

# Teacher Perspectives of Collaborative Practices with School-Based Occupational Therapists



Amanda Entress, OTS and Gabrielle Sharp, OTS  
 Laura Poleshuck, OTD, OTR/L



## Abstract

**Purpose:** To evaluate, from the teacher perspective, the extent of collaborative practices between elementary school teachers and occupational therapists (OTs) in schools.

**Method:** A convenience sample of public elementary school teachers was surveyed via email using the Survey of Teacher Perceptions of Collaborative Practices with School-Based Occupational Therapists.

**Results:** A majority of participants reported that collaboration with the OT led to student benefits, but that time consumption was a barrier to collaboration. There were significant correlations between participants who agreed that OT benefited students in the classroom and those who implemented OT suggestions, as well as significant correlations between participants who had more frequent meetings with the OT and those who agreed that OT benefited students in the classroom.

**Conclusion:** Teachers had positive perceptions of collaboration with OTs, which most frequently took place through informal meetings; the biggest barrier to collaboration was found to be time.

## Research Question

What is the extent and frequency of collaboration, as well as the supports and barriers to collaborative practices, between elementary school teachers and school-based occupational therapists from the teacher perspective?

## Literature

A review of literature was completed to assess the need for further research and identify aspects of collaboration that are currently supported by research.

### Perceptions held by teachers

- OT contributes to skill development, especially with pre-academic and academic skills (Barnes & Turner, 2000)
- Students benefit and achieve goals when support service teams and teachers work together (Nochajski, 2001)

### Barriers to collaboration

- A lack of role understanding (Fairbairn & Davidson, 1993)
- Lack of formal meetings and planning sessions between school based professionals (Nochajski, 2001)
- No scheduled classroom time for collaboration with the OT (Barnes & Turner, 2000)

### Types and Extent of Collaboration

- Informal discussions in hallways, lunchrooms, parking lots (Nochajski, 2001)
- Monthly team meetings to discuss students and planning meetings (Nochajski, 2001)

## Procedures

The authors attained approval from the Nazareth College Human Subjects Research Committee and research certification from the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative.

### Participants

- 32 Elementary school teachers (grades K-5) from suburban school districts in Rochester, NY
- Inclusion criteria: minimum two years teaching experience; under the age of 65

### Process

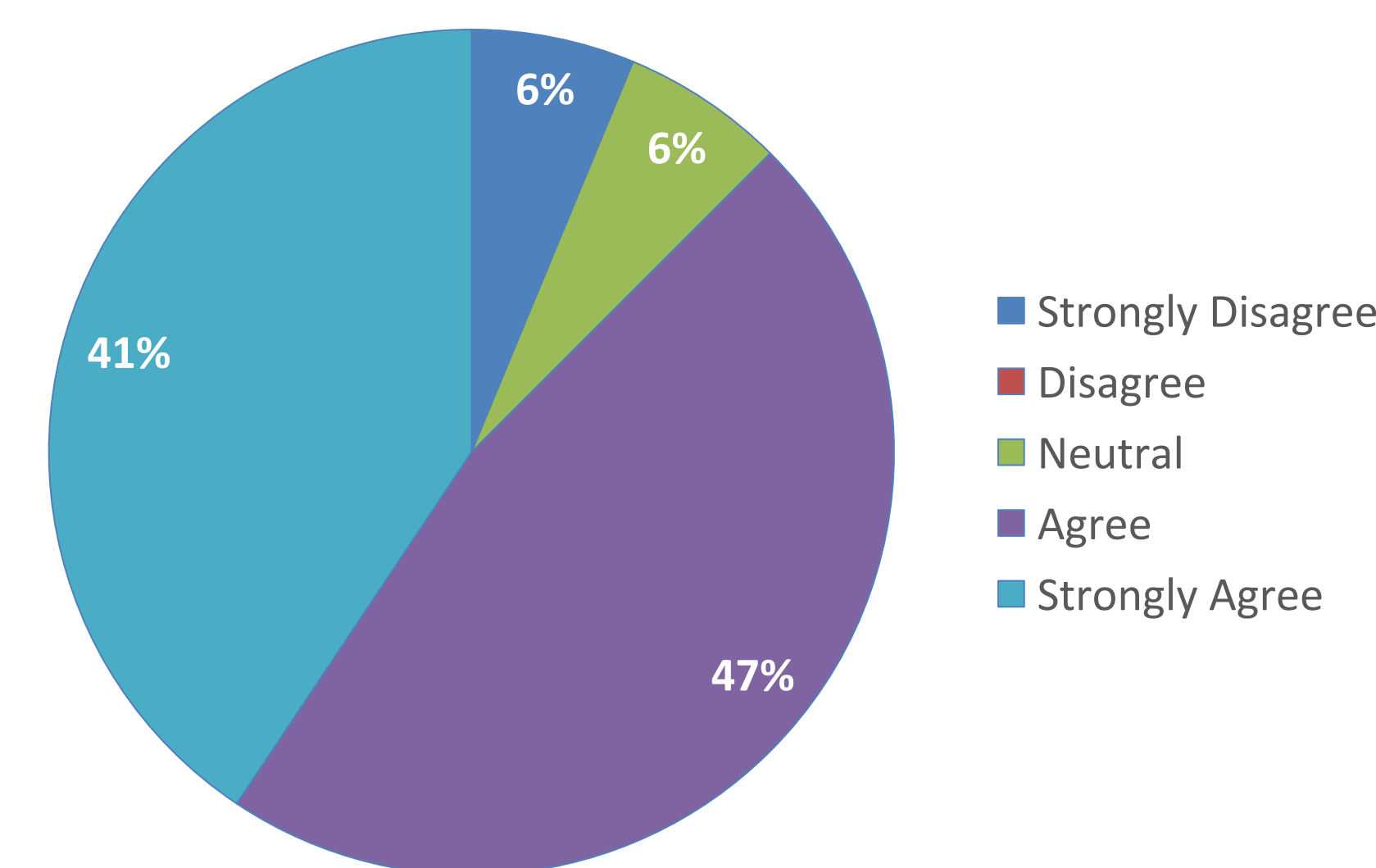
- 502 teachers were emailed through Survey Monkey requesting their participation
- Participants completed the "Survey of Teacher Perceptions of Collaborative Practices with School-Based Occupational Therapists"
- Due to a low response rate, school district OTs were contacted asking them to encourage teachers to complete the survey; the survey was resent to all 502 teachers

