their weight and gold, those SLAs.

Lisa Archibald

Absolutely. Well, lots of interesting things. I already thought of a couple more topics for podcasts, maybe <laugh>, we'll have to have you back, Jillian. So, I think that gives us a nice picture of where you're at and where – and what you're working environment is looking like. So, we're here to talk about a particular initiative that you started. Can you tell me about some of the major challenges that you noticed and that is kind of spurred along the project that you'll be speaking about today?

Jillian Gordon

So, when RTI came in – like I said – we really embraced that, but we didn't have programming to address all the kids on our caseload that a school could do in a small group setting or that an EA could easily do. Certainly, we had lots of good programs but I found in the realm of language processing, that was harder to kind of share the responsibility with schools.

So, then I had boys – my own sons in the district – they brought home something that was newly developed at the time called the Snap. And the Snap is a way that the district has adopted, it was developed here to look at numeracy skills. So, if you can picture roughly a rectangle or an oval with Snap, they would have a number in the middle and then they taught the students to talk about or think about numbers in different ways.

So, they would draw the number. They would plot the number on a number line. They would write a story problem about a number. But I felt that it was such a great way for that deeper knowledge and I thought this could work for language as well. So, I got the idea to play around with a prototype that

Snap had done a lot of groundwork, but I took that and made it so there was a word in the middle instead of a number.

Lisa Archibald

<affirmative> nice. And so, tell us more about what that came to look like, that rectangle, that circle, or with the word in the middle.

Jillian Gordon

Right. So again, Snap had a lot of time invested in their project. So, it came to be that every classroom had a whiteboard with a Snap template on it. So originally, back in the very beginning, I took one of their boards and actually taped over <laugh> my own – and made my own headings for each of the segmented areas in the oval. And I remember taking pictures of it and playing around with it and thinking, "this really has legs. I believe in this project."

Instead of a number line along the bottom, I had a space to write a sentence. They had Skip counting down the sides, and I did some phonological awareness activities. So, when I had a learning review or a personal goal session, at some point with my manager, I was ready to take it to him. And he was really impressed by it and really happy that it was a simple, familiar sort of layout that could piggyback on the work that had previously done been done by Snap.

Lisa Archibald

Connecting with background knowledge, right. <laugh>, we know what important that is. So, I really like what you're describing there because is it a vocabulary tool? Is it a language tool? Tell me about all the ways that you talked about phenology. Tell me about the ways that you tried to make it sort of as big as possible in terms of language or I – and those are my words, not yours, of course.

Jillian Gordon

Sure. So originally, I started asking classroom teachers if they would like me to come into their classes. And it got to the point where then the school district ordered two boards per classroom for – sorry, two boards per school for the district and then teachers wanted to order their own. So, the Board essentially ordered the paper version. It has a circle in the middle for a word and we've found that the best words are simple, like object vocabulary words. And even though a word like "fish" or "snowflake" or "liquid" – if you're doing science or "lever", it sounds very simple. It takes it into a very rich discussion with a lot of connectivity. So, the first segment is drawing a picture and I'll ask the kids, "give me the features of this object that we can draw," and then we all agree on it.

Actually, the more I am learning about the importance of gesture with some of these kids too, I'm actually getting them to make the object in their hands <affirmative> or visualize it, because that's powerful. It's not actually on the board, but it is powerful. Then we go into the function of the object. So, what does it do or what do you do with it? And then you're getting at some verb vocabulary, but you're already forming neurological connections between words. So, you're getting that richness already.

Then what goes together with this object? So, then you have an association and you can see your neural network is, is growing, what group does it belong to? And often, kids will have different ideas for this and teachers can get stuck on some of these things. And I always say, "trust your brain. You have a neurologically intact brain. You have an education, your first instinct about what goes together with it or what category it belongs to is going to be correct, because that's how we actually make meaning and share it." So, then I say, "name two more things in this group." So, putting items that belong to the same category. Then another segment is "how are our word and another object the same and how are they different?"

And then, the final box is "what three words can you use to describe this?" So often, teachers will use this, and I use it to show how we can make a rich sentence. Now, like I said, there's a rectangle at the bottom that says, "use your word in a sentence, and we can do some punctuation with that." What do we need an upper class or – sorry – an upper-case letter to start in a period and do we need a comma?

