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## Exploring Collaboration between Speech-Language Pathologists and Special Educators in Secondary Education Settings

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Exploring Collaboration between Speech-Language Pathologists and Special Educators in  
Secondary Education Settings

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Honors Project

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### **Abstract**

Speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and special education teachers collaborate in an effort to improve student outcomes. Although studies have examined the nature of collaboration between SLPs and teachers in preschool and elementary settings, collaboration in secondary education settings has not been examined. This project addresses the following questions: How do high school based SLPs and special education teachers who collaborate perceive one another? What are the perceived benefits and barriers to collaboration? How do SLPs and special education teachers in a high school setting characterize collaboration? SLP and special education teacher teams in secondary education settings completed questionnaires and face-to-face interviews. Findings suggested that participants had positive impressions of each other's expertise, therefore enhancing the quality of their collaborations. Despite the barriers experienced, they welcomed opportunities to collaborate with their colleague to improve student outcomes. Findings from this work may ultimately inform training/professional development efforts in educational settings where collaboration is an expectation.

## **Introduction**

According to the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, a primary responsibility of school-based Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs) is collaboration (ASHA, 2010). As an educational team member, SLPs are expected to be involved in all levels of service provision for children with language and learning disabilities, including educational planning and indirect and direct service provision. At each of these levels, different opportunities for collaboration between SLPs and regular education or special education teachers may occur. The effectiveness of collaboration between these professionals may impact student outcomes.

Individual characteristics (e.g. training experiences and communication skills), team characteristics (e.g. shared goals and mutual respect), and settings in which the collaborative effort occurs (e.g. primary and secondary schools), may influence the effectiveness or ineffectiveness of collaboration. Studies have shown that members of effective collaborative partnerships demonstrate good interpersonal and communication skills (e.g. ability to work with others, positive attitude, and active listening) as well as some training in collaboration (Morrison et al., 2011; Saar, 2012). Enhancing our understanding of collaboration within collaborative teams and across settings, may in turn improve student outcomes (Saar, 2012; Peña & Quinn, 2003; Shaughnessy & Sanger, 2005; Tollerfield, 2003; Wakefield, 2007; Ritzman et al., 2006; Drew, 1998). Factors that have been discussed in the literature as contributing to effective or ineffective collaboration are discussed with more detail in the following sections.

### **Individual Characteristics**

Studies have shown that individual characteristics of professionals working in a collaborative partnership influence the effectiveness of the collaboration (Morrison et al., 2011; Saar, 2012). In a study examining individual characteristics and collaboration skills of SLPs ( $N =$

10), Morrison et al., (2011) used semi-structured, individual interviews to obtain SLP self-reports of personal perspectives on collaboration. Participants ranged in age from 29-54 and had a range of clinical experience from 6 to 20 years. The SLPs reported that an ability to work well with others, a positive attitude, and active listening skills, allowed them to successfully implement classroom-based intervention. Additionally, all of the participants reported that on the job experiences in collaboration and having a mentor as a new practicing clinician, determined the effectiveness of the collaboration (Morrison et al., 2011). Based on this study, it may be that practical application of collaboration contributed to positive perceptions of collaboration.

Saar (2012) used observations to determine individual qualities needed for effective collaborative partnerships. Regular education kindergarten teachers ( $n = 3$ ) and an SLP in her clinical fellowship year completed surveys, weekly logs, and semi-structured interviews. Observations and interviews with the SLP concerned interprofessional relationships with the teachers. Data were used to establish the values and goals, communication skills, parity among partners, and level of trust among participants. Results showed that shared values and goals, effective communication, and development of trust, were the individual qualities of team members that lead to effective collaboration. Effective communication skills were referenced the most frequently (32.7%) in the interviews, followed by shared values and goals (26.1%), trust (25.5%), and parity among participants (13.7%).

