LESSON PLAN

BACKGROUND

Speech-language pathology assistants (SLPAs) are support personnel who assist speech-language pathologists (SLPs) in the provision of the therapeutic/rehabilitation services to individuals with speech and language disorders, across a wide variety of settings, including public schools, private practices, and medical settings (ASHA, n.d.a.). Currently 35 states license support personnel; however, the training and academic coursework for SLPAs vary dramatically from state to state, as do applicable laws governing SLPA duties and minimum supervision requirements.

In an attempt to address this national variability, the American Speech-Language and Hearing Association (ASHA) recommended national guidelines for the training, use, and
supervision of SLPAs (ASHA, 2004b). Despite these national recommendations, each state remains responsible for establishing and monitoring the requirements for SLPA use and training. In some cases, state regulations differ in substantive ways from ASHA guidelines (McNeilly, 2009). In 2010, ASHA created an *optional* Associates Program to address national inconsistencies in SLPA use and training (Robinson, 2010). This program is available to qualified SLPAs who agree to adhere to ASHA policies pertaining to support personnel (ASHA, n.d.b.). ASHA reiterates though, that this affiliation is *not* a mechanism for certification and that although the spirit and moral foundation of its professional Code of Ethics are applicable to SLPAs, the language of many of the Rules of Ethics contained within this code are not consistently applicable to the scope of an SLPA (ASHA, 2013). This intersection of conflicting and complex regulations and recommendations, combined with the fact that SLPAs work specifically under the supervision of an SLP, can add to confusion in understanding ethical conduct as an SLPA.

Two recent studies conducted on the topic highlight the need for specific training in ethical conduct for SLPAs. Ostergren and Aguilar (2012b) summarized the results of a statewide survey conducted on individuals who were registered in California as an SLPA. Participants commented on issues pertaining to their duties and levels of supervision. Results suggested the presence of potential ethical dilemmas, including reports of inadequate supervision and instances in which some SLPAs were engaged in activities outside their scope of practice as an SLPA. Ostergren (2012) also noted the lack of resources available in ethics for SLPAs *in training*, and the critical need for these resources to support ethical conduct of licensed SLPAs and SLPAs in training.
Limited comprehensive resources are available that specifically address ethical conduct and ethical decision-making of SLPAs. This makes training and education in this area challenging. Several authors in the field of speech-language pathology have suggested frameworks applicable to SLPs, but none have addressed ethics as they apply to SLPAs (Body & McAllister, 2009, Chabon & Morris, 2004; Irwin, Pannbacker, Powell, and Vekovious, 2007). In theory, these frameworks could be applied by an SLPA. One model that holds promise in this area is a consensus-building framework (CBF) described by Carbon and Morris (2004). CBF highlights the importance of carefully analyzing potential conflict from multiple perspectives, including relevant facts, the values and beliefs of those involved (e.g., clients, supervisors, family members), professional norms, ethical constructs, applicable ethical codes, social roles, and self-interest.

PURPOSE/LEARNING OUTCOME

The information contained below describes a three-hour model addressing the many facets of ethical conduct and ethical decision-making applicable to an SLPA. The target audiences for this teaching module are licensed SLPAs or individuals in training to become an SLPA. This module is intended for individuals who have already completed basic coursework about the nature of communicative disorders and the field of speech-language pathology, as well as specific instruction in the roles and responsibilities of an SLPA. Following module completion, module participants will be able to:

1. Compare and contrast the concepts of morals, ethics, and laws (Horner, 2003).
2. Describe ASHA’s Code of Ethics (ASHA, 2010a), including avenues for reporting alleged ethical violations to AHSA (ASHA, 2010b).
3. Describe ASHA’s Code of Ethics as it pertains to SLPAs and their supervisors.

4. Describe the impacts of unethical conduct by SLPAs.

5. Explain core principles of ethical decision-making.

6. Employ an SLPA specific ethical decision-making framework (Ostergren, in press), using case scenarios of potential ethical dilemmas faced by SLPAs and SLPAs in training.