But they can often come up like, "how can we make this sentence richer?" They have three describing words right there. They have their category there, they have a bit about same and different. So, on the older grades, they actually could do a bit of a paragraph. Yeah and then down the sides, like I said, there are two columns and one is "what are words that sound with the same sound as our letter?"

And again, not the same letter as our word – sorry – not the same beginning letter, but beginning sound. And then we talk about how even though a word starts with "ph" for example, we're listening to the sound and then words that rhyme down the other side. And often the words are multi-syllabic and difficult to rhyme, so I will just take one syllable. But the beautiful part of those side ones is that everyone can participate. You see the hands go up even with the kids that might not have had a lot of confidence to contribute to the activity. This is where we get everyone participating.

Lisa Archibald

Yeah, I really like how rich that is and I can imagine the sort of rich discussions that stimulates. I'm interested in your comment that you were describing earlier: what group does it belong to and sort of trusting your own brain and wondering what's happening there. Because that seems – so if one person thinks, "oh, this is part of this group" and someone else thinks it's part of a different group or questions themselves, that adds richness, one would think.

Jillian Gordon

It does; you're right. And say you had a food there and some people eat that for breakfast or some people in their culture eat that on a special holiday. There's different kind of salmon, for example. You can draw in people's own understanding of the world <affirmative>. There's not a right or wrong, I would say. It's just bringing a rich discussion. It's facilitating a rich discussion.

Lisa Archibald

<affirmative> and really getting at those multiple meanings. Yeah. Is it a vocabulary task? Is it a vocabulary tool then? Is that what is that how you would describe it, Jillian?

Jillian Gordon

We like to call it a word analysis. So, I think the biggest way that teachers can latch onto it is as a vocabulary tool. But for S-LPs, we know language processing. I don't care if you call it semantics, I don't care if you call it meaning, I don't care if you call it language content. <affirmative>, it's all kind of getting to the same thing.

Lisa Archibald

<affirmative>. So, tell me a bit more about how you decide what words to put in the middle.

Jillian Gordon

Yeah, so when I've done it in classrooms, I will ask the teacher, "is there something that you've been discussing lately as a class?" And there, I've done "friend" and we've gone through kind of different types of friends. Nowadays, kids have a lot of online friends and it jumps into a discussion about what the different friends look like mm-hmm. We've done, like I might have mentioned Beaver, after they'd done a unit and the teacher was like, "wow, you guys have really learned a lot," because it just crystallized their knowledge and it was a good way for them to wrap up their session.

I've done a lot of science ones with liquid, solid or gas in the middle. And I think that's the beauty of this too, is in kindergarten we'll do something like blossom in the springtime; very simple, but then in a Grade Five or Six class, I'll go in and do a more complex science word or land forms I've done, too. Like we've done mountain or Peninsula, so it really lends itself to all grade levels and it lends itself to a lot of different subject matters.

Lisa Archibald

I want to ask you a little bit about the classroom connection there in just a second, but I can kind of come back to words. You suggested earlier that some words might not work as well as other words. You said that you thought simple object-based kinds of things. Could you talk a little bit more about that?

Jillian Gordon

Yes, I find that the way that we store objects in the brain, this works well for that. And we do hit on describing words. We do hit on function words, which are verbs. So, by starting with a noun, I think it allows us to branch out to other types of words.

Lisa Archibald

<affirmative>. So, those other more abstract words come in all around those objects, right? <affirmative>. In terms of Tier One and Tier Two vocabulary types of words, are all of those working there? Is it a focus on Tier One? I'm not sure there.

Jillian Gordon

That's a good question. I think you could try a Tier Two word. I really think you could. We've also found recently that it works really well with characters in novels. So, when you're getting into words like villains or similarities and differences for a protagonist, for example, and the anti-hero; words to describe them. So, we've taken it there but right now when we suggest to other people, we say, "keep it as simple noun" Yeah, and go from there.

For the most success, we don't want people to get in the middle of it and think, "oh my goodness, I don't know where to go," or "I don't know how to do this." So, our suggestion is to keep it quite simple.

Lisa Archibald

Yes, so you described "do you want me to come into the classroom," is what you might say to a teacher, and [what] is this tool you're using to do that? What's that look like?

