

AET

Association of EDUCATIONAL THERAPISTS

The Educational Therapist

The Journal of the Association of Educational Therapists

The mission of the Association of Educational Therapists is to define and set standards for the professional practice of educational therapy; to promote professional training, development, and research; and to create public awareness of and access to educational therapy services.

WINTER 2011 • VOLUME 32 • NUMBER 1

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

- Message from the President 4
Marcy Dann, MA, BCET

PSYCHOEDUCATIONAL PERSPECTIVES

- When Multiplication Facts Won't Stick:
Could a Language/Story Approach Work? 5
Joni D. Mahler, MEd
- Collaboration Between Educational Therapists
and Their Potential School Partners 9
Downie Techaviratanakul, MA, and Wendy Murawski, PhD

DEPARTMENTS

- Each One, Teach One:
Insights and Best Practices Column 11
Jeri Burzin, MEd, BCET
- Conference Highlights 12
Kate McNeil, MA, ETIP
- T.E.L. Talk Column 21
Joan Manchester, MEd

BOOK REVIEWS

- Changing Lives Through Metacognitive Relationships 13
Reviewed by Joslyn Aubin, MA, ETIP
- Rethinking Learning Disabilities 14
Reviewed by Jane V. Drucek, PhD, ETIP
- The Clinical Practice of Educational Therapy:
A Teaching Model 15
Reviewed by David Fedo, PhD
- Challenging Kids, Challenged Teachers 18
Reviewed by Deborah Fencer, MEd, ETIP
- The Disorganized Mind 19
Reviewed by Virginia Charlton Jardim, MAT, ETIP

Collaboration Between Educational Therapists and Their Potential School Partners

Downie Techaviratanakul, MA,
and Wendy Murawski, PhD
California State University, Northridge

ABSTRACT

This article provides an abridged description of a study that investigated pre-K–12 school personnel's (N = 135) background knowledge and opinions regarding educational therapists and the effect those beliefs have on subsequent collaboration, or lack thereof, between school personnel and ETs. This article considers the results of an online questionnaire and follow-up interview that examined school personnel's background knowledge regarding educational therapy, collaboration experiences with educational therapists, attitudes toward collaborating with ETs, beliefs regarding ET, and suggestions for improved collaboration. Results showed that school personnel had limited knowledge of, and few collaborative experiences with, ETs, but that they were amenable to future collaboration. Factors associated with school personnel's willingness to collaborate with ETs, the implications for the practice of ET, and suggestions for further research are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

Educational therapy is a field that provides individualized interventions for students with learning difficulties. Practitioners of this field have used various titles (e.g., therapeutic tutor, clinical teacher, remedial therapist); however, the term *educational therapist* has now typically replaced previous titles used by practitioners who remediate learning problems (Ungerleider, 1995; Werbach, Kornblau, & Slucki, 2010). The AET defines the educational therapist as "a professional who works in the educational domain with children, adolescents, and adults who have been diagnosed with or exhibit learning disabilities and/or learning differences" (Association of Educational Therapists, 2008, p. 1). Although the AET provides a fundamental definition, individuals in the field of educational therapy have put much effort into clarifying their own professional role (Ficksman & Adelizzi, 2010).

Educational therapists work with individual clients and those involved in their clients' learning within a treatment alliance (Ficksman & Adelizzi, 2010). In order to develop an appropriate ET treatment plan, ETs are encouraged to collaborate with school personnel from the pre-kindergarten (pre-K) to 12th-grade levels (henceforth called pre-K–12). However, recent research has found that it is unlikely that school personnel know much about ETs or how their role may affect professionals in the school domain (Techaviratanakul,

2010). A primary concern with the lack of a definitive role definition is that school personnel are understandably not aware that collaborating with ETs could be desirable. Maslow and Ungerleider (2007) conducted a study in which parents completed a survey regarding their child's ET services and found that ETs had very few school interactions.

