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Do Students Talk the Talk?

A Study of the use of Professional Vocabularies
Among Student Speech-Language Pathologists
and Teachers Through an Interprofessional
Education ExperienceLes Étudiants Font-ils de Beaux Discours ?
Une Étude sur L'utilisation du VocabulaireProfessionnel Chez les Étudiants en Orthophonie
et les Étudiants en Enseignement par le Biais
d'une Expérience InterprofessionnelleSalima Suleman
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Abstract

A barrier to collaboration is the use of profession-specific terminology that is inaccessible to members outside of one's own profession. Results presented in this paper are part of a study that examined the efficacy of an interprofessional education (IPE) experience between student speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and student teachers. This paper focuses on analyses pertaining to profession-specific terminology. Results showed that student SLPs used significantly more profession-specific terminology than student teachers when explaining profession-specific concepts to parents. It was also found that an IPE experience significantly decreased the number of jargon words used by student SLPs. Finally, when student SLPs and teachers worked together, they used minimal amounts of profession-specific terminology. This study provides evidence for professional preparation programs to allocate time and resources to increase student awareness of profession-specific terminology. Professional speech-language pathologists are encouraged to increase awareness of jargon terms and identify and reduce their use of this terminology in their professional practice.

Abrégé

La terminologie spécifique à une profession, qui est inaccessible à quiconque n'est pas membre de la profession, constitue un obstacle à la collaboration. Les résultats présentés font partie d'une étude ayant examiné l'efficacité de l'expérience d'éducation interprofessionnelle (EIP) entre des étudiants en orthophonie et des étudiants en enseignement. Le présent article se concentre sur des analyses portant sur la terminologie professionnelle. Les résultats ont montré que les étudiants en orthophonie utilisaient significativement plus de termes spécifiques à la profession que les étudiants en enseignement lorsqu'ils expliquaient aux parents des concepts propres à la profession. On a trouvé qu'une expérience d'éducation interprofessionnelle (EIP) diminuait de façon significative le nombre de mots de jargon utilisés par les étudiants en orthophonie. Enfin, quand les étudiants en orthophonie et les étudiants en enseignement travaillaient ensemble, ils utilisaient moins de termes spécifiques à la profession. Cette étude montre que les programmes de formation professionnelle devraient allouer du temps et des ressources à la sensibilisation des étudiants concernant la terminologie spécifique à la profession. Les orthophonistes sont encouragés à prendre conscience de l'utilisation qu'ils font des termes spécialisés et à réduire l'usage de cette terminologie dans leur pratique professionnelle.

Introduction

Communicative competence is a set of skills that is fundamental to effective collaboration (Woods, 2007). As students immerse themselves in a professional field, their lexicon is developed through a socialization process that results in a vocabulary that is specialized and potentially inaccessible to those outside of the discipline (Hall & Weaver, 2001; Irvine, Kerridge, McPhee & Freeman, 2002). It has been suggested that the use of profession-specific jargon can interfere with sharing information among professionals from differing fields (Bucknavage, 2007; Wright, Stackhouse & Wood, 2008). In a study that asked early-childhood educators about collaboration with speech-language pathologists (S-LPs), different professional vocabularies and the time consuming nature of asking for clarification from S-LPs were identified as barriers to interprofessional communication and collaboration (Hall, 2005). For example, a teacher surveyed stated “they [S-LPs] sent some sheets, I didn’t really understand them... and it was obviously something that was really familiar to themselves and (we didn’t know) what it was used for...I wasn’t really sure what to do with it...” (Hall, 2005, p. 17). While there is a paucity of evidence regarding the use of profession-specific terminology by S-LPs when collaborating with teachers, the field of school-based psychology has conducted some research to show that the use of profession-specific terminology in psychology reports negatively impacts teacher preference, ability to recall information, and perceived comprehension of reports (Bucknavage, 2007; Wiese, Bush, Newman, Benes, & Witt, 1986). Effective collaborators need skills to negotiate the barrier of profession-specific terminology.

