



# My Language Experience

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**"Never had I thought that peanut butter, bubbles and fun-dip could be used as clinical tools!"**



IMPACT

## SERVICE SITE

For my practicum, I volunteered my time at a Speech-Language Pathology group, *The Language Experience*, in both Shady Grove and Chevy Chase, Maryland. The Language Experience is a group of 5-8 speech pathologists that deal with patients, ranging in age, for speech, language, and voice disorders. In general, speech-language pathologists (SLPs) work with their patients to assess speech and language development and treat any speech, language, swallowing or voice disorders. But this is not as easy as it might sound! Speech and language disorders can affect a person at any age or intellectual level. There are speech, language, voice or swallowing impairments, which each vary greatly in degrees and assessments.

## WHY?

As a hearing and speech major, I was interested in a first hand experience of what the field was all about. Despite the "learning" that takes place in school, which is used for the sake of a test grade, learning and seeing that information being used during a therapy session, to assess a person's specific disability is a much different experience. While learning all the necessary background information in school, I never understood how it would apply in a clinical atmosphere; with a patient and a therapist trying to alleviate a specific problem. As opposed to all the other "school learning" I have done in the past, the information which I have learned in my speech language classes is relevant not only to my interests but to a possible future profession. This opportunity to shadow a speech- language pathologist at *The Language Experience* was one of the most invaluable experiences because it gave me a chance to see my possible future, as a speech- language pathologist.

While working at *The Language Experience* I was able to shadow therapists in addition to learning the daily workings of the office. Being the type of person that I am, I enjoyed the office portion of the working experience, filing, welcoming patients, and answering phones. I always knew I was a people person, but after this experience, I gained confidence in my ability to positively interact and help other people. However, my favorite part was sitting in on therapy sessions. Many of the patients were children ranging in age. I have always loved working with children and have spent much of my time working with or volunteering with children. It was great to be able to be a part of a child friendly atmosphere, which I love because I am still a kid at heart, and learn so much from not only the therapists, but the children as well.

The most influential part of my practicum was seeing how the International Phonetic Alphabet plays a practical role in speech - language pathology not just a theoretical role, which is how it is perceived in my classes. The International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) is a system of symbols used to represent each of the many speech segments, or phonemes, used in spoken language. Linguists and speech-language pathologists use this alphabet to break down words into specific speech sounds in order to learn how each sound that we combine to make words are produced. Before a therapist can help a child, they must first understand how a normal developing child produces the sound. By using the IPA as the standard articulation pattern, therapists can determine where a patient's articulation problem begins.

THE INTERNATIONAL PHONETIC ALPHABET (revised to 2005) © 2005 IPA

CONSONANTS (PULMONIC)	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Postalveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Uvular	Pharyngeal	Glottal
Plosive	p b			t d		ʈ ɖ	c ɟ	k ɡ	q ɢ		ʔ
Nasal	m	ɱ		n		ɳ	ɲ	ŋ	ɴ		
Trill	ʙ			ʀ					ʁ		
Tap or Flap				ɾ		ɽ					
Fricative	ɸ β	f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ	ʂ ʐ	ç ʝ	x ɣ	χ ʁ	ħ ʕ	h ɦ
Lateral fricative				ɬ ɮ							
Approximant		ʋ		ɹ		ɻ	j	ɰ			
Lateral approximant				l		ɭ	ʎ	ʟ			

Where symbols appear in pairs, the one to the right represents a voiced consonant. Shaded areas denote articulations judged impossible.

**International Phonetic Alphabet.** Consonant sounds (above). Taken from The International Phonetic Association <<http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/IPA/index.html>>

This IPA consonant chart has two important parts to it. Horizontally along the top of the chart, the different places of articulation are shown. This means that for all the consonants represented (all consonant sounds for all languages), your lips, tongue and mouth are placed in a specific way for the sound to come out sounding correct. For example, if you take the symbol *p*, from the IPA consonant chart above, it falls under the place of *bilabial*. This means that both (*bi*) lips (*labial*) must come together for this sounds to be articulated correctly. If you look vertically, along the left side of the chart, the manner in which you say consonants is shown. The manner, or way you use your tongue, voice and other speech organs to allow airflow to enter your oral or nasal cavity, can be described in many different ways. The symbol *p* is categorized as a *plosive*, or *stop consonant* that refers to the way the airflow in the vocal and oral tract is stopped to produce this sound. This chart is not only informative but is crucial for a therapist to understand in order to teach their patients to change their articulation errors.

While learning the IPA in my classes I could not conceptualize how this information was used in the real world of speech language pathology. After my first day of observing, all of my questions were answered. One would think, how much fun could speech therapy be? When dealing with young children the only way to teach them and make them excited about learning is by making it fun. There are many different ways to help a patient try to learn the correct ways to produce certain sounds, but never had I thought that peanut butter, bubbles and fun-dip could be used as clinical tools!

\*To help move the tongue to the correct place of articulation peanut butter can be used, by placing it on a specific location on the mouth and telling the patient to look for it with their tongue. For the sound *l*, the tongue must be placed right behind the top front teeth, or the alveolar ridge, to be articulated correctly. If peanut butter is placed there, the patient will make their tongue move in the correct way, and find the peanut butter.

\*To help strengthen oral muscles, especially those of the tongue, fun-dip can be used if strategically placed. When the lips are coated with the powder the patient is expected to use their tongue to lick it off. To strengthen the muscles, it can be placed on the far corners of the mouth and above or below the main portions of the lips. This will force the patients to really stretch the muscles in their tongue to lick the fun-dip. (And they get a great tasting treat!)

\*To help strengthen oral muscles, those needed to move the lips, as well as controlling the amount of breath used when talking, bubbles are a great tool. The lips and tongue need to be strategically placed in order to successfully blow a bubble. By showing the patient how to blow one, as well as allowing them to blow bubbles, their lips are moving and their breathing is being controlled.

After seeing these exercises done, using fun, interactive, and tasty tools, I realized that therapy could be fun. What could be better than playing with children all day but really helping them learn how to talk? I could not think of a better job!

## FUTURE

My time at *The Language Experience* was a great opportunity for me to see how important and relevant the classes I am taking now are for my future. There is a difference in learning information and being tested on it, than seeing how it is used in a way outside of a classroom. This opportunity gave me a chance to see what speech pathology is about and how the information I am learning now can eventually help impaired people learn to effectively communicate. Being the person that I am, (one that loves to talk) I cannot think of something better to do then help someone learn to successfully communicate with the people around them. I am excited to learn more about this profession and eventually become a speech- language pathologist.

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