MODULE QUESTIONNAIRES

To aid the instructor in understanding the level of knowledge participants have prior to module completion and to serve as a mechanism for data collection and module modification, administration of a brief questionnaire is recommended pre and post module implementation. The Pre-Module Questionnaire (Appendix A) should be completed prior to Phase I (Required Readings Assignment). The Post-Module Questionnaire (Appendix B) can be conducted immediately after module completion.

MODULE PHASES

Phase I: Required Reading

To facilitate optimum participation and learning, module participants should be assigned readings on the topic, prior to module participation. These readings will introduce general concepts in ethics and provide an overview of important ethical considerations relevant to an SLPA. The following three readings are recommended for this purpose:


**Phase II: Lecture Presentation**

In Phase II, the instructor presents the content contained in the lecture slides. Instructor notes within these slides discuss areas of emphasis and discussion.

*Approximate Time: 60 minutes*

**Phase III: Group Discussion (Decision-Making Worksheet Explanation/Application)**

In Phase III, the instructor reviews the Ethical Decision-Making Worksheet (Ostergren, in press; Appendix C), including a sample case. Appendix D contains a sample case and completed worksheet for this purpose. This information is also available on lecture slides for display during discussion of this information.

*Approximate Time: 15 minutes*

**Phase IV: Small Group Discussion (Case Analysis)**

In Phase IV, module participants should be assigned to groups of 4-5 students each. Each group should be provided with a different case scenario (Appendix E), a copy of the Ethical Decision-
Making Worksheet (Appendix C), and a copy of ASHA’s Code of Ethics (2010). This portion of the module is separated into small group discussion and small group presentation, as follows:

**Small Group Discussion:**

Using the Ethical Decision-Making Worksheet, each group is tasked with collectively completing a worksheet on the case scenario provided. A member of the group should be assigned to write responses for the group on this worksheet. Groups should be instructed to first read aloud the case scenario and then to spend 5-10 minutes discussing this case informally. Following informal discussion, group members are tasked with completing the Ethical Decision-Making Worksheet. The instructor should move between the groups and encourage thoughtful reflection on the case scenario and full participation by all group members in collectively completing the Ethical Decision-Making Worksheet.

**Group Presentation:**

Following small group discussion, the class should reconvene as a group, when the results of their small group case analysis can be presented. The case scenarios for this exercise are incorporated into lecture slides so that they can be displayed while each small group presents their findings. During this presentation, group members are asked to describe the following outcomes from their Ethical Decision-Making Worksheet:

- *Are there any potential conflicts with ASHA’s Code of Ethics?*
- *Which ethical principles are involved? Why?*
- *What is a potential resolution to this situation?*

The instructor can facilitate class participation by reiterating that there is not one right answer, and by encouraging participants to expand upon their rationale or resolution. The instructor can also present an alternate interpretation for class discussion.
Approximate Time: 80 minutes.

This includes approximately 20 minutes of small group discussion and 60 minutes of small group presentation. This is based on approximately 10 minutes of discussion time per group, for a total of 6 groups. If you are presenting to a larger class with more than 6 groups, this portion of the module may take longer to present the results of the case analyses.

Phase V: Small Group Discussion (Case Creation and Presentation)

In Phase V, students return to their small groups to create a new ethical case scenario applicable to an SLPA or SLPA in training. For this portion of the module, a group member should be tasked with writing down this case scenario. Module participants should be instructed to create a case, addressing a core ethical conflict, from a different/unique perspective. The instructor should encourage module participants to think realistically in creating an ethical scenario that may actually occur and in creating a conflict that contains the subtleties common in real world ethical dilemmas. These cases can be collected for use in future models. If time permits, group members can share their case with the class.

Approximately: 15 minutes

Phase VI: Wrap-Up and Lessons Learned

In this Phase VI, the class reconvenes to summarize lessons learned. This can be a collective exercise that is facilitated first by asking the participants to describe one (1) thing they learned from this module. The instructor can list these items on the board. After this, the instructor can ask the participants to take on the role of an ethical advisor and share one (1) message/concept they would convey to an SLPA new to the topic of ethics. These comments can also be
summarized in list fashion on the board. At the completion of this exercise, participants can complete the Post-Module Questionnaire (Appendix B).