### **Team Characteristics of Collaboration**

Studies examining characteristics of collaborative teams and collaboration models suggest that there may be specific individual characteristics of each team member that contribute to the team's overall effectiveness. Peña & Quinn (2003) were interested in how team development occurred in collaborative service delivery models between SLP student clinicians

( $n = 2$ ), regular education classroom teachers ( $n = 2$ ), and teacher assistants ( $n = 2$ ) over one academic year. The study examined the development and implementation of two classroom-based collaborative team models in a preschool Head Start Program using Lowe and Herranen's (1978, 1982) stages of team development. Each team consisted of a student SLP, a teacher, and an assistant in a classroom of 19-20 students. The student SLPs and teachers were followed as they progressed through the following stages: 1. Becoming acquainted 2. Trial and error 3. Collective indecision 4. Crisis 5. Resolution 6. Team maintenance. Participants' progression through Lowe and Herranen's stages of team development was determined based on observations and journal entries. Results suggested that the teams progressed through more advanced stages with time. Effective collaboration was evident in teams who had a shared purpose, appreciated each other's expertise, had clear definitions and delineation of roles, shared leadership, discussed openly, and had joint decision making (Peña & Quinn, 2003; Hartas, 2004). Data from the study were used to develop collaboration practices and techniques for SLPs and teachers within the classroom setting. In an earlier study, Prelock (1995) described a collaboration model that, like Peña & Quinn (2003), consisted of shared responsibility and cooperation between SLPs and educators.

In a similar study conducted by Tollerfield (2003), an SLP collaborated with one classroom teacher from a school for children with physical disabilities with a goal of determining how professionals function on a team. After 13 weeks of audio and visual recording, as well as SLP and teacher diary entries, participants demonstrated unique contributions as well as gains in skills and knowledge from the partnership. Data derived from observations and journals provided insight into SLPs and teachers perceptions of roles and skills necessary for effective collaboration. Individuals' perspective and expertise contributed uniquely to positive

collaboration, where SLPs contributed skills specific to speech and language treatment, and teachers' contributions regarded classroom management and curriculum requirements. Elksin (1997) corroborated the finding that each team member possesses unique skills and contributes something different yet complementary to the partnership. Both the SLP and teacher identified instances that were necessary for team collaboration. These included setting appropriate goals, ensuring child success, questioning, identifying underlying difficulties, and ensuring that activities are interesting (Tollerfield, 2003; Elksin, 1997).

### **Settings**

Studies exploring collaboration between school-based SLPs and regular or special education teachers have been conducted in kindergarten (Shaugnessy, 2005) and elementary classroom settings (Wakefield, 2007; Ritzman et al., 2006; Elksin, 1997). In general, these studies have described what collaboration may look like in the different settings. Similarities seem to exist with regards to the teachers' perceptions of SLPs, shared roles, the preferred method of service model, and the level of involvement of the teachers in providing intervention services.

Shaugnessy & Sanger (2005) explored perceptions of regular education kindergarten teachers ( $N = 484$ ) regarding roles and responsibilities of SLPs using survey methodology. The survey consisted of thirty-six items regarding background information, experiences working with SLPs, and professional training. Results revealed that a majority of the teachers had positive impressions of SLPs' expertise and their shared roles in language development of the students. The participants reported that they welcomed opportunities to collaborate with SLPs, especially when students in the class demonstrated needs in the areas of language and literacy. Furthermore, it was noted that the SLPs and teachers in a kindergarten setting often assisted in planning,

providing direct services, and improving language-based literacy needs (Shaughnessy & Sanger, 2005).

A case study conducted by Wakefield (2007) intended to explain the roles and routines of SLPs as collaborators in inclusive service delivery models. The participants included an SLP, regular education teachers ( $n = 10$ ), and a principal at an elementary school. Data, collected through field notes, transcripts, interviews, school documents, student work samples, and student records, provided information regarding the shared roles of professionals. The results indicated that the SLP maintained a total of ten shared roles with her cooperating teachers during a collaborative therapy lesson. These included 1. Focuses on IEP goals 2. Focuses on curricular goals 3. Addresses literacy skills 4. Transitions students to activities 5. Initiates comments about problems and successes 6. Engages in five types of collaboration sequences 7. Initiates suggestions 8. Provides modifications to suggestions 9. Initiates clarifications and 10. Engages in strategy teaching. The role of the SLP in inclusive service delivery, as implemented at this school, involved primarily shared roles with the classroom teachers.

Ritzman et al., (2006) explored an SLP's implementation of a classroom-based service delivery model in an elementary school setting, through the use of interviews and detailed observations. Specific themes that contributed to the overall success of the collaborative intervention model included several service delivery models (e.g. pull-out and inclusion), the use of curriculum based intervention, prior scheduling with students and teachers, collaboration, and advocacy (helping teachers understand the role of the SLP). The results suggested that the SLP's use of the curriculum and classroom environment supported the needs of her students the most. Rather than distance herself from the teacher and classroom, the classroom-based service delivery model allowed for more opportunities for collaboration.



