Title: Engaging in Clinical-Research Partnerships: A Perceptual Mapping Activity

Research Questions: The research-practice gap is well known and experienced by many fields (Green et al., 2009). Researchers and clinicians have been encouraged to adopt approaches and to minimize this gap, including engaging stakeholders in the research process. In practice-based research, an active partnership between researchers and clinicians is required throughout the research endeavour (Epstein, 2001). One factor that supports the maintenance and continued success of the partnership is the evaluation of the project and the partnership (Frisby, Thibault, & Kikulis, 2004). Partnership evaluation promotes the discussion of facilitators and barriers that partners may be experiencing. Perceptual mapping is one technique that can be used to determine the experience of those involved in a partnership. This technique develops a visual representation of elements that each member believed influenced the partnership. In the current project, school board speech-language pathologists (SLPs) and researchers engaged in a clinical-research partnership aimed at validating a kindergarten assessment tool participated in a perceptual mapping activity to evaluate their ongoing partnership.

Method: The aim of the study was to evaluate a practice-based research partnership established for 2 years at a point when new direction was being considered. Six SLPs and two researchers participated in a meeting involving review of the shared goals of the partnership and the perceptual mapping activity. The perceptual mapping activity was introduced as a way to discover the factors that supported or hindered the partnership. As the first step, each member of the group wrote down factors that they felt influenced the partnership and they wrote one factor per post-it note. After everyone made note of all of the factors they personally identified, they described each factor to the group. While each factor was described, the group member describing it indicated if the factor was a facilitator or a barrier with a (+/-). Next, the group

members categorized the post-it notes based on perceived similarities. Participants then gave each category of notes a title to capture the theme of the notes. Then, participants drew arrows between the categories to denote how the factors influenced each other and influenced the overall outcome of the project. Lastly, the group engaged in a discussion about the activity including if the model captured all facilitators and barriers and what the group learned from the activity.

Analysis and Results: During the activity, key categories that were found to influence the success of the partnership included how the initial partnership was established, the frequency that the project leads were in contact with each other, engaging all SLPs at the school board, and the overall motivation to engage in the partnership. Factors more specific to the success of the project included a well-defined problem, specific shared outcomes from the project, and the funds to complete the project. Within each of these categories facilitators and barriers were discussed. The audio from the perceptual mapping activity was transcribed by a research assistant who did not take part in the activity and further analysis of the transcription is being completed. Preliminary results reveal that a facilitator of the partnership included the establishment of initial trust the clinical partners felt as a result of the researchers taking time to understand how the school board operated. The largest barriers faced included distance between partners which resulted in additional time to discuss next steps.

Implications: This project demonstrates one approach to engage stakeholders in a discussion of partnership success, and the results of this case study demonstrates facilitators and uncovers potential barriers to success. Engaging stakeholders in a continued discussion of partnership success not only identifies areas of improvement but further maintains motivation amongst stakeholders.