Collaboration is an especially important skill for educators who work with students with learning difficulties. Previous and current models of ET have illustrated the importance of collaboration in the practice of ET (Ficksman & Adelizzi, 2010; Kaganoff & Ficksman, 1998). Individuals who collaborate on a treatment plan are more committed to the plan's implementation and success (Snell & Janney, 2005). Friend and Cook (2007) define collaboration as "a style for direct interaction between at least two co-equal parties voluntarily engaged in shared decision making as they work toward a common goal" (p. 7). The essential characteristics of collaboration include voluntariness, parity among participants, mutual goals, shared responsibility for participation and decision-making, shared resources, and shared accountability for outcomes (Friend & Cook, 2007).

THE STUDY

Given the supporting research on collaboration among pre-K–12 school personnel, benefits can be anticipated if school personnel and ETs collaborate, because they share similar goals when working with students. However, the question is: Do they collaborate, and if not, why not? The purpose of this study was to investigate pre-K–12 school personnel's background knowledge and opinions regarding ETs and the effect those beliefs have on subsequent collaboration, or lack thereof, between school personnel and ETs. One of the goals of the study was to promote future collaboration between school personnel and ETs in their mutual effort to improve educational outcomes for students with disabilities and other learning difficulties, as well as to use the insights gleaned from the study to help ETs represent themselves in the field and aid in future collaboration attempts. The overarching research questions that guided the study were:

1. What factors influence pre-K–12 school personnel to collaborate with ETs?
2. What factors are associated with pre-K–12 school personnel who are amenable to collaborating with ETs?
3. What factors are associated with pre-K–12 school personnel who are reluctant to collaborate with ETs?

METHODOLOGY

The target population was individuals with training or experience as general or special education teachers, administrators, school psychologists, or school counselors at the pre-K–12 school levels. During the Fall 2009 semester, 15 College of Education courses at California State University, Northridge were selected to participate in the study because they enrolled individuals with characteristics of the target population. The College of

Education is one of the largest preparers of educators in southern California and is affiliated with one of only two universities in the nation that has both a master's and post-master's certificate program in ET. Individuals enrolled in the selected courses were invited to participate in the study. The researcher collected email addresses from all volunteers and emailed them a link to the online questionnaire. Participants indicated on the online questionnaire whether or not they were willing to complete a follow-up interview.

The online questionnaire and follow-up interview protocol were developed and refined by the researcher and members of her thesis committee. The online questionnaire collected quantitative and qualitative data concerning participants' background knowledge regarding ET, collaboration experiences with ETs, attitudes toward collaborating with ETs, beliefs regarding ET, and suggestions for improved collaboration. Participants responded to yes/no, multiple choice, open-ended, and Likert scale questions. The interview responses provided additional insight into participants' beliefs. Data were analyzed to determine possible factors associated with school personnel's responses and their willingness to collaborate with ETs. In addition, the study examined if school personnel's roles and experiences could be attributed to differences in opinion and response.

A total of 232 individuals were invited to participate in the study and 200 (86%) volunteered to complete the online questionnaire. However, the actual response rate was 135 participants (58%). Additionally, the researcher conducted 17 (13%) follow-up interviews. A total of 111 participants (82%) reported experience as pre-K-12 school personnel. Approximately one fourth reported experience in more than one role. Participants included teachers ($n = 100$), administrators ($n = 24$), school psychologists ($n = 8$), and school counselors ($n = 8$). The teachers had a range of 1-2 years to 31-35 years of experience; however, most had 3-4 years (28%) or 5-10 years (31%) of experience. The school administrators' years of experience ranged between 1 and 15 years. The vast majority of the school psychologists and school counselors had 1-2 years of experience. Despite participants' substantial academic training and experience in the field of education, and the fact that they attended a university with a program in ET, 93% ($n = 126$) had no training in ET.