These aforementioned studies were conducted in kindergarten and elementary school settings, where classroom based service delivery models were implemented. Being able to focus on the language needs of the students in the classroom rather than solely in the clinical setting, adds to an increased authenticity of assessment of student abilities (Elksin, 1997). Teachers and SLPs often share roles in order to meet the needs of all students. Across studies, teachers report positive impressions of SLPs clinical skills and expertise, as well as advantages of direct involvement in addressing students' goals.

### **Common Barriers to Collaboration**

The studies described formerly emphasized the factors contributing to effective collaboration. With that said, factors have also been discussed that contribute to ineffective collaboration. These have been described in the literature as *barriers to collaboration* between SLPs and educators (McCartney, 1999; Saar, 2012; Hartas, 2004).

Hartas (2004) conducted a study to explore the common barriers to collaboration. Participants, including SLPs ( $n = 17$ ) and special education teachers ( $n = 25$ ) completed a questionnaire and participated in group discussions. Participants' personal opinions on collaboration illustrated that limited time was the primary factor hindering collaborative efforts. Saar (2012) and McCartney (1999) supported this finding that a lack of time and resources interferes with the ability to effectively collaborate. Additionally, professional status, rigid organizational structures, and lack of communication were factors that often hindered collaboration significantly (Hartas, 2004; McCartney, 1999; Saar, 2012).

When professionals in a collaborative partnership lack compatible social and interpersonal skills, different interpretations of what collaborative partnerships should look like, may impede effective collaboration (Saar, 2012). Furthermore, literature suggests that a lack of

administrative support, inadequate training and education in collaborative styles, and cultural differences within the teams are common barriers to effective collaboration (Saar, 2012).

The benefits of collaboration may not always be reaped without difficulty and struggles along the way. Collaboration barriers, while common, may be overcome if both individual and collective characteristics, such as personality, teamwork, and shared responsibility, discussed previously, are present. In some cases, the barriers may even lead to stronger, more effective collaboration.

### **The Current Study**

A review of the literature indicates that the characteristics of individuals in collaborative partnerships ultimately impact student outcomes. While studies that describe collaboration in kindergarten and elementary school settings are available, information is lacking concerning collaboration in high school settings. The research questions concerning collaboration addressed in the current study were: 1) How do high school based SLPs and special education teachers who collaborate perceive one another? 2) What are the perceived benefits and barriers to collaboration? 3) How do SLPs and special education teachers in a high school setting characterize collaboration?

## **Method**

### **Recruitment**

Recruitment procedures for this study were designed to invite the participation of at least 3 SLPs and 3 special educators employed in a high school setting in the state of Ohio. Eligible participants were collaborative high school based teams that consisted of 1 ASHA certified SLP and 1 special educator. After receiving approval from the Bowling Green State University Human Subjects Review Board, telephone recruitment began. Telephone recruitment consisted

of calls to 11 high schools in the state of Ohio (9 in Bowling Green, 2 in Cincinnati). Participants were recruited via school administrators who were contacted to agree and assist with recruitment efforts. Once administrators agreed, they were sent an email containing the informed consent and an explanation of the study's purpose to the SLP and special educator employed at their school. Of the schools contacted, 2 high school administrators declined the participation of their employees in the study. Three high school administrators were contacted and left 3 voicemails on their office phones or with secretaries during a two week period, and the calls were never returned. Six of the 11 administrators forwarded the email to the eligible participants. In this email, interested participants were encouraged to indicate a willingness to participate by responding to the primary investigator. Three teams (1 SLP and 1 special educator) responded to the recruitment email expressing an interest and willingness to participate.

### **Participants**

Three ASHA certified SLPs and 3 special educators participated in this study. Table 1 summarizes participant demographics. Special educator participants worked full-time in the high school setting. SLP participants worked part-time in the high school setting and were employed by at least 1 other elementary school in the district. Two teams collaborated within the context of a life skills classroom for students with disabilities. One team collaborated for the needs of a single student in a special education classroom.

