UNDERSTANDING ROLES FOR COLLABORATION: TEACHER AND SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGIST

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ABSTRACT

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This investigation sought to discover if graduating education students understood the role of a speech-language pathologist (SLP) and if they realized the opportunities for collaboration. This study was performed using a survey distributed to education students in their final year of study. The survey consisted of general questions about SLPs in school systems and questions about the two professions working together. The data collected revealed a positive attitude toward collaboration but an overall confusion of what SLPs do in public-school settings. These students who were set to begin their teaching careers within months of the survey did not understand the many ways SLPs could help their students. This study revealed a need for SLPs to educate others about their profession and the benefits of collaboration.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Interprofessional collaboration occurs when professionals across disciplines come together to work side by side to resolve patient problems (Vries et al., 2016). Appropriate collaboration occurs when the professionals understand the roles and responsibilities of one another, utilize the differences between the professions, and rely upon one another to solve the problems at hand (Vries et al., 2016). Interprofessional collaboration requires each professional to appreciate the role of the other and for both to take on the roles of specialist and learner (Tollerfield, 2003). Collaboration involves a flow of information between the individuals and a positive working relationship that will benefit the client.

School-aged children with communication difficulties have issues regarding the classroom curriculum. These students require support from their parents, peers, teachers, and speech-language pathologists (SLPs) to succeed in the classroom (Wright, 1996). These supporters must be in agreement with each other. The teacher needs to be aware of how to assist the student. The SLP should be aware of what curriculum the teacher is covering. The parents need to be getting similar reports from both professionals to provide additional support at home. Otherwise, the child will not have the best opportunity to succeed. Teachers and SLPs have a great opportunity to work side by side to help their students make the best progress they can (Wright, 1996). Language is fluid

and is used in every aspect of education (Ukrainetz & Fresquez, 2003; Zygouris-Coe & Goodwiler, 2013). Language is an overarching term that cannot be the sole responsibility of an SLP or a teacher. The SLP and teacher should both be sharing the load of language training (Ukrainetz & Fresquez, 2003).

Traditionally, SLPs pull their students out of the classroom to have their therapy sessions, allowing the children to miss important class discussions and subject matter (Hartas, 2004). Presently there is a movement to reach beyond that traditional method and incorporate the classroom curriculum as often as possible. A child will learn the best in his or her natural learning environment surrounded by peers in comparison to isolation (Beck & Dennis, 1997). The IDEA act of 1997 further expects SLPs to implement the curriculum into their service delivery (Pershey & Rapkin, 2003). For this curriculum implementation, the teacher and SLP will need a good working relationship to share ideas to help the student.

In a study by Wright (1996), an SLP noted that "There is no advantage to working alone," supporting the importance of interprofessional collaboration. So, if this relationship seems so logical and so necessary, why is it not standard? Many studies reported teachers and SLPs mentioning time as a disadvantage for collaboration, however Tollerfield (2003) presented an interesting idea. According to Tollerfield (2003), teachers do not have the specialty training that SLPs have, so when asked about aspects of language, the teachers were only able to use very broad or general terms. The teachers do not see language as the SLPs do, so if the teachers are not engaged in the process, they may not understand what the SLP is targeting with the student. The teachers in this study also requested a clarification of the jargon used by SLPs (Tollerfield, 2003). A study by

Glover, Cormack, and Smith-Tamaray (2015) suggested that teachers need more education and training. In response to a questionnaire, teachers seemed confused and gave conflicting responses regarding services and resources provided by SLPs (Baxter et al., 2009). If a teacher doesn't understand what services an SLP can provide for a child, then it might be difficult, if not impossible, to collaborate.

Therefore, the purpose of this study was to see how education students perceived the role of an SLP and if that perception affected their plan to work together in a school. It was hypothesized that education students would not be able to accurately describe the role of an SLP in a school and that this misrepresentation would affect how they intended to work with SLPs in the future.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Interprofessional collaboration allows professionals of different disciplines to work together to achieve a common goal. Teachers and speech-language pathologists working in schools have a prime opportunity to collaborate and share ideas for the betterment of their students.

Legislature Important to Collaboration

Zygouris-Coe and Goodwiler (2013) investigated the literacy demands of Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and the role a speech-language pathologist (SLP) has with this type of curriculum. CCSS suggest that language should be taught throughout the day instead of in isolation. The researchers hypothesized that SLPs could help with this implementation by providing guidance in language and literacy strategies to the teachers who have to adapt to these new standards (Zygouris-Coe & Goodwiler, 2013). In addition, Murza, Malani, and Hahs-Vaughn (2014) reviewed how SLPs could implement CCSS into their therapy goals. It was declared that SLPs are "uniquely prepared" to assist students who do not meet the new CCSS. Areas specifically targeted by CCSS such as morphology, syntax, and comprehension-based literature questions are well within the scope of practice of an SLP. Murza et al. revealed that SLPs are willing to

learn more about CCSS to better serve the public-school population. Teachers need to realize that SLPs will work with the same CCSS as they are to help students in the classroom. These new standards will not hinder collaboration between the professions but should allow for a closer relationship between the professionals.

Every subject area requires students to have varying degrees of literacy skills (Zygouris-Coe & Goodwiler, 2013). Teachers' attitudes on CCSS ranged from enthusiastic to indifferent. Most teachers agreed that moving to a more independent way of learning was a positive change but were confused on how to do that. SLPs have been specially trained in language and literacy and at the preschool and elementary levels often incorporate subject matter into their service delivery. The researchers believed that SLPs could incorporate literacy and language into secondary education the same way and share those strategies with the teachers. The researchers speculated, that with the new standards, SLPs may see larger caseloads at this level of education. The researchers insisted, that through professional development led by SLPs, collaboration, and reflection, the implementation of CCSS could be easier across the United States (Zygouris-Coe & Goodwiler, 2013).

Due to implications of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) act of 1997, SLPs needed to find ways to implement curriculum into their service delivery. Pershey and Rapkin (2003) believed collaboration was the solution and explored the collaborative relationships between SLPs and teachers. Their report described SLPs' responses to a questionnaire about current forms of collaboration and what factors inhibited SLP collaboration with teachers. Seventeen SLPs who worked in an urban school district in the United States participated in this study (Pershey & Rapkin, 2003).

Fifteen of the 17 SLPs who participated were full time with caseloads varying from 40 to 84 clients (Pershey & Rapkin, 2003). Due to the size of caseloads, the SLPs reported a lack of time to provide quality services to their clients. This also led to a lack of time to collaborate with educators. Despite the drawbacks, the SLPs indicated two advantages for classroom therapy. The first was that seeing students in small groups in the classroom was efficient and allowed support for students not receiving services. Additionally, therapy within the classroom allowed the SLP to confront reading and writing needs within the context of the curriculum. Many participants reported using classroom materials, vocabulary, and spelling words within the classroom and in pull-out therapy. The SLPs also noted that they set goals based on the curriculum (Pershey & Rapkin, 2003).

When asked why collaborative services do not occur, four main themes were apparent: time limitations, limited knowledge of the classroom/teacher routine, issues related to inflexibility, and a lack of willingness of the SLP to collaborate with another professional (Pershey & Rapkin, 2003). The SLPs indicated that teachers were usually satisfied with the collaboration that took place with them. The participants noted that they felt most effective when they could target their clients' goals within and outside of the classroom setting (Pershey & Rapkin, 2003).

Defining Roles

In order to collaborate for the implementation of CCSS and the IDEA act, the roles of the teacher and SLP must be first clearly defined. The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association or ASHA (2010) defines the roles and responsibilities of school-based SLPs. SLPs working in a school are to provide quality services across all