FINDINGS

Results support that pre-K-12 school personnel had limited knowledge about ET and few collaboration experiences with ETs, but that they were amenable to collaborating with ETs. The following list gives the major findings of the study:

- Just under one third of the participants had even heard of ET, despite the fact that participants attended the same university and College of Education that houses a master's and post-master's certificate program in ET.

- Participants had limited background knowledge about ET even if they had heard of it. In fact, one fifth of the participants who indicated that they had heard of ET could not describe or define ET. The remaining participants attempted to define ET; however, many had misconceptions.
- Some participants with misconceptions about educational therapy and the ET's role, regardless of whether or not they said they had heard of it, believed that ETs work solely with students with disabilities; others thought that ETs were tutors; while yet others thought ETs were similar to school psychologists.
- Only about one fourth of the participants knew an actual educational therapist. Those who knew an ET comprised over one fourth of the teachers in the study, and almost half of the administrators in the study.
- Few participants had any interactions with ETs at all.
- Private school teachers and administrators appear to have had more opportunities to interact with ETs than those who work in public schools. A higher percentage of private school teachers and administrators as compared with those in public schools had heard of ET as a profession, knew an ET, or had interacted with an ET.
- Few participants reported collaborating with an ET. Half of those who reported collaboration had only collaborated with one ET, while approximately one fourth had collaborated with two ETs.
- Teachers represented the primary school personnel role that had collaborated with ETs, as compared with school counselors, psychologists, or administrators. Teachers with more years of teaching experience were more likely to have interacted with an ET.
- Almost three fourths of those individuals who had worked with an ET indicated that their collaboration with ETs usually led to positive outcomes for students. Almost all indicated they communicated in person, and most reported that their common goals were related to behavior.
- Participants who had experience collaborating with ETs were provided with a list of essential characteristics of collaboration, few individuals reported that voluntariness and parity were present during their collaboration experiences.
- Interestingly, almost two thirds of the participants who had experience collaborating with ETs reported that they had never heard of ET, and about one third reported that they did not know any ETs. These conflicting data suggest that participants did not understand what ET entails or who were considered ETs, even though they may have collaborated with ETs.

Continued on page 16

intriguing. Other chapters on the importance of the therapist's "empathic intelligence" (Roslyn Arnold, PhD, chapter 4), on the special needs of multilingual college students with learning differences (Patricia Mytkowicz, EdD, chapter 7), on the triage approach to therapy for adults (Linda Lawton, chapter 8), on the application of appropriate interventions (Phyllis Koppelman, MEd, chapter 10), and on ethics and etiquette in ET (Susan Fogelson, MA, and Ellen Opell, MA, chapter 14) are all instructive, dynamic, and in many cases, creative. And in the final chapter of the volume, Adelizzi, Marcy Dann, MA, and Ficksman boldly project the future of ET in a changing and increasingly technologically dominated world. This is all well and good; in fact, it is excellent. But does ET, whatever the theory that grounds it, and do ETs, whatever the strategy of diagnosis and treatment, really help those who suffer from learning disabilities (I prefer the term learning differences) and related problems? Are lives changed, even transformed, for the better, by the work of ETs? Where is the hard evidence? If young children, students, and other clients of all ages discover that, because of ET, their learning skills have been strengthened and their lives have been improved, that they feel more confident in their work and satisfied in their relationships, then clearly the ETs have been successful. If this transformation continues and is sustained over time, voila! So much the better.

Just one chapter near the end of what is an otherwise thorough book ("The Efficacy of Educational Therapy," chapter 17, by Phyllis Maslow, PhD, and Dorothy Ungerleider, MA) treats what I would call the critical assessment issue. The two authors conducted a survey in 2005 and 2006, under the auspices of the AET, with one question in mind: "Is educational therapy effective?" For the survey, 70 California clients of ETs, with an average time spent in ET of 3.8 years, were the subjects; 69 of these were reported to be children, all between the ages of 9 and 20 (the median age was 13.6), and their parents were the sole confidential respondents.