## Data Analysis

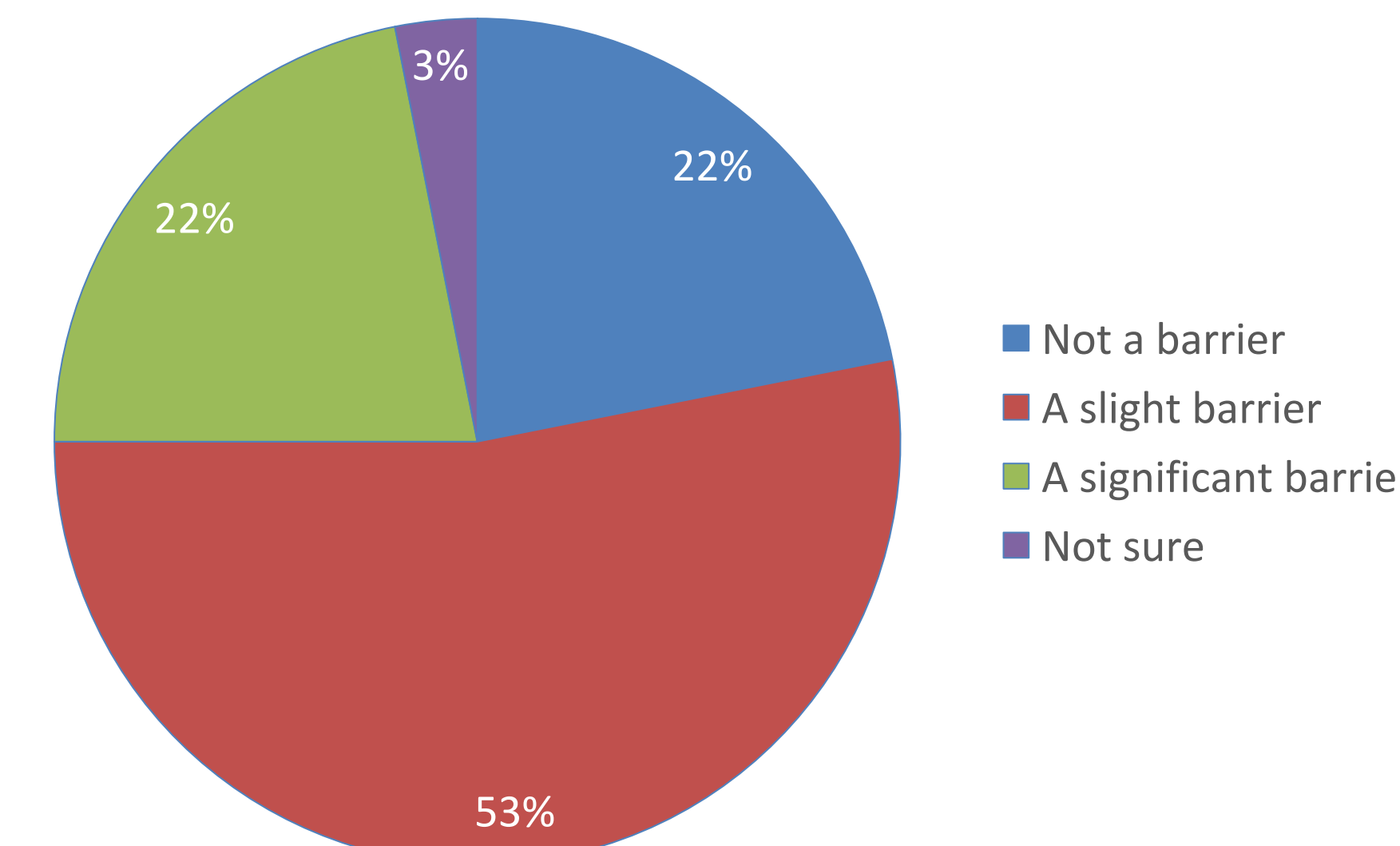
Analysis was completed using Statistical Package for Social Sciences. Correlations were run between variables including Likert scales and frequency questions. Descriptive statistics were based on the demographic data.