*Approximately: 15 minutes*
Bibliography

ASHA. (n.d.a). *Frequently Asked Questions: Speech-Language Pathology Assistants (SLPAs).*

ASHA. (n.d.b). *ASHA to Launch New Associate Affiliation Associates Program Overview.*
Retrieved from http://www.asha.org/Members/Associate-Affiliation/

Available from www.asha.org/policy .


Denton, D. R. (2009, August 11). Watch Out for These Ethical Traps in Private Practice. *The ASHA Leader*


Appendix A
Pre-Module Questionnaire

What is ethical conduct?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

What factors influence ethical conduct?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

Describe an ethical dilemma you think an SLPA or SLPA in training may face?
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_____________________________________________________________________________
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Please rate each of the following statements. Place a checkmark in the applicable category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am knowledgeable about ethics and ethical principles applicable to SLPAs.</td>
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<td>I am comfortable in making ethical decisions as an SLPA.</td>
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<tr>
<td>I am comfortable in addressing ethical conflict (should it arise) as an SLPA.</td>
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Appendix B
Post-Module Questionnaire

What is ethical conduct?
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

What factors influence ethical conduct?
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

Please rate each of the following statements. Place a checkmark in the applicable category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I am knowledgeable about ethics and ethical principles applicable to SLPAs.</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>I am comfortable in addressing ethical conflict (should it arise) as an SLPA.</td>
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</table>

In terms of the learning module on ethics you just completed, please rate each of the following statements. Place a checkmark in the applicable category.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The required readings assigned for this module were helpful for my learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The lecture presentation portion of this module was helpful for my learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>The case studies presented as part of this module were helpful for my learning.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in small group discussion</td>
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</table>
What was the **most valuable** aspect of this module?
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
What was the **least valuable** aspect of this module?
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Appendix C
Ethical Decision-Making Worksheet*


SLPA Ethical Decision-Making Worksheet

STEP 1: Gather/Clarify Facts*

• Who is involved in this situation?

• Who is impacted by this situation?

• What are the motives and roles of those involved in this situation?

• List applicable ASHA Ethical Principles and Rules of Ethics (if any):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethical Principle</th>
<th>Ethical Rule</th>
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<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>

*NOTE: At the end of Step 1 (Gather/Clarify Facts) you should be able to describe the nature of the problem accurately and in-depth, factoring in each of the facts above. If not, continue to gather additional information. If by clarifying the facts, the ethical dilemma no longer exists, stop here. If not, proceed to Step 2 (Action Analysis)
### Step 2: Action Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible Course of Action</th>
<th>Those Impacted by Action</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Risks</th>
<th>Ethical Resolution? (Yes/No)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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</tbody>
</table>
Consult Experts**

- Who are sources of assistance in problem solving this matter (e.g., supervisor, employer, co-worker, etc.)?

**Note: In consulting with others about the situation, you must do so with discretion and complete confidentiality.** This is particularly true when the conflict involves a client. Federal law prohibits you from discussing any personal information about your client with anyone other than the SLP responsible for that client’s care and those specifically authorized (typically in writing). If so, you should use only generic descriptions, without any names or personal information specifically identifying the individuals involved. You should also have this discussion in a private location where others cannot overhear your conversation.

Step 3: Action Implementation***

- What action was implemented?

- What was the outcome of that action?

***Note: The outcome of your action should resolve the ethical dilemma. If not, restart this process over again at Step 1 (Gather/Clarify Facts) and proceed through Steps 2 (Action Analysis) and Step 3 (Action Implementation) until an ethical resolution is achieved.
SAMPLE CASE

Julie is an SLPA employed in a large, urban high school setting. Julie is bilingual and frequently assists her supervisor as an interpreter during assessment. Julie has worked in this setting for more than a year. She is currently supervised by an experienced SLP with her ASHA CCCs. Julie’s supervisor has one of the highest caseloads in their district. Next week, her supervisor has several Individualized Educational Plan (IEP) meetings scheduled. She has expressed to Julie that she is behind schedule in writing documentation for these meetings and in performing follow-up assessments. Julie’s supervisor asked her to perform an assessment on a bilingual client in preparation for an upcoming IEP meeting. Julie is concerned because performing diagnostic assessment is outside the scope of her practice, as per both ASHA recommendation and state licensing standards.