Jillian Gordon

Yeah, so I'll come into the classroom with a whiteboard that I have or one that the school has and again, the teacher has given me a word – like I've done "moss", for example. And then, either to introduce and find out what their previous knowledge is. Often the teachers are surprised, okay. Some people know about this already. And it gives a starting point. I, of previous knowledge, and kids like to hear things from other kids too, right? Instead of a teacher telling them all about moss, we might have a moss expert in the group and they have a lot to share, and that's great for everybody. <affirmative>. So typically, it'll take probably a half an hour to go through and by the end –

Lisa Archibald

To go through one word there, Jillian?

Jillian Gordon

<affirmative>, and that attests to the richness of the discussion and then at the end, I have them do a sentence and it – depending on the age, I'll talk about, "could that be a topic sentence for a paragraph,"

but it's a kicking off point for the teachers. <affirmative>. And I'll leave the board there or take a picture and send it to the teacher.

Lisa Archibald

And so, this is something that is added to what's going on in the curriculum?

Jillian Gordon

Right.

Lisa Archibald

Yeah. Did you – and was that we were back to [those] challenges or things that you were responding to in need – did you see that as a need in the classroom?

Jillian Gordon

I did and often teachers will say, "this is what I need in here. This is what I've been looking for. This is such useful information for me." The feedback has been really great. I encourage teachers even when they're reading aloud to their kids to stop at a word and do some exploration because we know that when we're learning new vocabulary that the richness, the experience and the real-life application is really crucial for them to make it their own. That's why I say, "I want this word. I want them to make it their own."

Lisa Archibald

<affirmative>. I mean, it kind of operationalizes that sort of pre-teaching of vocabulary and I really like the idea that it encourages that time spent on a word, right. I think sometimes, pre-teaching vocabulary is, "do you know this word, this word and this word," right? Whereas this is really getting at that depth.

Jillian Gordon

Yeah, and it goes beyond just the word itself. I think it introduces different concepts and different kind of things. When we think of a word there, the definition is broader than just saying, "a lever is a simple machine." We use levers to lift things. Right?

Lisa Archibald

Yes. So, you described just your teacher stopping, and I think maybe just grabbing your visual and sort of working on a word that's coming up just as it happens.

Jillian Gordon

That's the idea. I think some of them like me to come in and show how that works first. They had a lot of training around Snap and a lot of time was spent on it. So, the elegance of Snap they understand, but I think it still can be intimidating, but the beauty of this is that it's very simple. It's not complicated and it kind of is self-explanatory, so I just encourage people to jump in and give it a try.

Lisa Archibald

Yeah, and is that what you – you've done that, like within a story, you might stop and jump right in. Could you talk a bit about that?

Jillian Gordon

That's right, so we all come across a word in a story. For older kids, it might be "crystal", or for younger kids it might be like "salmon" for example, right? <affirmative> and then, we can stop and really have a rich discussion, either taking in what's already been mentioned in the book or setting up the book for a richer understanding and a deeper understanding of that. And it really – when we're reading books with kids, we want them to make connections with their life, and it gives them a sense of, "I understand the

characters' reasons for doing things. I understand their decision making, I understand how they're feeling." The stronger the link, the richer the book. So, this gives an opportunity for kids to do that for themselves.

Lisa Archibald

Yes, and so have you then seen educators start using it?

Jillian Gordon

Yeah, so what I've encouraged some to do is just do one box at a time. So, pick a few words and just do the picture, for example, and then move on to the function; the "what does it do" part, so it's not too overwhelming for them or the kids mm-hmm. <affirmative>, so they can just black the other papers out. A lot of people use a smart board or what we used to call an overhead projector, <laugh> with the paper. So that's easy to do, to introduce it in a less intimidating way.

Lisa Archibald

And then maybe another day, go on the next section or something like that.

Jillian Gordon

Yeah, because it can be overwhelming if you just look at a blank page. But by breaking it down into smaller sections. Some of the things too aren't necessarily developmentally appropriate in kindergarten to talk about similarities and differences quite yet. So, that's going to need more support from a teacher, whereas an older student could do it on their own as a written activity and give the teacher some idea of what they know about a topic.

Lisa Archibald

Yeah, very nice, and so how are you seeing it used by teachers in and across their day or across their curriculum?

