

The raison d'être of speech and language therapy.

Mark Meersman, Lessius Hogeschool, Belgium.

What is the reason for existence of speech and language therapy? What exactly do we do when we 'provide treatment'? What can we do *more* or *better* than the practitioners of the auxiliary sciences our discipline is affiliated with? Has speech and language therapy something extra to offer? Indeed, when it comes to 'curing', the physician is the first person to think of. When the focus is on modifying people's behaviour, feelings or attitudes, psychologists are cut out for this. There are experts in linguistics for language matters, and so on...

Still, SLTs, being experts in helping and teaching clients to alleviate their communication problems, might hold a key position – small but crucial – somewhere in between those experts of body or mind. SLTs hardly ever eliminate the cause or aetiology of the speech or language problem; generally we are not able to remove the disorder. Our strength is in changing, modifying, stimulating, modeling, shaping, reinforcing, training... communication *behaviour* in the broadest sense. Looking at speech and language therapy as an applied behavioural science that, in a well-structured methodological way, deals with communication *problems* rather than with the disorders as such, makes our profession even more challenging than it already is...