As reported by Maslow and Ungerleider, the results to the 13 main questions—for example, "The ET helped build confidence and a sense of self-competency in my child"—were mostly positive, indicating that "80% or more [of the parents] strongly agreed or agreed that the educational therapist provided a supportive setting, honored their input into goal setting, discussed and clarified assessments, assisted in building confidence and a sense of self-competency in their child, and helped them understand the strengths and challenges of their children." Further, "The educational therapist helped parents learn alternative methods for teaching their child, and the parents tended to agree that the findings of the educational therapist were consistent with their own perceptions of their child." There were two caveats: "Although 72.9% of the parents felt they learned what accommodations their children needed to acquire, it remains a concern that more than 25% of these parents often are not aware of how to incorporate these accommodations for the benefit of their children." And the researchers found that only 60.5% of the parents reported that their children had improved in writing ability.

This is useful information as far as it goes. But if I were to quibble about the survey and findings, I would make the following points:

One, a survey that was conducted over a wider age range—through the complete college and university ages and well into full adulthood—would likely have been more revealing and meaningful.

Two, the parents' perspectives on their own children, while obviously important, needed somehow to be supplemented by the perceptions, however inchoate, of the children (clients) themselves. Did the 69 children and 1 adult feel that their learning—and thus their lives—had been improved? Did their feelings match their parents' perceptions, or not? Could not the responses of at least the older children have been tactfully sought?

Third, as with almost all therapies, much more research needs to be undertaken about the short- and long-term effectiveness of ET on clients, whether they are young children, teenagers, postdoctoral students, or working adults. Are the benefits from ET sustainable over time? How can former clients maintain the level of skills, confidence, adaptability, awareness, and meta-cognition that they may have learned from their ETs? In my view, this latter question needs systematic exploration and research by the profession.

Still, having said the above, I found *The Clinical Practice of Educational Therapy* enormously informative, thoughtfully and clearly written, and well-documented. The book—362 pages, including the index—is handsomely designed by Routledge. I predict that it will be a standard in the field of ET for many years to come.

Dr. David Fedo, former Academic Dean of Curry College in Milton, MA, is Executive Director and Visiting Scholar for Boston's Wheelock College Center for International Education, Leadership, and Innovation, located in Singapore. David, besides being a scholar and administrator, is also a poet, and he recently published Carrots and Other Poems.

Collaboration Between Educational Therapists and Their Potential School Partners

Continued from page 10

- Those individuals who had experience collaborating with ETs felt more positive about the idea of collaborating with ETs than those who had no experience with ETs. In fact, even those participants who had interactions with ETs who were considered noncollaborative still felt more positive overall about collaborating with ETs than those who had no interactions with ETs at all. Additionally, more participants who knew at least one ET felt positive about collaborating with ETs than those who did not know any ETs.

- Overall, almost three fourths of the participants reported a positive outlook toward collaborating with ETs. Interestingly, teachers, administrators, and school counselors were more amenable to the concept of collaborating with ETs than were school psychologists.
- A little over one fourth of the participants felt neutral about collaborating with ETs, and almost half of these individuals explained that they needed more information about ET.
- The benefits of ET identified by participants focused on improving student outcomes. However, over one fourth were concerned about the cost of ET services.
- Almost all participants were interested in getting more information about ET. Nearly half of these participants were simply interested in general information about ET or the ET's job description.
- A little over one fourth of the participants suggested that ETs should clarify or explain the ET's role if they want to work more closely with school personnel.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

Collaboration is most effective when all participants understand and appreciate differing areas of expertise (Knackendoffel, 2007). Parity in collaboration is when each participant's contribution is valued equally, and each participant has equal power in decision-making (Friend & Cook, 2007; Knackendoffel, 2007). A lack of parity can be a significant barrier to collaboration among pre-K–12 school personnel (Murawski & Spencer, 2011). This holds true when collaborating with ETs as well. When school personnel do not know about ET and the expertise of the ET, shared respect can be lacking. Clearly, for valued collaboration and communication to occur, it is necessary for school professionals to be informed regarding the role of the ET. Currently however, there is a lack of shared understanding about the role of the ET and the collaborative options that may exist between ETs and school personnel. It is important for ETs to clarify their role, so their knowledge and expertise can be viewed as a resource in the collaborative process.