Interprofessional education (IPE) has been defined as “those occasions when members [or students] of two or more professions learn with, from and about one another to improve collaboration and the quality of care” (Hammick, Freeth, Koppel, Reeves & Barr, 2007, p. 736). Interprofessional education programs can foster the development of communication skills related to the clear expression and clarification profession-specific ideas and terminology (Woods, 2007). The University of Alberta Health Sciences Council, in collaboration with professional agencies, other universities and Canadian Interprofessional Health Collaboration (CIHC) developed an Interprofessional Learning Pathway Competency Framework that consists of four collaborative competencies; collaboration, reflection, communication, and understanding professional roles aimed to improve efficiency and effectiveness of successful collaboration (HSERC, 2011, p.1). The communication competency refers to “communication skills that enhance interprofessional collaboration” (HSERC, 2011, p. 3). When detailed, this competency involves skills associated with profession-specific terminology including the ability

to address profession-specific language as a barrier to effective communication, the ability to match level and mode of communication to the communication partner (i.e., other professional, client, family, etc), and the ability to ensure that professional knowledge is translated and conveyed appropriately to the client (HSERC, 2011). IPE has the potential to help students learn to identify their profession-specific terminology and define it in a way that is understandable to individuals outside their profession.

The American Speech-Hearing Association estimated that over 50% of S-LPs work in the school system (ASHA, 2012) and speech, language, and communication disorders are cited as the most common childhood disability (Hall, 2005). Listening, speaking, reading and writing are interrelated and support in all language processes is especially important for children with communication disorders or those at risk of school failure (ASHA, 2010; Catts & Kamhi, 2005). Both teachers and S-LPs have responsibilities in the area of language and literacy development, and therefore a distinct area of role overlap emerges for these two professions (Ukrainetz & Fresquez, 2003).

In spring 2011, the University Of Alberta Department of Speech Pathology and Audiology and the Department of Elementary Education established a two-session IPE experience for student S-LPs and student teachers. The experience was developed to address four constructs of collaboration: knowledge and understanding of professional roles; communication skills, specifically the ability to identify and reduce the use of profession-specific terminology; personal reflection; and knowledge and application of models of specialized service delivery. These four constructs were specific to this IPE experience and were derived from the competencies outlined in the University of Alberta Health Science Council Interprofessional Learning Pathway Competency Framework (HSERC, 2011). The analysis and results presented in this paper only pertain to the communication construct of this IPE experience. The IPE experience included completion of two online reflective surveys, attendance and participation in a ninety-minute interactive seminar, where interprofessional pairs of students completed six activities based on a foundational metaphor that described schools as existing on a mainland and S-LPs existing on an island approximately a kilometer off the coast, and completion of a collaborative case study that required student S-LPs and teachers to work in small groups to develop an intervention plan for a hypothetical classroom (Figure 1).

Specific to the communication construct, the IPE provided student teachers and student S-LPs with authentic opportunities to become aware of and reduce their use of profession-specific terminology, as well as develop skills in explaining profession-specific terminology to individuals

external to their profession. For example, in the interactive seminar, participants engaged in a discussion around shared vocabulary (i.e., words used in both fields that may appear related but are distinct in their usage, for example *phonology*, a term used by S-LPs and *phonics*, a term used by teachers).

Methodology

Participants

All students enrolled in designated speech-language pathology and education courses were required to participate in the IPE experience as part of their course work. Student teachers were registered in the Faculty of Education course entitled 'Language Arts in Elementary Schools'. This course was designed to prepare student teachers to implement a Language Arts curriculum in an elementary school setting. The student S-LPs were registered in the Department of Speech Pathology and Audiology course entitled 'Language and Literacy', which focuses on the relationship between oral language and literacy skills such as reading and writing. The courses selected focussed on language and literacy and therefore there was some shared content, which allowed the IPE to have foundation in the content of the courses. Ninety-five percent of students who took part in the IPE experience agreed to participate in research related to the efficacy of the IPE experience. This study used information from 55 student S-LPs and 52 student teachers. The IPE experience took place midway through the student S-LPs second semester in a two-year professional master's degree program, prior to formal clinical experience. For student teachers, the timing of the IPE experience varied and depended on when the students opted to take the course in their three-plus-one-year bachelor's degree program. Over 95% of the student teachers had completed a five-week introductory practicum placement in a classroom. For the collaborative case study, students were randomly assigned to small groups of four to six students, with a comparable number of student S-LPs and student teachers per group.