### **Materials and Procedure**

Interviews were conducted at a single time point, individually. At the start of the interview, participants signed consent documents acknowledging their participation as voluntary. All participants completed a questionnaire and responded to a series of questions. The same questions were asked of every participant. Five interviews took place at the workplace of the

participant as a matter of convenience and 1 occurred at a local coffee shop per participant request.

**Questionnaire.** The demographic questionnaire included information pertaining to participants' ideas regarding collaboration. The questionnaire consisted of 25 questions and was first completed by each participant at their own pace. The first part of the questionnaire included background information regarding gender, education, work experience, and training. The remainder of the questionnaire contained questions about experiences and ideas regarding the nature of collaboration and questions concerning perceptions of collaboration. Questions were multiple choice, scale ratings, and an open-ended question. The questionnaire took approximately 5-10 minutes to complete.

**Interview.** Each participant was asked 9 open-ended questions, and responses were audio recorded by the primary investigator. Question topics included the overall nature of collaboration, such as the definition, purpose and value of collaboration, the benefits of and barriers to collaboration, primary activities, effectiveness of collaboration, the impact of collaboration on student outcomes, and skills and characteristics important for effective collaboration. Follow-up questions varied for each participant depending on responses and what information was still needed for the examiner to understand responses. The interviews lasted between 4 and 11 minutes (*Mean* number of minutes = 7).

### **Transcription and Reliability**

Reliability estimates were based on a comparison of 33% of the transcripts transcribed by the primary investigator and a trained graduate student. One sample from an SLP and 1 sample from a special educator were included in the reliability analysis. Comparisons were conducted to

determine inter-rater (inter-transcriber) reliability. Percent agreement was 100% on word for word transcriptions.

## **Results**

### **Data Analysis**

The current study explored the nature of collaboration among SLPs and special educators in high school settings using quantitative and qualitative analyses. Table 2 provides general characteristics of collaboration among participant teams.

### **Research Question 1**

To answer research question one, “How do high school based SLPs and special education teachers who collaborate perceive one another?” quantitative data from the questionnaire were analyzed. Responses from SLPs were analyzed first. All SLPs reported initiating collaboration with their colleague. With regards to perceptions of their colleague, SLPs strongly agreed that their colleague understands their role and appreciates their expertise, has qualities that enhance collaboration, is an effective collaborator, and has a desire to collaborate. SLPs self-reported being “extremely committed” ( $n = 2$ ) and “committed” ( $n = 1$ ) to collaborating with their colleague. SLPs perceived their colleague’s level of commitment as “extremely committed” ( $n = 2$ ) and “committed” ( $n = 1$ ). When asked to rate the overall effectiveness of their collaboration on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 being not effective and 5 being extremely effective), 1 SLP described collaboration with her colleague as “extremely effective” and 2 SLPs described collaborations as “effective.” Special educators strongly agreed ( $n = 2$ ) and agreed ( $n = 1$ ) that they initiate collaboration with their colleague. All special educators strongly agreed that their colleague understands their role and expertise, has qualities that enhance collaboration, is an effective collaborator, and has a desire to collaborate. All special educators self-reported being “extremely

committed” to collaborating with their colleague. Special educators perceived their colleague’s level of commitment as “extremely committed.” When asked to rate the overall effectiveness of their collaboration, all special educators described collaborations as “extremely effective.”

### **Research Question 2**

To answer research question two, “What are the perceived benefits and barriers to collaboration?” additional participant responses were analyzed. When asked about the benefits of collaboration, participant responses varied. Benefits included “generalization of skills,” as noted by an SLP, and achieving a status of “superior professionals,” as noted by a special educator. One SLP said, “I think they’re [the benefits] kind of endless. They [collaboration] benefit the student, they benefit developing a relationship with your colleagues, and figuring out what works and what doesn’t work.” Other participants specified the benefit of sharing one another’s expertise when developing effective plans for the students. Two special educators and one SLP noted the importance of understanding that each professional has “a different perspective” to offer. With regards to beneficial contributions of their colleague, a special educator stated, “She can hone in on specific skills that I can’t always do in the course of a class.” Another special educator shared this idea stating, “Two heads are better than one.” Responses also focused on a sense of cohesiveness among the professionals who collaborate. An SLP indicated that when collaborating, “Everybody knows what’s going on and everybody is on the same page.” A special educator also emphasized the importance of being “on the same page.” Having a mutual concern for the students was another benefit of collaboration. A special educator shared, “Because we both have that same concern, that same moral imperative, that’s the basis of our teaching philosophies.” The importance of having “shared values and shared goals” when working with a colleague was also mentioned by two special educators.