Educational therapists must be prepared to explain their expertise to ensure effective collaboration. ETs can clarify their role by describing the similarities and differences between ETs and related professionals, and explaining how their roles might complement each other. For example, school psychologists and ETs can integrate their test findings and help parents understand test results. Conversely, ETs need to be aware of school personnel's roles as well. ETs need to be savvy about how they collaborate and work with school personnel. Collaboration allows school personnel and ETs to provide a consistency of approach. This is especially important for students who have multiple special service providers. If more students are able to receive ET services, and more school personnel and ETs are able to engage in collaboration, there could be a tremendous benefit for students who experience difficulty learning.

Increased exposure to literature on ET and the role of the ET is needed at a broader level so that more school personnel can know what ET is and how a strong collaboration may be beneficial. Although this study provided new insight and information concerning the factors associated with school personnel's willingness to collaborate with ETs, further research can better inform the field. The findings of the current study indicated that school personnel who had collaborated with ETs mostly believed their collaboration led to positive student outcomes; however, most of this information is anecdotal. Additional research is needed to support and continue such collaboration. Suggestions for further research include exploring the collaborative options between school personnel and ETs, how to train school personnel and ETs for collaboration, and the outcomes of collaboration with ETs.

REFERENCES

- Association of Educational Therapists. (2008). *Bylaws of the Association of Educational Therapists*. Los Angeles: Author.
- Ficksman, M., & Adelizzi, J. U. (Eds.). (2010). *The Clinical Practice of Educational Therapy*. New York: Routledge.
- Friend, M., & Cook, L. (2007). *Interactions: Collaboration Skills for School Professionals* (5th ed.). Boston: Pearson.
- Kaganoff, A., & Ficksman, M. (1998). The AET Graphic Model of Educational Therapy. *The Educational Therapist*, 19(2), 3–5.
- Knackendoffel, E. A. (2007). Collaborative Teaming in the Secondary School. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 40(4), 1–20.
- Maslow, P., & Ungerleider, D. (2007). The Efficacy of Educational Therapy, Part II. *The Educational Therapist*, 28(3), 16–21.
- Murawski, W. W., & Spencer, S. (2011). *Collaborate, Communicate and Differentiate: How to Improve Student Learning in Today's Diverse Schools*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Snell, M. E., & Janney, R. (2005). *Collaborative Teaming: Teachers' Guides to Inclusive Practices*. Baltimore, MD: Paul H. Brookes.
- Techaviratanakul, D. (2010). *Exploring the Collaboration Between Pre-K–12 School Personnel and Educational Therapists*. Unpublished Master's Thesis, California State University, Northridge.
- Ungerleider, D. (1995). *Psychoeducational Perspectives: A Compilation* (2nd ed.). Los Angeles: Association of Educational Therapists.
- Werbach, G., Kornblau, B., & Slucki, C. (2010). Educational Therapy's Ancestry and Migration. In M. Ficksman & J. U. Adelizzi (Eds.), *The Clinical Practice of Educational Therapy* (pp. 45–62). New York: Routledge.

Downie Techaviratanakul, MA, has a Multiple Subject Teaching Credential and Master of Arts in Special Education, with emphasis in Educational Therapy. She works at California State University, Northridge, in the Department of Elementary Education (email: downietech@csun.edu). Wendy Murawski, PhD, is a Professor of Special Education and Eisner Endowed Chair of the Center for Teaching and Learning at California State University, Northridge (email: wendy.murawski@csun.edu).