Materials

Data related to the use of profession-specific terminology were gathered from reflective surveys. Identical surveys were completed independently and online before the interactive seminar and after the collaborative case study (i.e., before and after the jointly attended sessions). As part of the surveys, participants were asked to:

- explain to a parent the role and process of assessment in your profession; and
- explain to a parent the connection between spoken language (i.e., speech and language) and reading/writing.

These items were used as one way to assess participants' ability to reduce jargon.

For the case study, every interdisciplinary group received a thorough description that included a diagram of the classroom layout, a description of the school (i.e., school population, demographics, shared spaces), and holistic descriptions of seven students with behavioral and/or speech or language concerns in an inclusive grade two classroom. For example, one student description stated:

Doug has a moderate stutter, and while he seems to have a close circle of friends, Doug reported to his mom last week that he was being picked on by some kids on the playground. Doug rarely speaks up in class, but has no trouble completing written academic work.

One response item on the collaborative case study was used for analysis of use of profession-specific terminology. On this item, small interprofessional groups of students were asked to explain their jointly developed intervention plan for one of the hypothetical students to the hypothetical child's parents.

Analysis Methodology

Researchers developed a list of objective criteria to identify profession-specific terminology. The criteria included researchers' agreement, appearance in glossary or index of general introductory textbooks to the field, and usage that deviates from conventional definitions found in a dictionary. The analysis process involved counting the number of profession-specific words in the explanation provided by each participant. Simultaneously, the researchers created a list of words used by students that met the criteria of being profession-specific terminology and sorted this list according to whether the word was used by student S-LPs, student teachers, or both student S-LPs and teachers.

Results

Compilation of Jargon Terms

Analysis of responses from all items from the reflective surveys yielded a total of 56 different jargon terms used by students. Student S-LPs used 44 of the jargon words, 7 were used only by student teachers and only 5 words were used by students from both disciplines. Speech-language pathology jargon words included *articulation*, *graphemes*, *intelligible*, *orthography*, *sound-letter correspondence* and *standardized test*. Education jargon terms included *differentiated instruction*, *formative* and *summative*, and *program of studies*. Jargon terms used by students of both disciplines included *decode*, *developmental functioning/appropriate*, *formal and informal* and *receptive and expressive*. Examples of student responses can be found in Table 1. Table 2 contains the full list of profession-specific terms organized by profession.

ANOVA analysis

The preliminary ANOVA analysis conducted yielded a significant between-groups difference ($F(1, 105) = 23.979$, $p < 0.001$, partial eta squared = 0.186). The ANOVA analysis also showed a significant difference within-groups before and after the IPE experience ($F(1, 105) = 6.137$, $p = 0.015$). Mean and standard deviations for both groups before and after the IPE experience can be found in Table 3. A post-hoc pairwise comparison using a Bonferroni correction showed a significant difference within the speech-language pathology group before and after the IPE experience ($t(54) = 2.801$, $p = 0.007$). The post-hoc pairwise comparison showed that there was no significant difference within the education group before and after the IPE experience ($t(51) = 0.131$, $p = 0.896$). These results showed that student S-LPs used significantly more jargon than student teachers before the IPE experience. After the IPE experience, student S-LPs showed a significant decrease in their use of jargon words. However, student S-LPs continued to use significantly more jargon than student teachers after the IPE. Student teachers used relatively less jargon before the experience and did not show any change in their use of jargon after the IPE experience.