COMPLETED WORKSHEET (SAMPLE ANSWERS)

STEP 1: Gather/Clarify Facts*

- Who is involved in this situation?
  - Julie and her supervisor.

- Who is impacted by this situation?
  - Julie, her supervisor, and the client and his/her family (if Julie performs the assessment).

- What are the motives and roles of those involved in this situation?
  - Julie’s supervisor appears to be motivated by currently pressing issues in terms of a large number of reports and assessments that need to be done soon. Additional clarification is needed relative to the supervisor’s intent with this request. That is, was the request that Julie assist in this assessment as an interpreter or that Julie perform this assessment independently. Julie’s supervisor’s role is one of a superior, which is a position of power in terms of Julie’s employment and performance evaluation, as well as potential future supervision. Julie may be concerned how her response to this request will influence her job and future supervision.

- List applicable ASHA Ethical Principles and Rules of Ethics (if any):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethical Principle</th>
<th>Ethical Rule</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principle of Ethics I</td>
<td>F.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals shall honor their responsibility to hold paramount the welfare of persons they serve professionally or who are participants in research and scholarly activities, and they shall treat animals involved in research in a humane way.</td>
<td>Individuals who hold the Certificate of Clinical Competence shall not delegate tasks that require the unique skills, knowledge, and judgment that are within the scope of their profession to others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle of Ethics II</td>
<td>B.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individuals shall honor their responsibility to achieve and maintain the highest level of professional competence and performance.</td>
<td>Individuals shall engage in only those aspects of the professions that are within the scope of their professional practice and competence, considering their level of education, training, and experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principle of Ethics IV</th>
<th>B.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individuals shall honor their responsibilities to the professions and their relationships with colleagues, students, and members of other professions and disciplines.</td>
<td>Individuals shall prohibit anyone under their supervision from engaging in any practice that violates the Code of Ethics.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
*NOTE: At the end of Step 1 (Gather/Clarify Facts) you should be able to describe the nature of the problem accurately and in-depth, factoring in each of the facts above. If not, continue to gather additional information. If by clarifying the facts, the ethical dilemma no longer exists, stop here. If not, proceed to Step 2 (Action Analysis)*

**Step 2: Action Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Possible Course of Action</th>
<th>Benefits</th>
<th>Risks</th>
<th>Ethical Resolution? (Yes/No)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Julie could assess the client (as requested), but not tell anyone and allow her supervisor to sign the report as if the SLP was the one who conducted this assessment.</td>
<td>Julie avoids conflict with her supervisor by not having to tell the supervisor that assessment is outside Julie's scope of responsibilities.</td>
<td>Violation in ethical principles, for both Julie and her supervisor. Negative impact in quality of care for the client. Potential for sanctions from state licensing board, for both Julie and her supervisor.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie can tell her supervisor that assessment is not within her scope of responsibilities and as such she is not able to assess the client (as requested). She can, however, offer to assist in the assessment as an interpreter and in any other duties within her scope of responsibilities so that the supervisor has additional time to assess the client.</td>
<td>No violation in ethical principles. Quality in client care is maintained as Julie has reduced the supervisor's workload in other ways so that the client can be assessed by the SLP, who is qualified to do so.</td>
<td>Julie's supervisor may disagree or may be upset that Julie has refused to do something requested. If good interpersonal skills are utilized in addressing this situation, this risk may be mitigated.</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julie could assess the client (as requested), but report her supervisor's conduct to the state licensing board, ASHA's Board of Ethics, and their employer.</td>
<td>Julie avoids direct conflict with her supervisor by not having to tell the supervisor that assessment is outside Julie's scope of responsibilities.</td>
<td>Violation in ethical principles, for both Julie and her supervisor.* Negative impact on quality of care for the client. Potential for sanctions from state licensing board, for both Julie and her supervisor.</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
NOTE: Although Julie reported her supervisor to ASHA’s Board of Ethics, Julie would still be engaging in unethical conduct as she performed the assessment, which was not in the best interest of the client.

| Julie could not mention this conflict to her supervisor, but call in sick the day the assessment is scheduled so she does not have to assess the client. | Julie avoids direct conflict with her supervisor by not having to tell the supervisor that the assessment is outside Julie’s scope of responsibilities. No sanctions from state licensing board for either Julie or her supervisor if the assessment is not performed by Julie. | Potential negative impact on quality of care as the assessment may not be performed as needed, which isn’t in the best interest of the client. Alternatively, the supervisor may simply reschedule the assessment for another day when Julie is available and in that case the issue has not been resolved and will resurface when she returns. | No |

Consult Experts**

- Who are sources of assistance in problem solving this matter (e.g., supervisor, employer, co-worker, etc.)?

