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## Interprofessional Collaboration between Occupational Therapy and Applied Behavior Analysis

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**OT 4801 Baccalaureate Project Presentation Final Paper**

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OT 4801: Baccalaureate Project Presentation

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## **OT 4801 Baccalaureate Project Presentation Final Paper**

Our baccalaureate project was an opportunity to learn more about interprofessional collaboration between occupational therapy and applied behavior analysis. Rachel and I set out to learn more about current trends in each field regarding their understanding of their own profession and the other. We also wanted to know how this knowledge, or lack thereof, influenced their perceptions on the other field, which further impacts the ability to collaborate interprofessionally. Then, we conducted a literature review in order to understand the research regarding how to collaborate in OT and ABA and the impact it can have on client outcomes. Lastly, we created a pathway towards collaboration with the goal of inspiring current and future practitioners to foster open lines of communication and collaboration to improve client outcomes in both fields.

Throughout the project my personal goal was to gain knowledge that I may use in my future career regarding interprofessional collaboration and create a project that might inspire others to further their efforts to collaborate as well. I hope to work in pediatrics and know from my current job that many children with autism see multiple disciplines for therapy, but that practitioners may not work together to make goals for children and ensure consistency across therapy sessions. I have also seen instances where skills are addressed in one discipline that may be better suited to be addressed by a different practitioner, or when consulting a different practitioner for treatment methods would have been extremely beneficial. As a future occupational therapy assistant, I want to encourage and foster collaboration and treat all children from a holistic perspective. This includes considering all of their daily occupations, which for some children include attending ABA therapy. Being able to support my clients in all areas of their daily life and ensure they reach their maximum potential is important to me.

In order to learn more about current trends in both fields including research regarding the impact of collaboration on client outcomes, Rachel and I conducted a comprehensive literature review. Unfortunately, one of the main findings of our literature review was that there is a current lack of research regarding collaboration between occupational therapy and applied behavior analysis. In fact, we struggled to find information regarding collaboration in therapy fields in general, which was extremely surprising given the importance of this topic. That being said, this topic is a fairly new area of study, with a lot of the literature being published in the last 5 years. This gives me hope that this emerging practice area will continue to be explored and implemented in practice.

Our literature review was divided into a few main categories based on the current literature. We discussed the background of ABA and OT in which we found that the limited amount of literature does not allow for a complete understanding of ABA and OT interactions. We also found that OT and ABA are the most commonly used therapies for children with autism spectrum disorder and that there is an overlap in skills addressed in each profession. In our section on current interprofessional collaboration, we found that client outcomes are positively affected by mutual respect and understanding of the other profession as well as acting cooperatively. As well as a potential barrier to interprofessional collaboration being a disagreement on the importance and usage of evidence-based practice. Overall, philosophical differences, misconceptions, and biases can hinder collaboration between professionals. In the section discussing benefits to collaboration, we were able to find that collaboration can increase client's success on mutual goals and positively impact client outcomes especially since each profession can see different sides of a problem area. Lastly, we were able to find some recommendations for methods to improve collaboration which included a decision tree model to

determine when collaboration could be beneficial and an interprofessional learning opportunity for entry level practitioners to explore the principles and methods of other disciplines in order to gain a better understanding of that therapy. Overall, in the process of conducting our literature review we found that the limited amount of current literature published on interprofessional collaboration shows that it can positively impact client outcomes in both occupational therapy and applied behavior analysis.

In order to put our project into action, the next step was to create a survey to send to current professionals in both fields. This survey collected data on whether practitioners currently collaborate with the other field, whether they see a need for collaboration, and if they know how to contact a professional in the other field to collaborate. We found that while a majority of professionals from both fields saw a need for collaboration for one or more clients, some did not collaborate, and may not know how to collaborate with another profession. Other limiting factors impacting collaboration included negative perceptions and biases of the other discipline or the ability to contact the professional directly. The final step in putting our plan to action was creating a pathway to collaboration. Our pathway highlighted 4 main steps to encourage collaboration including learning about the other profession, approaching in a collaborative way, discussing each practitioner's priorities, and finally collaborating on how to meet client goals. To implement our plan, we presented our poster at the MiOTA Conference to occupational therapy practitioners and students, who showed a great interest in our topic.

Our project was successful in the long run, which was evidenced by how it was received at the conference. I was nervous going into our presentation as I wasn't sure how OT practitioners may respond to our topic. I was especially worried that conflicting opinions and preconceived notions about ABA may cause people to lose focus of the goal of our project or

that people may be disappointed at the level of research we conducted as we weren't able to complete a deep dive into the topic. But, when presenting, we were able to bring an awareness to the importance of collaboration and many people expressed a desire to learn more about this topic. We received lots of positive feedback and I was surprised at the number of people that immediately saw the value of our research in impacting their current practice. Not only was our project successful in the fact that the physical presentation went well but also, it was successful in developing my understanding on the topic and furthering my skills in administration and leadership. This project helped further develop my skills in the concentration area of administration as I learned about the structure and importance of collaboration. I learned how different practice settings go about collaboration and how it can be facilitated or hindered by different styles of communication. I also gleaned that there are a lot of soft skills that are crucial to successful collaboration including your ability to compromise, be an active listener, and be an advocate for your own profession. I also developed skills in the concentration area of leadership as I learned how to communicate the distinct value of OT to professionals. During our presentation, I learned how respectfully listen to other's opinions as well as advocate for occupational therapy's role in ABA and how collaboration is a crucial component of this role.

One thing that I would do differently in my project is start developing our pathway to interprofessional collaboration earlier on in the process. During our project, Rachel and I knew we wanted to create a pathway to encourage participation but were unsure what this pathway might look like. Therefore, the development of our pathway got delayed until the end of our project as we had other areas of focus that took priority. Looking back, if Rachel and I would have created a working pathway throughout the project, creating a rough outline towards collaboration early on and modifying it as we found more research and information, our pathway

would have developed over time. In order to do this, we would have needed to send out our survey earlier on in the process in order to learn current trends in the field and use this information to guide our recommendations. Lastly, if we were able to create the pathway earlier in the process, it would have given us the option to implement our pathway with practitioners from both fields which would have given us an additional layer of depth to our presentation. I still think our project was a success without this component but actually implementing our pathway to determine its effectiveness instead of simply creating a suggestion to improve collaboration could have been beneficial.

Overall, this process helped develop my in-depth knowledge in how to conduct research and collect information on an emerging topic or practice area. This project made me realize that there is not an abundance of published literature on interprofessional collaboration in general, which made us rely on information from practitioners in the field more heavily. We were able to be flexible in this project and learn that sometimes the most valuable information can come anecdotally from practitioners that experience the benefits from collaboration or the hardships from a lack thereof. In summary, this process contributed not only to my knowledge on interprofessional collaboration between occupational therapy and applied behavior analysis, but it also taught me how to research, learn about a topic I find important, use a multitude of resources, and how to share information with others in order to further the field as a whole.