Jillian Gordon

Well, it's really nice because some of the S-LPs are going into kindergarten classrooms in the Fall and just getting to know those kids. They're a friendly person in the school and they're building relationships, so they'll do a story, maybe, and pick a word and go in and give kind of Tier One service really early in the year, which is really nice. And then, the teachers say they get the confidence and then they continue on during the year. We also see EAs doing it with some of our students that have one-on-one time. We can say, "well, we often put together programming for EAs, and this can be a really nice part of that." We often see EAs in the hallway and detached from their classroom, so this is a nice way that they can bring something from the classroom and make that bridge.

Lisa Archibald

Yes, absolutely. You got that again, that familiarity and knowing the routine.

Jillian Gordon

Right, and they'll have a deeper understanding and maybe some more words to be able to follow and contribute when they get back into the classroom environment.

Lisa Archibald

Yeah, and have there been times when you see the children themselves using it or the being familiar with it or being ready at a good readiness stage for working with that tool?

Jillian Gordon

I think it's early days still and I will be presenting at a professional day here in a couple of weeks, so it's been a year of getting the word out. I presented to our executive team last June and they believed in it enough to get a website going, so I've been working with that. And the behind the scenes I can finally just say it is ready to roll out properly, so we've been doing it slowly as S-LPs for a long time, but I'm really excited to see where it can go in the district.

Lisa Archibald

Yes, that's very exciting. I want to ask you more about the rollout in just a second. So, tell me about how your team then started, because you had the idea at the beginning, and then how did it become part of what your team was doing?

Jillian Gordon

Well, I started this years ago. I remember bringing the idea to the table, and Snap was quite new at the time and was getting a lot of attention and buy-in from teachers. So, they were always right alongside me. They have helped every step of the way and I have a lot of gratitude for their support, and I think there came a time when everyone just started really believing in it and seeing that this is a really useful good tool.

So, they've been writing recommendations in reports and attaching templates to reports just to get the word out there. Our S-LPs have trialed it with their students and it's often part of the therapy that they do. And then. S-LPs are asked to do it in the classroom quite often, actually. It's nice.

Lisa Archibald

Yes, all right. So, tell me about the rollout, then. Tell me what does it look like on your website? What is the piece of it there?

Jillian Gordon

So, the website has the templates. Obviously, we've got it translated into French because we have French immersion programs in this district and we have a couple of different rubrics. So, to help teachers kind of assess and know what they can get from this, we have a rubric for whether you're doing with a group and a rubric of whether it's an individual activity.

Lisa Archibald

Can you speak more about those, Jillian? What are the rubrics doing?

Jillian Gordon

So, the rubric offers a way to record the skills that the students are using and applying when they go through an activity like this. So, one of the rubrics, for example, will be about a group setting. So, we're doing this as a whole class activity or a small group and some of the skills are honestly just joint attention raising their hand waiting for a turn. You know, participation is part of it, but there's a lot of receptive kind of skills that we look at in social skills as well. And then there's an individual one that's often used with higher grades where it's really like, "can you generate two more members of a category? Can you generate a function with an action word?" <affirmative>, those types of more specific skills.

Jillian Gordon

Yeah, so the group level one is going to be for how the whole group's responding, and the individual one is about individual, or they both get some individual the group one is for an individual in a group setting.

Lisa Archibald

I see. Okay.

Jillian Gordon

Yes, so if we have kind of eyes on one or two students, we can speak to that, I guess. It's just a way to formalize our observations and their learning, which I think is important.

Lisa Archibald

Yes.

Jillian Gordon

Yeah, I get some data. Also, on the website, there's examples from different age levels and different topics. There is a page on just how to go about trying it, an explanation and examples with each box, A bit of history, a bit of why it's important, "why do we care in the first place?" Why are we making this time to learn about words? And often that is a huge part of our education. This is an oral language activity, or it can be; it doesn't have to be a paper and pen activity. And I think as teachers, we're really sometimes stumped at what constitutes a true oral language activity and why [it is] important.

Lisa Archibald

Yes, and I think coming back to those observations that teachers might be making about, well, I haven't heard these ideas. Right. We haven't – I'm surprised at what they know. You know, it can be a way of really revealing their knowledge.

Jillian Gordon

Yes, and it also can say, "oh, we need to do some more work about around describing words," for example, because that is an area where, as a class, there might have some weakness.

Lisa Archibald

Nice, so we can put that website link on our show notes so people can go and have a look at the tool. You made it broadly available, I think.