Concerning barriers to collaboration, all participants overwhelmingly indicated “time,” or the lack thereof, as the main obstacle to collaboration. Furthermore, a special educator stated, “Especially in the beginning of the year, you usually have behaviors [of the students] that kind of interfere in the way, which ties into time.” An SLP indicated, “Often times speech is seen as just an isolated thing.” An SLP participant discussed having a lack of interest in collaborating as a barrier stating, “If they have no interest then....you have to have a common vision for the kids.” A special educator said, “People taking offense to suggestions or requests or assistance [is a barrier to collaboration]. It happens sometimes, one individual feels like another is asking them or telling them to do something. There is no hierarchy in a collaborative setting. It’s an equal playing field with equal ideas and vision.”

### **Research Question 3**

To answer research question three, “How do SLPs and special education teachers in a high school setting characterize collaboration?” participant responses were analyzed. The topics involved the overall nature of collaboration in a high school setting, such as the definition, purpose and value of collaboration, primary activities, effectiveness of collaboration, the impact of collaboration on student outcomes, and skills and characteristics important for effective collaboration. The responses helped to provide an understanding of what effective and ineffective collaboration may look like in a high school setting.

When participants were asked how they define collaboration, answers were alike. Responses included phrases such as, “working together,” “coming together to work towards a common goal,” and “looking at the needs of our students.” A special educator stated, “Collaboration is when two or more individuals work towards a common purpose to improve the services or the education for a student or a group of students.” An SLP defined, “It is a group of

team members--whether it be family, teachers, or related service people--coming together to work towards a common goal.”

Concerning the purpose of collaboration in a high school setting, participants seemed to be in agreement. An SLP stated, “[Collaboration] is making sure the needs of the child is being met.” A special educator’s response regarding the purpose of collaboration included, “Taking the strengths of a group of different people in their expertise’s’ and troubleshoot and intervene to improve upon the needs of a set of students.” An SLP said “The purpose of collaboration is that the students know that we are a cohesive unit teaching them or working towards a common endpoint. It creates meaningful teaching.” Similarly, a special educator stated, “When we do come together, we are on the same page, sending the same message...So collaboration, without it, nothing would really be clear, in my opinion.” The value of collaboration was described as “invaluable” and “endless.” Concerning its value, an SLP indicated, “If we did not collaborate, everything would be meaningless, isolated, and unrelated to the purpose of the life skills program. It makes things relevant.” Another SLP highlighted a similar thought when stating, “If you’re not collaborating, you’re obviously not going to be looking at the big picture or trying to help the students in the best way possible.” Regarding the value of effective collaboration, a special educator stated, “When you come together as professionals and you are on the same page and you have the same goals...then you can set realistic goals and standards as a team.”

When asked to describe the primary activities in which SLPs and special educators collaborated, responses varied. Typically, these professionals collaborated when students had speech services. To deliver these speech services, participants collaborated for activities including, “evaluations and IEPs,” “future planning meetings and ETRs,” “social skills for role



playing,” “self-advocacy,” “to discuss what would be the next best activity,” and “for social needs and class needs.”

To determine if collaboration was effective, participants offered the means by which they measured the success of their collaborative efforts. These measures for an SLP included “student progress on IEP objectives...thorough discussion with families and their general social behavior within the school through observation.” Another SLP measured the effectiveness of collaboration based on, “if the student has success.” A special educator identified, “It’s seeing measurable progress for the student, whether it’s an academic or a functional task or whether it’s a behavioral thing. And then whether we’re seeing it consistently.”

Concerning the effect collaboration has on student outcomes, an SLP responded, “I think it [collaboration] has a huge impact [on student outcomes]. So collaboration supports generalization of skills tremendously.” Another SLP stated, “We meet their [students’] needs.” Further, an SLP stated, “That’s [student outcomes] part of the reason you collaborate, to really focus in on the students and learn what’s working for them and what’s not working for them in different settings.” One SLP and two special educators expressed the positive effect being “on the same page” has on student outcomes. A special educator explained, “We both really know what it is each one of the students is working on and we directly teach them teachable moments any time we can.”