Collaborative Case study

The collaborative case study asked each interprofessional group of students to explain their intervention plan for one of the hypothetical children in the description to his parents. The number of jargon words used in that explanation was counted for each group response. Results displayed in Table 4, showed that the majority of groups (87%) used zero to one jargon word in their explanation of an intervention plan to parents. Analysis of group responses on the collaborative case study yielded six different jargon terms: *articulation*, *digit fidget*, *intelligibility*, *phonological awareness*, *segmenting & blending*, and *sound-letter correspondence*. One group used all six of the identified jargon terms. It can be noted that five of the six words used on the collaborative case studies were identified as being used only by student S-LPs on the reflective surveys.

Discussion

The statistical analysis of the frequency with which participants used jargon showed that student S-LPs used significantly more profession-specific terminology than student teachers before and after the interprofessional education experience. However, analysis also showed that student S-LPs used significantly less jargon after the IPE experience. Both disciplines were able to explain the concepts; the difference was the student teachers were able to do so with minimal use of profession-specific terminology. For example, a student teacher who used profession-specific terminology in their explanation of assessment, stated (profession-specific terms are in bold):

The role of assessment is to determine the students standing in the classroom on a given activity.

- *Allows the teacher to reflect on teaching (how to improve it)*
- *Shows what needs to be improved in the students*
- *The process of assessment is clearly defined by the teacher to the students*
- *Sometimes **formal/informal***
- *Must reflect on the **program of studies***

In comparison, a student S-LP who used profession-specific terminology in their explanation of assessment, stated (profession-specific terms are in bold):

*To see if the child has a disability and if so, in what **domains of language**. Use **standardized test** to see if there is a problem then do more **informal probes** and language samples to see exactly where the problem is (**semantics, syntax, pragmatics**.)*

When examined, not only does the response from the student S-LP use quantitatively more jargon terms; the terms actually refer to abstract concepts that may be unknown or unclear to individuals outside of their profession (e.g., syntax). The student teacher's response provides an explanation that is primarily free from jargon, while the student S-LP uses jargon more frequently and regularly in their explanation. The student teacher used 64 words in her explanation, and only two profession-specific terms. This student teacher used jargon at the very end of their explanation, and at no other point in her explanation. In contrast, the student S-LP used 44 words in her explanation with six profession-specific terms that were employed regularly throughout the response. These qualitative differences between this pair of examples, demonstrates some of the details that were not formally analyzed in this study but provide valuable information that informs the following discussion.

Of the 56 jargon words identified by researchers, student teachers used only 7 terms. Not only were speech-language pathology participants using more profession-specific terminology, they were also using a broader range of terms that were considered jargon. Even with the emphasis being placed on 'parent-friendly' language in post-secondary preparation programs, the student S-LPs in this study seemed to fluently use jargon in their explanations, even though this was inappropriate in the given context.

In contrast, when students were assigned to interprofessional groups and given an opportunity to explain a concept to parents, almost 90% of groups used less than two jargon term in their explanation. This demonstrated that when students worked together in

interprofessional groupings, they were either actively working to use less jargon in their explanation or they were using less profession-specific terminology as a consideration of working with members of another profession. The single group that used six profession-specific terms used five words that were classified as being used by student S-LPs on the reflective surveys. This suggested that in that group, the student S-LPs may have been responsible for the use of the jargon terminology. Statistical analysis showed a significant decrease in the use of profession-specific terminology used by student S-LPs after the IPE experience concluded.

This study showed that student S-LPs used profession-specific terminology in inappropriate contexts perhaps due to being unaware that the terms are not generally understood by the general population or other professions. The IPE experience was shown to reduce the amount of profession-specific terminology used by student S-LPs, which may ultimately work to improve collaboration between members of these professions. The IPE provided an opportunity for students to receive immediate feedback regarding their communication style. The authentic nature of the IPE allowed students to explore their developing professional vocabularies and increase their awareness of their use of this vocabulary.