Jillian Gordon

Yep, you can take the templates and use them as your own.

Lisa Archibald

<affirmative> and what have you called it? Not Snap, I don't think.

Jillian Gordon

Snap is the numeracy, so ours is student word analysis and practice. Yeah, and the idea was that you could just swap out Snap for – like a language and literacy version.

Lisa Archibald

<affirmative> very nice. Yes, and so when was the website set up? Have you had people on it and responding to it?

Jillian Gordon

In September, and there's actually other districts interested in British Columbia. We had a student do her final placement last year and she's now on the island and she's shared it with her district. And I just feel that now that the website is available, that it's easier to spread the word. So, that was early October that that was ready.

Lisa Archibald

<affirmative>, very exciting.

Jillian Gordon

<affirmative>, I hope to present at the BC Speech and Hearing conference in October, actually.

Lisa Archibald

Nice, and so what's the dream here? Where would be how you would see this project growing, perhaps?

Jillian Gordon

I think the dream is that everyone in the district is as familiar with Swap and its value and comfortable using it as they are with Snap, that teachers feel like they know where their Swap board is in the school and they know how to use it and when to use it, that becomes kind of a tool that they gravitate towards.

Lisa Archibald

Yeah, nice. I'm going to bring you just – we are wrapping up, but Deb's going to bring you back to one more question that I wanted to ask about your rubrics, and that's kind of intrigued me, that idea. Because of what I am thinking there is that sometimes you're in a group, maybe you as the Speech-Language pathologist doing this activity with a group, but it's still giving you information about some particular child that you've got your eye on, perhaps <affirmative>. Can you tell me a bit about how that works?

Jillian Gordon

Well, when we see students and they're on our caseload, we always have goals for them. And the goals, it's very important to make them appropriate for them developmentally. So, by seeing where they're at in a group setting, for example, can inform us, "what's the next step for this student?" And it might not be the next step for the same next step as for the rest of the class, but it gives us feedback on how they're doing for their current goal, and then what is a good next step for them.

Lisa Archibald

And so, as you were noticing that, then you've been able to sort of operationalize or describe that in your rubric so others can be guided around the same kinds of observations?

Jillian Gordon

Right, yeah so if an EA, for example, or a teacher is taking data and says, "okay, they can come up with some category names now," then we're going to up the ante a little bit and say, "okay, let's work on this," even if it's individually, and give them some practice at the next step, which would be adding things to a group.

Lisa Archibald

Yeah, really nice. Do you consider that it informs your own assessment?

Lisa Archibald

Yes, usually, this is done kind of after an assessment as a tool where we have identified some weakness. But as – we don't have time to assess four times throughout the year so we can – it informs, I guess, our decisions more than any formal assessment. It gives us feedback so that we can make timely recommendations.

Lisa Archibald

Right, I guess it gives you a bit of a progress monitoring tool and let's just sort of shape how your expectations even for a child.

Jillian Gordon

Yeah, and to monitor progress as well.

Lisa Archibald

Yeah, really nice. Thank you so much Jillian, for telling me about this work. If you could give somebody a piece of advice on how to get started on implementing a program like this, what would be that first piece of advice you'd give them?

Jillian Gordon

I think believing in yourself is the most important thing and the progress with this project was slow. Like, we're talking years. I did it off the side of my desk and made lists and tried to kind of <laugh> advertise and spread the word, but just sticking with it, it gained momentum and the right people supported me with it and came on board. So yeah, I think just having patience. It's – these things aren't – nothing's quick <laugh> in this day and age.

Lisa Archibald

Even in this day and age, I guess <laugh>. Jillian, that's great advice. You know, I think that's really important advice for folks for sure. All right, let's finish off with what's your top tip on being a school-based S-LP and doing it well?

Jillian Gordon

Oh goodness. Well, organization is the name of the game. <laugh>, of course. and finding your people. But the number one tip I would say is to remember your value outside of just one-on-one therapy because we do enjoy that. It is important, but there are lots and lots of other things that are valuable that we can be teaching to other adults to support their students that have value too. We can't see everybody. Um, but there are a lot of other things out there that we can still give good service.

Lisa Archibald

Yes, very good. Thank you very much, Jillian, for your time today and for telling us about the Swap tool.

Jillian Gordon

You so much for having me. Thank you.

Lisa Archibald

Bye now. Bye.