Collaborative Practices in Special Education: An Exploratory Study

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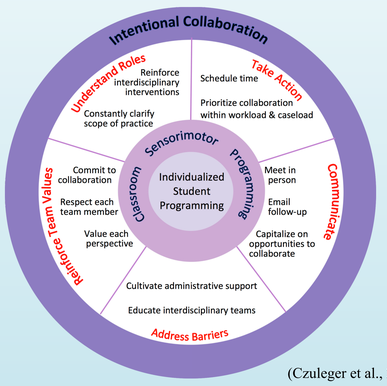
Introduction and Purpose

- Professional collaboration in special education is essential for student success (Barnes & Turner, 2000)
- However, IDEA legislation does not guide how such collaboration should take place (Pub. L. 108–446)
- The Conceptual Model for Collaboration (CMC) created by Czuleger and colleagues (2016) described professional collaborative practices of a transdisciplinary team at a special education center



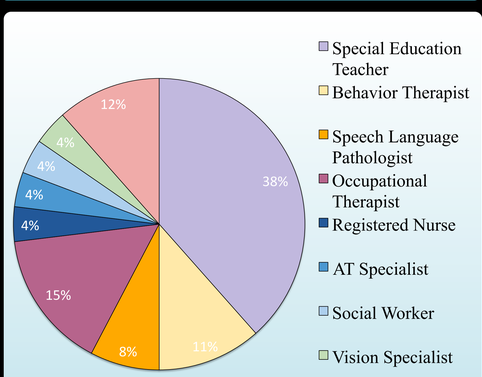
(Czuleger et al., 2016)

The purpose of this study was to examine the CMC in a broader context

Design

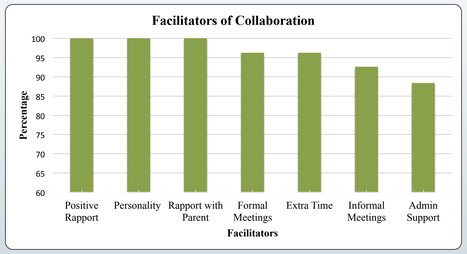
- Quantitative exploratory design - online survey
- Participants from a SELPA in northern California, n=27 (~30% response rate)

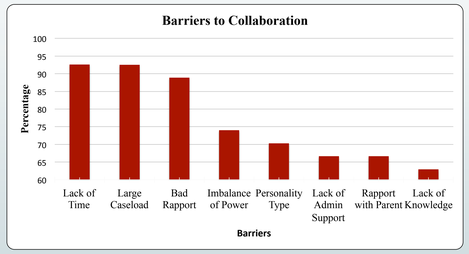
Participants

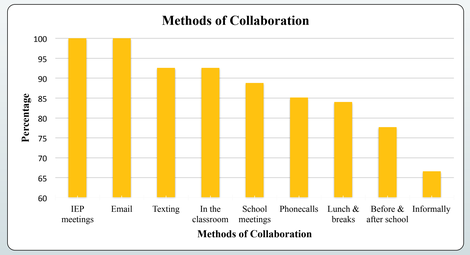


Results

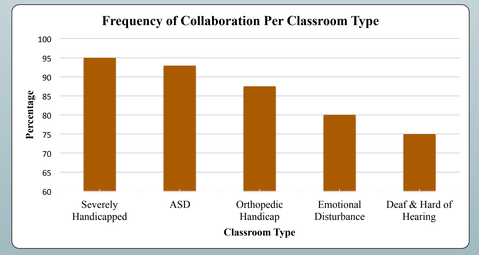
Question 1: What are common facilitators and barriers to collaboration and how does it take place?

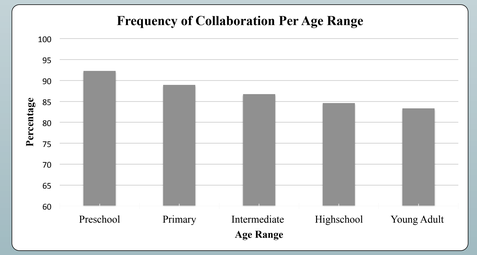




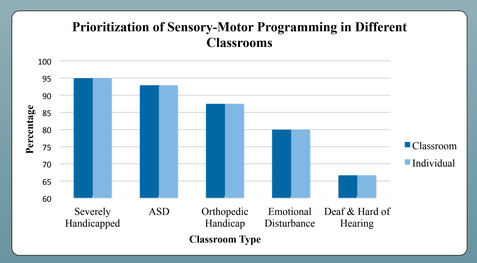


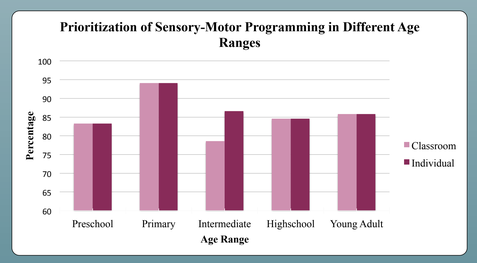
Question 2: What is the frequency of collaboration in different classroom types and age ranges?





Question 3: How much are sensory-motor programs prioritized in different classroom types and across age ranges?





97% of participants agree that good collaboration leads to improved student outcomes and professional development

Moderate correlation between understanding of OT and the prioritization of sensory-motor programming for both classrooms, $r = 0.52$, $p < .05$; and students, $r = .49$, $p < .05$

Moderate correlation between frequency of collaboration and the prioritization of sensory-motor programming for both classrooms, $r = .56$, $p < .05$; and students, $r = .48$, $p < .05$

Quotes

Sensory Strategies

- *My students need to find and utilize strategies that help them self-regulate and manage their over or under activity alertness/internal sensation in not only my class, but generalized over all settings of their life.*

Facilitators

- *Respect among members of the team - you don't have to be besties, but you do have to respect each other!*

Barriers

- *When members of the team do not value the contribution of other disciplines. When team members see kids/challenges as "an OT thing" or "just behavior" or "speech issue" rather than a combination.*

Discussion

- Over 80% of participants agreed on common facilitators to collaboration
- Lack of time, large caseloads, and bad rapport are strong barriers to collaboration
- Most collaboration takes place in IEP meetings, through email and text messaging
- Frequency of collaboration is high in all classroom types and across all age ranges
- Respect and understanding of OT has supported prioritization of sensory-motor programming for both the student and the classroom equally

Implications for Practice

Team members are committed to collaboration for (1) student outcomes and (2) professional development. Suggested strategies include:

- Plan face to face meetings
- Use "virtual" methods of communication (e.g., email, texting, Google docs, etc.)
- Promote your professional scope of practice as part of daily service delivery and make an effort to respect and understand other professional roles
- Partner with administrators to facilitate best practices in collaboration
- Prioritize rapport building as part of professional development, both formally and informally
- Collaborate with OT to build classroom based sensory motor programming

Selected References

Barnes, K. J., & Turner K. D., (2000). Team collaboration practices between teachers and Occupational Therapists. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy. 55*(1), 83-89. doi:10.5014/ajot.55.1.83

Czuleger, B., Garnica, E., Phung, J., Rzepka, M., & Hess, L. (2016, October) *A collaborative approach to school-based sensorimotor programs*. Poster presented at Occupational Therapy Association of California Conference, Pasedena, CA

Individuals With Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004, Pub. L. 108–446, 20 U.S.C. 1400 et seq.

Acknowledgements

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