Julie has another SLP she has worked closely with in the same district. She may be an additional resource on the matter, given of course that Julie discusses this issue in confidence.

**Note: In consulting with others about the situation, you must do so with discretion and complete confidentiality. This is particularly true when the conflict involves a client. Federal law prohibits you from discussing any personal information about your client with anyone other than the SLP responsible for that client’s care and those specifically authorized (typically in writing). If so, you should use only generic descriptions, without any names or personal information specifically identifying the individuals involved. You should also have this discussion in a private location where others cannot overhear your conversation.
Step 3: Action Implementation***

• What action was implemented?
  Julie expressed to her supervisor that assessment was not within her scope of responsibilities and as such she was not able to assess the client, as requested. She offered to assist in the assessment as an interpreter and also by preparing the necessary materials. Julie also indicated that she would be willing to stay late to assist with other scheduling and clerical duties needed in preparation for the upcoming IEPs meetings.

• What was the outcome of that action?
  Julie’s supervisor assessed the client. With the additional help Julie provided, she was able to meet all her obligations in terms of upcoming IEP meetings. Julie’s professional approach and good interpersonal skills preserved their relationship and helped Julie feel confident in addressing conflict ethically in the future.

***Note: The outcome of your action should resolve the ethical dilemma. If not, restart this process over again at Step 1 (Gather/Clarify Facts) and proceed through Steps 2 (Action Analysis) and Step 3 (Action Implementation) until an ethical resolution is achieved.
Appendix D

Sample Ethical Case Scenarios

Case #1
Jonathan is a newly hired SLPA, working in an elementary school setting. This is his first SLPA position and his first job in a public school. His supervisor trained him for approximately 1 week, consisting of showing him paperwork and having him observe her providing services to students. She then became seriously ill and has taken an extended medical leave. The district supervisor has asked Jonathan to work until they can find a replacement supervisor for him, including providing treatment services to the students on the supervisor’s caseload.

Case #2
Susan is an SLPA working in a private practice setting while attending graduate school to become an SLP. She has been employed as an SLPA for approximately 2 years, under the supervision of an ASHA certified SLP. There is an opening for a SLP position at the site where she works. The owner of this site told her they would like to hire Susan for this position. The owner indicated that Susan could be begin working in this position immediately because she is in school to become an SLP. Further, the owner states that they would list her title on official records as an SLP, because clients prefer to be seen by an SLP.

Case #3
Edith is an SLPA working in a medical setting that bills Medicare for services provided to patients. During Edith’s initial training, her supervisor mentioned that SLPA services are not “billable” under Medicare, unless the paperwork indicates that the SLP provided the services. Because of this, Edith’s supervisor instructed Edith that she is not to record anything in official records. Her supervisor instructed Edith to tell her verbally the outcome of the treatment so that she can enter that information into the billing system as if an SLP provided the services.

Case #4
Leena is an SLPA working in a private practice. Her supervisor has trained her to work with individuals in this setting and she feels competent in doing so with the supervision. She is assigned a new client to work on treatment goals addressing memory and attention. When Leena reads the client’s chart, she sees that the client is HIV positive. Leena is concerned that she will contract HIV/AIDS so she tells her supervisor that she does not want to provide services to this client.

Case #5
Bill is an SLPA working in a public school setting. He has been working in this setting for 6 months. Thus far, he has received excellent training. There is a particular student’s mother that does not get along with his supervising SLP. As a result, the student’s mom asks Bill questions about the student’s goals, progress, results of assessment, and future recommendations for services. She tells Bill, “I trust you” and as such she wants to know his opinion about her daughter’s disorder and treatment.