Implications

This preliminary study demonstrated that this IPE reduced the number of profession-specific words used by student S-LPs. In doing so, the IPE assisted in the preparation of these students for the collaborative workplace. Ideally, all university programs in Canada would include some form of IPE that connects student S-LPs with student teachers, a very probable collaborative pairing upon graduation.

Unfortunately, the establishment of an interprofessional education experience is time-consuming and complicated to coordinate, so IPE is not always feasible. Finding a mutually agreeable time proved to be one of the greatest challenges to setting up this IPE. The authors suggest establishing departmental investment in the establishment of IPE and culminating relationships between faculty members in order to promote the accommodation of IPE into course work and time. At the University of Alberta, student S-LPs have a fixed course schedule and attend all courses as a single cohort, whereas student teachers have individual and varied course schedules. This IPE took place during scheduled class time for education students, which was either during flexible speech-language pathology course time or after S-LP courses had concluded for the day.

The results from this study provide evidence for university programs to include more education related to effective communication for professional preparedness. This education can be included in coursework as well as

in the clinical practicum setting. Throughout the formal education of students, professors and instructors can provide additional opportunities for students to practice using jargon-free language by promoting parent or client-friendly communication. Clinical educators for students S-LPs can use these findings to enhance the education they provide students. Clinical educators for students could mentor student S-LPs by providing examples of jargon-free reports and explanations to demonstrate a collaborative-friendly communication style. Also, these results should heighten awareness of personal use of profession-specific terminology in new and established practitioners. This study provides rationale for practitioners to connect with team members from other professions and discuss clarity of communication (written and spoken) and profession-specific terminology. It would be valuable for interprofessional teams to work together to develop a shared vocabulary and clarify their intent when using terms that could be confusing (e.g., phonology and phonics). Team leaders can foster a collaborative-ready team by promoting and providing time for formal team discussions of communicative barriers, and fostering an open environment where team members feel comfortable requesting clarification and providing feedback to other team members if their communication is unclear or laden with jargon terms.

Limitations & Future Research

This preliminary study provided a broad overview of the efficacy of one specific IPE experience. This study brought together student teachers and S-LPs and developed an IPE curriculum specific to these professions. This specific IPE experience focussed on the area of language and literacy, a unique area of overlap between S-LPs and teachers. Other IPE experiences should be developed to focus on other areas of overlap, such as curricular modifications, and then tested for efficacy. If the IPE were to include other professions that work in schools (e.g., occupational therapists, physical therapists, nurses, psychologists, educational assistants, speech-language pathology assistants, etc), this language-literacy IPE curriculum would not be relevant and would require revision. Interdisciplinary teams typically involve more than two professions, so in the interest of workforce preparedness, an authentic IPE experience would include more professions. In order to determine the impact of IPE on the use of profession-specific terminology across more disciplines, a future study should include a variety of other professions.

This study only looked at quantitative changes in the use of profession-specific terminology before and after the IPE. A future study should employ different measures in order to provide more qualitative information about the explanations used by members of different professions.

These measures could include complexity measures related to sentence structure and overall vocabulary choice or ratio of profession-specific terms to total number of words in an explanation. A closer examination of this phenomenon would provide more information for individuals, programs, and teams trying to address this problem.

It may also be beneficial to determine the effects of clinical experience on frequency of jargon use. In this study all the student S-LPs in this study had not yet engaged in clinical experience. A future study should look into the efficacy of this IPE with professional teachers and S-LPs working in the schools to determine if the IPE would benefit professionals as well as pre-professional students. Finally, in order to determine the prevalence of profession-specific terminology used by professionals, a future study should look at the use of profession-specific terminology used in S-LPs' written and spoken communication in the schools.