## Results

Collaboration with the OT leads to student benefits in the classroom



How much of a barrier to collaboration is "time consumption?"



### Correlational Relationships:

- Teachers who agreed or strongly agreed that collaboration with the OT leads to student benefits in the classroom were more likely to agree or strongly agree that they implemented the suggestions made. A moderately strong correlation ( $r=.582$ ) between the two variables was statistically significant ( $p<.05$ ).
- Teachers who had more frequent meetings with the OT were more likely to agree that collaborating with the OT leads to student benefits in the classroom. A moderately strong correlation ( $r=.601$ ) between the two variables was statistically significant ( $p<.05$ ).

Reported Meeting Frequencies Between Teachers and OTs

	Less than once a month	Once a month	Once a week	Daily
How often do you have informal meetings with the OT?	34%	22%	41%	3%
How often do you have scheduled planning meetings with the OT?	75%	19%	6%	0%
How often do you and the OT have scheduled team meetings?	97%	3%	0%	0%

## Discussion

Teachers surveyed reported implementing suggestions given by the OT, and found benefits to working together. When collaborating, informal meetings were utilized more frequently than scheduled meetings. The most significant barrier to collaboration was found to lack of time.

### Relation to previous literature

Nochajski (2001) found that students benefit and achieve goals when support service teams and teachers work together, while Barnes and Turner (2000) found that OTs contribute to skill development. The current study supported those results and found that the majority of teachers agree or strongly agree that collaboration with the OT leads to student benefits in the classroom.

Of our participants, 75% reported time consumption as a barrier to collaboration. This supports Nochajski's (2001) findings that 76% of teachers, OTs, PTs, and SLPs reported time consumption as a barrier to collaboration and it supports Barnes and Turner's (2000) findings that a lack of scheduled time was a barrier to collaboration.

Both this study and Nochajski's (2001) found that informal meetings were extremely common. In our study, 63% of teachers reported them occurring at least monthly, while Nochajski (2001) found that 100% of teachers, OTs, PTs, and SLPs surveyed reported daily informal discussions.

### Implications for practice

It is suggested that teachers and therapists be given workload flexibility to provide more opportunities for collaborative meetings throughout the day. Teachers value OT suggestions, and should be encouraged to collaborate to benefit students. Less timely collaboration strategies should be researched further and utilized in schools because of time constraints.

### Conclusion

Teachers perceive OT suggestions and services as beneficial to student skill development, and despite time being a barrier, have positive perceptions of collaboration with school based OTs.

## References

- Barnes, K. J., & Turner, K. D. (2001). Team Collaborative Practices Between Teachers and Occupational Therapists. *American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 55* (1), 83-89.
- Fairbairn, M., & Davidson, I. (1993). Teachers' perceptions of the role and effectiveness of occupational therapists in schools. *Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy, 60*. 185-191.
- Nochajski, S. (2002). Collaboration Between Team Members in Inclusive Educational Settings. *WOHC Occupational Therapy In Health Care Occupational Therapy In Hlth. Care. 15* (3), 101-112.