The Impact of an Educational and Activity Based Program on Inclusion of Children With Disabilities or Disorders

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Introduction

Background:
- The 2019 U.S. Census Bureau reported an increase in children with disabilities and an increase in prevalence of multiple disabilities found in children around 5 years of age (Young, 2021).
- Teachers often report feeling ill-equipped to manage classrooms when trying to include children with disability/disorders (D’Agostino & Douglas, 2021). This, thus, lessened their likelihood to offer inclusive classrooms and were more likely to support discharging or never enrolling children with disabilities due to lack of confidence in managing the disabilities.
- Stacey McGuire and Meadan (2022) conducted a study to create inclusive environments for children with emotional or social delays, handle children with persistent challenging behaviors (PCBs), and help typically developing children understand how to interact with peers who had a disability or disorder. The researchers also discussed how exclusionary practices hinder children that exhibit PCBs. McGuire and Meadan (2022) found that teachers that made extra effort to create socially inclusive environments saw benefits not only for the children with disabilities or PCBs but also for the typically-developing children. The challenging behaviors decreased, which eventually led to improvements in the functional well-being of students and teachers individually.
- The Model of Human Occupation (Kielhofner & Burke, 1980) demonstrated the relationship between environment, volition, and habituation on individuals’ performance. Having teachers learn the advantages of choosing to be more inclusive incorporates the concept of volition. Engaging in activities that require teachers to practice including others embraces the idea of habituation. Furthermore, giving educators chances to learn to adapt physical aspects of classrooms shows how dynamics of the environment can impact performance.

Purpose:
- To address preschool teachers’ ability to: Understand the benefits and importance of incorporating inclusive principles for typically and non-typically developing children in preschools
- Use occupational therapy-oriented strategies (adaptive equipment and environmental modifications) to promote inclusive principles in preschools

Methods

Recruitment:
- Through email/letter and associations with UCP/CCEP
- From preschools within of Montgomery, Alabama

Icebreaker Activity:
- Told to complete puzzle to create an ‘Inclusive School of Fish’
- Given disproportionate amount of specific color pieces required to complete puzzle
- Encouraged to seek resources/help from others in exchange for resources required to complete puzzle
- Debriefed on intent behind icebreaker and what each element in puzzle represented

Education Module:
- 45 minute PowerPoint presentation with opportunities for small discussion throughout
- Informed of occupational therapy techniques, adaptive equipment recommendations, and environmental modifications

Pre-Test and Post-Test Survey:
- Pretest with Likert scale and open-ended questions administered prior to icebreaker activity and PowerPoint Presentation
- Post-test administered 2 weeks after post-test with Likert scale from pre-test and additional open-ended questions

Participants:
- 29 participants, 18 remained throughout, 2 dropped out at post-test
- 2 different preschools in Montgomery, AL

Survey Responses:
- Increased understanding of occupational therapy noted through written explanation of the field
- Increased use of occupational therapy interventions to include non-typically developing children reported by teachers
- Increased understanding of inclusive principles reported by teachers in open-ended questions and through Likert scale

Discussion

Inclusion Survey Results

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<th>Inclusion Survey Results</th>
<th>Pre-Test Average</th>
<th>Post-Test Average</th>
<th>Percent Improvement</th>
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Justification for OT Intervention:
- The results of this study suggest that many directors or faculty members are willing to implement some cost-effective inclusive principles if provided with the resources and instruction to do so.
- The lack of knowledge about occupational therapy in general and occupational therapy-specific interventions that improve skills vital to children’s success in the classroom also demonstrates an area where occupational therapists can intervene on behalf of children to improve overall quality of life.

Discussion continued

Unexpected Results:
- Multiple reports of burnout experienced during training revealed additional challenges to educate teachers on the importance of inclusive techniques
- Lack of motivation to respond to survey or provide written feedback demonstrated some teachers’ negative regards and perception of inclusive environments
- Reluctance to adopt interventions citing parent complaints demonstrated additional need for educating parents on benefits of inclusion as well as educating teachers on how to promote inclusive classrooms to parents of both typically and non-typically developing children.

Limitations:
- Small Sample Size
- Lack of consideration of regional differences
- Time frame of study activities
- Differences in levels of prior exposure to inclusivity training with CCEP inclusion consultants
- Short duration of time in between collection of pre-test and post-test results

Conclusion

Implications:
- Continuing to provide education about the importance of inclusion and cost-effective strategies to better include children within preschools allows all children to advance in the social and academic setting of a preschool classroom.
- Allowing more occupational therapists or occupational therapy students into various school, workplace, and social settings to teach inclusive principles, modifications, and interventions will ultimately improve quality of life for both typically developing and non-developingly developing children.

Future Research: Impact of affluence of surrounding communities regarding preschool inclusion, regional differences in support for inclusive classrooms, prevalence of teacher burnout in inclusive classrooms, and parental attitudes toward inclusive classrooms

References


Acknowledgement & Contact information


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