Conclusions

A profession-specific vocabulary is a product of professional socialization and results in the use of professional vocabularies even when engaging in discourse with other professionals and parents. This study found those student S-LPs were using a jargon-rich professional vocabulary in authentic situations. The introduction of IPE reduced the quantity of profession-specific terms used by student S-LPs. Interprofessional education can assist in preparing student S-LPs for a collaborative workplace by increasing their awareness and reducing their use of profession-specific terminology.

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Table 1. Examples of SLP and education participant responses explaining the connection between oral and written language, organized by use of profession-specific terminology

Participant Discipline	Responses free from profession-specific terms	Responses with profession-specific terms
S-LP	<p>“There is a strong but complex connection between the spoken language and reading/writing. Reading and writing are language based, and children begin to learn to read and write based on the language they have gained through speaking. Reading/writing can also increase vocabulary in the spoken language. Also they are all forms of communication”</p> <p>(S-LP participant, 118 pre-IPE reflective survey)</p>	<p>“Spoken language is the generation of grammatical structures and vocabulary. This does not require explicit knowledge of phonemes or the alphabet. However, reading and writing requires phonemic awareness and requires the child to make letter-sound correspondences. Reading helps to increase vocabulary and introduce new grammatical forms to the child. Writing is the creative generation of these grammatical structures and vocabulary”</p> <p>(S-LP participant, 116 pre-IPE reflective survey)</p>
Education	<p>“Spoken language generally develops sooner than reading and writing skills. After developing spoken language ability, the child begins to connect their knowledge of word sounds with the idea that they can be represented in writing. Over time, children make specific connections to oral sounds and written letters and words to learn to read and write.”</p> <p>(Education participant, 211 pre-IPE reflective survey)</p>	<p>“Spoken language refers to the way children communicate to peers, adults, etc. using their mouth or other methods to create sounds. It is a way to express themselves (as is writing). With reading (receptive language) and writing it is also a mental process but it requires movement of their hands and eyes and fine motor skills (for writing). Some children have trouble seeing the connection between spoken and written language.”</p> <p>(Education participant, 321 post-IPE reflective survey)</p>

Notes: S-LP = speech-language pathology

Table 2. Profession-specific terms used organized by discipline

Terms used by S-LP participants	Terms used by Education participants	Terms used by participants from both disciplines
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Articulation • Chronological + (age) • Criterion Referenced • Domains + (language) • Fine Motor • Fluency • Forms + (Grammatical) • Graphemes • Intelligible • Modalities + (language) • Morphology • Narrative Sample • Normal Curve • Normal Distribution • Normal Range • Norms • Operating + (—) • Oral Language • Orthography • Output + (Motor) • Phonemes • Phonemic • Phonological Awareness • Phonology • Pragmatics • Pre-Literacy • Pre-Post Treatment Measure • Probes • Profile + (language) • Representations + (—) • Resonance • Segmenting + (sounds) • Semantics • Sight Words • Significant Difference • Sound-Letter Association • Sound-Letter Correspondence • Sound Segments • Standard Deviation • Standard Scores • Standardized Test • Typical + (range, etc) • Within normal limits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Differentiated Instruction • Formative • Metacognitively • Portfolios • Program of Studies • Registers • Summative 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decode • Developmentally + (appropriate/functioning) • Formal & Informal • Phonetic • Receptive & Expressive

Notes: S-LP = speech-language pathology

Table 3. Summary of mean and standard deviation of profession-specific terms used by participants from each discipline before and after the IPE experience

Participant Discipline	Mean before IPE	SD before IPE	Mean after IPE	SD after IPE
S-LP	1.96	1.91	1.22	1.71
Ed	0.48	0.92	0.46	0.78

Notes: Ed = education. IPE = Interprofessional education. SD = standard deviation S-LP = speech-language pathology.

Table 4. Summary of percentages of groups of participants that used numbers of profession-specific terminology in explanation of an intervention plan to parents (collaborative case study)

	Number of profession-specific terms						
	0	1	2	3	4	5	6
Percentage of groups	58%	29%	8%	0%	0%	0%	4%

Figure 1. Summary of University of Alberta Interprofessional Education Experience