Concerning the skills and characteristics that are important in developing effective collaboration with a colleague, an SLP responded, “I think it’s important that people are open to the idea of collaboration. Another SLP stated, “I think you have to be flexible in your role.” One SLP said, “Both parties have to be able to get along and have a desire to collaborate.” A special educator responded, “You have to put aside any feelings of superiority. You can’t take offense to

what somebody says or somebody who's very critical." The importance of "a willing participant" and "prioritizing it [collaboration]" were also mentioned by SLPs and special educators. Three participants emphasized the importance of interpersonal skills such as "communication" skills. Similarly, an SLP stated, "I think you have to be a great listener. I think you have to understand the context of the classroom. You need to be an effective communicator." One special educator shared, "We have the same moral imperative that these students are important to us, and then the importance of putting the students' needs [first]," is essential in establishing an effective collaboration. Without these skills and characteristics of team members, collaboration may be ineffective.

### **Discussion**

The current study sought to explore the nature of collaboration between SLPs and special educators in secondary education settings. The study focused on perceptions of collaborating teams, the benefits of and barriers to collaboration, and the overall characterization of collaboration in a high school setting.

#### **Research Question 1**

In the current study, participants had positive impressions of each other's expertise and ability to collaborate, which may have influenced the perceived quality of their collaboration. Participants welcomed opportunities to collaborate with their colleague to benefit students. This corroborates findings of Shaughnessy & Sanger (2005), who explored perceptions of SLPs and educators in a kindergarten setting, and found that a majority of the teachers had positive impressions of SLPs' expertise and their shared roles in language development of the students. Participants in the Shaughnessy and Sanger (2005) study also reported that they welcomed opportunities to collaborate with SLPs, especially when students in the class demonstrated needs

in the areas of language and literacy. Similarly, the case study conducted by Wakefield (2007) in an elementary setting, indicated that the SLP maintained a total of 10 shared roles in the collaborative setting. Understanding that collaboration involves mutual effort and understanding of roles, was characteristic of the participants in the present study. This may suggest that perceptions of team members in collaboration, are indeed consistent across settings, involving primarily shared roles.

The current study also supported the findings of previous studies, regarding individual and team characteristics of effective collaborators (Morrison et al., 2011; Saar, 2012; Peña & Quinn, 2003; Hartas, 2004). Participants similarly noted that an ability to work well with others, listening skills, shared values and goals, communication skills, shared purpose, and an appreciation of each other's expertise, were skills and characteristics that were necessary for collaboration. The study conducted by Tollerfield (2003), noted the value of each expertise contributing something different yet complementary to a collaboration, which the findings in this study corroborated.

## **Research Question 2**

Barriers to collaboration at the kindergarten and elementary level were also reported by SLPs and educators in the high school setting. All participants in the current study felt that a lack of time was the primary barrier. SLPs in the current study were employed part-time. It may be the case that lack of time was a consequence of the amount of time available for sharing ideas. A difference in ideas of what collaborative partnerships should look like, rather than being on the same page, was another barrier to collaboration reported by participants in the present study. The barriers reported in the current study were similar to those reported in previous work (Saar, 2012; McCartney, 1999; Hartas, 2004). There were additional barriers that were mentioned by

participants in this study were not discussed in literature from primary education settings. The additional barriers experienced across educational settings may be due to the varying contexts of the classrooms in high schools, size of caseloads, the unique needs of the students, and individual personalities involved in the collaborations.

### **Research Question 3**

Despite barriers, SLPs and special educators reported positively about their collaborative partnership and noted several benefits to collaboration. They reported being “very satisfied” and “satisfied” with the collaborations. The benefits seemed to make the collaborations meaningful. Concerning the definition, purpose, and value of collaboration, participants seemed to be in agreement. Definitions of collaboration emphasized the idea of two or more individuals working together to meet the needs of the students. The positive experiences and perceived purpose and value of collaboration suggested that collaborations are effective and beneficial at the secondary education level, according to participant responses.

Participant responses concerning the activities during which collaboration occurred were similar to studies of SLPs and educators in kindergarten and elementary settings (Shaughnessy & Sanger, 2005; Ritzman et al., 2006). Activities included educational planning of tasks and goals, providing direct services, and improving language-based needs of the students. Special educators welcomed SLPs as collaborators in inclusive service delivery models, as the SLP did in the elementary study conducted by Wakefield (2007). Student outcomes, and effective means to measure progress, seemed to be the focus/purpose of collaboration for all participants. Ensuring success of the students was a factor for participants in the current study. Since participants reported positive impressions regarding the effectiveness of their collaborations, the findings suggest that student outcomes may have been positively impacted.

