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Adaptive Sports in Schools for Students with Disabilities from an Occupational Therapy Perspective

Tamara Harvey; Mary Jan Greer, PhD, OTR

BACKGROUND

Multiple studies have indicated that children who participate in sports see positive psychosocial adjustments, increased academic performance, and increased physical benefits (Findlay & Coplan, 2008; Owen et al., 2022). However, it has also been noted that children with disabilities have reduced levels of participation in leisure activities, including sports when compared to children without disabilities (Sharp et al., 2012). Parents of children with disabilities face many challenges when seeking out sports for their children, including insufficient staff expertise and training as well as a lack of resources. (Coates & Howe, 2023). Occupational therapists can help with these barriers by enabling adaptive physical activity (APA) participation in schools. They can help by working directly with the children as well as training school staff.

PROBLEM

Children with disabilities do not have the same opportunities to participate in sports within schools as their peers, which may affect their social participation, academic performance, and overall health and well-being (Aytur et al., 2018).

PURPOSE

To develop a program that increases occupational engagement of students with disabilities, specifically focusing on sports and leisure activities while providing resources and educational information to parents and school staff.

Outcome Objectives:

1. Conduct a needs assessment at an elementary school to determine the need for increased adaptive sports participation and resources.
2. Develop a program that focuses on adaptive sports/activities.
3. Implement & share the program's content at the elementary school and with the parents.
4. Evaluate the program by analyzing data from pre- and post-program surveys and observations to determine how successful it was.

METHODS

Site:

- Richard J. Lee Elementary School (Focus on the two Special Education classes)

Participants:

- School staff & parents: 11 participated
- Students: 15 participated

Needs Assessment:

- Use of informal interviews with school staff, parents, and students.
- Observations of students in special education classrooms, general education classrooms, PE, and recess.
- Pre-survey given to staff and parents to determine a need.

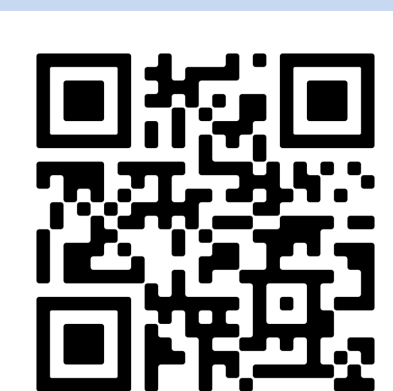
Development/Implementation:

- Created handouts for parents and school staff.
- Created guidelines for school staff.
- Provided demonstrations, explanations, and assistance to students.

Evaluation:

- Compare needs assessment results to results of the post-survey and to continuous observations throughout the program's implementation.

References



PROGRAM

General Program Goals:

1. Promote sports participation among children with disabilities.
2. Increase staff and parent understanding about the topic of adaptive sports, including the benefits and barriers.
3. Increase staff expertise and confidence in modifying and adapting sports activities.
4. Promote inclusion among all students.
5. Provide resources within the community to families.

Activities:

1. Adapted Bowling
 - Demonstrations + handouts
2. Adapted Tennis
 - Demonstrations + handouts
3. Sitting Volleyball
 - Demonstrations + handouts
4. Adapted Table Air Hockey
 - Demonstrations + handouts
5. Resources in the community + educational information about benefits and barriers

Theoretical Framework: The Occupational Adaptation Model (OA)

CONCLUSION/FUTURE DIRECTION

Conclusion:

- The program increased the abilities to adapt and modify activities including a positive impact on confidence.
- The program provided resources within the community.
- The program promoted adaptive sports participation in the classrooms and playground.
- The program promoted inclusion and increased communication among students.

Future Direction:

- Share with multiple schools and school districts.
- Include additional sports with increased adaptations and modifications.
- Increase the length of the program.

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