Participants characterized collaboration as occurring at any available moment in a high school setting, possibly due to time constraints, which indicate when, how, and if collaboration occurs. In the current study, collaboration reportedly occurred before school, after school, during class, and during lunch time. While the preferred context(s) were in person, via email, and via telephone, actual contexts may vary depending on the activities and goals of each day and the context of the classroom. The consistency of participant responses regarding time and context for collaboration, suggested that SLPs and special educators were in agreement regarding these specific aspects. Overall, participants noted high levels of satisfaction with their collaborations that were in agreement with one another across teams.

### **Future Directions**

However, there are some limitations to the current study. Provided that the nature of the study was voluntary, volunteer bias may be present. Those who agreed to participate may have higher perceptions of their ability to collaborate than others. Therefore, the findings reported are preliminary and may not be representative of all collaborative partnerships in secondary settings. It may also be the case that participants did not fully disclose any negative experiences. Similarly, the small sample size may provide a limited view of collaboration. Finally, if the primary investigator unintentionally affirmed or persuaded the responses of participants during the interview, the data may not be a true reflection of their thoughts and feelings concerning collaboration. To improve upon the current study, future work might include a larger sample where more variation in responses can be observed. A larger sample size that includes professionals who feel that their collaboration is “good” (i.e., effective) and “bad” (i.e., ineffective), would also provide a more representative understanding of collaboration in the high school setting. Finally, focusing on just one aspect of collaboration, such as perceptions, may

enhance understanding of each aspect of contribution and potential relationships with student outcomes. Recruiting other professionals from each school to comment on how they perceive the effectiveness of collaboration between the SLP and special educator teams, could be a more unbiased measure of the perceived effectiveness.

## **Conclusion**

While the results of this work are descriptive, and may not apply to all collaborations in secondary education settings, they offer insights into some critical aspects that may shape future practice. If administrators and professionals understand the factors that influence collaborations, they may be more likely to create environments that allow for meaningful collaborations. Since the results of the current study and previous works suggest benefits of collaboration across educational settings, for both students and professionals, it may become a focus across different aspects of education, such as hiring, implementation of training programs, and professional evaluations. Changes in these practices may be further developed in response to this expectation of collaboration in educational settings.

It is evident that collaboration is a priority of high school based SLPs and special educators and that these professionals view collaboration as beneficial. The results of this study bring to light the overall nature of collaboration across educational settings. Understanding collaborators' perspectives concerning the purpose, value, and need for collaboration, is essential to understanding the nature of collaboration. Findings from this work may ultimately inform training/professional development efforts in educational settings where collaboration is an expectation.

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Table 1

*Participant Characteristics by Groups*

Characteristic	<u>SLPs</u> ( <i>n</i> = 3)	<u>SPEDs</u> ( <i>n</i> = 3)
Gender		
Male	0	1
Female	3	2
Highest Degree Earned		
B.A./B.S.	0	1
M.A./M.Ed./M.S.	3	2
Years of Practice in Current Profession		
1-5 years	1	1
11-20 years	2	1
21-30 years	0	1
Years Employed in High School Setting		
Less than 1 year	1	0
1-5 years	1	1
6-10 years	0	1
11-20 years	1	1
Collaboration Training Received		
No formal training	1	1
Some formal training	1	2
A significant amount of formal training	1	0

*Note.* SLPs = speech-language pathologists; SPEDs = special educators

Table 2

*Characteristics of Collaboration by Groups*

Characteristic	<u>SLPs</u> ( <i>n</i> = 3)	<u>SPEDs</u> ( <i>n</i> = 3)
Frequency		
Daily	2	1
Weekly	0	1
Bimonthly	1	0
Monthly	0	1
Time of Day		
During a break/planning period	1	0
Multiple times daily	2	3
Preferred Context		
In person	2	2
More than one applies	1	1
Actual Context		
In person	2	2
More than one applies	1	1
Level of Satisfaction		
Very Satisfied	2	3
Satisfied	1	0

*Note.* SLPs = speech-language pathologists; SPEDs = special educators