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## A Peer-Mediated Art Program for Secondary Education Students: An Occupation Based Approach

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# A Peer-Mediated Art Program for Secondary Education Students: An Occupation-Based Approach

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## PURPOSE

This project aimed to explore the impact of a peer-mediated art program on social participation of students with disabilities. This program also aimed to promote inclusion of students with disabilities by providing an opportunity to interact with typically developing peers within the school-context.

## BACKGROUND

Individuals with disabilities are more vulnerable to social isolation, feelings of loneliness, and poor overall well-being (Gómez-Zúñiga et al., 2023)

- These individuals may experience adverse outcomes in adulthood as a result of being rejected by their peers (Kwan et al., 2020).

Play and leisure activities serve to promote overall development and contribute to quality of life for children and youth

- Evidence supports the idea that incorporating peers or siblings is an effective approach in increasing participation (Cahill & Beisbier, 2020).

Peer-mediated approaches have shown short and long-term benefits for students, including:

- Intrapersonal and interpersonal development (Travers & Carter, 2022).
- Academic performance and engagement (Carter et al., 2015)
- Improved behaviors (Kaya et al., 2015)
- Development of friendships (Carter et al., 2015)
- Increased social skills (Matthews et al., 2018).

## METHODS

- 10 students at Vermillion High School (4 special ed, 6 general ed)
- The art program was embedded in a peer-program at VHS:
  - Students met for three 45-minute sessions and one 90-minute session each week as part of their weekly curriculum
  - Students participated in at least 2 art sessions/week (12 art session total)
- Students from the general education classroom were paired with a student from the special education classroom
  - Pairings changed throughout the program to maximize the development of new peer relationships
- Assessment tools were administered at weeks 5 and 12 of the capstone project
  - Social Participation and Anxiety Scale (Pre/Post)
  - Perceptions of Persons with Disabilities Survey (Pre/Post)
  - Post-Program Teacher Survey (Post)

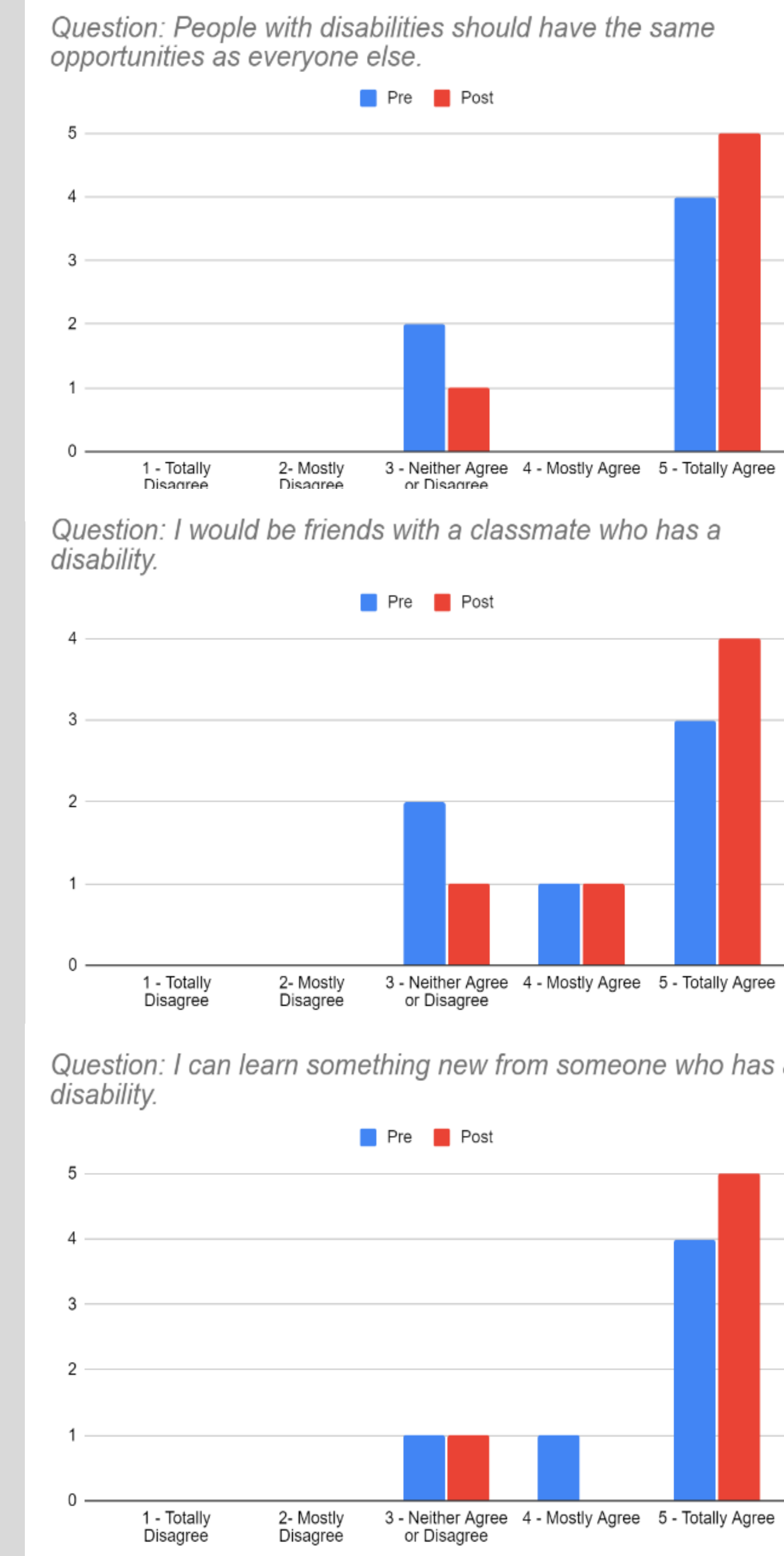
## RESULTS

### Impact on Students with Disabilities

- There was a notable improvement in all supported students' social participation and anxiety
  - 2 of the 4 participants noted improvements in over 50% of survey items
  - All students had the same pre/post response on at least four survey items, with at least half of these items reflecting a positive perception of their social participation.
- 1 of the 4 students provided post-survey responses that indicated a positive perception/experience on 100% of post-survey items
- 2 participants provided responses indicating an increased negative perception of their social participation on  $\leq 2$  post-survey items

### Impact on Peer Helpers

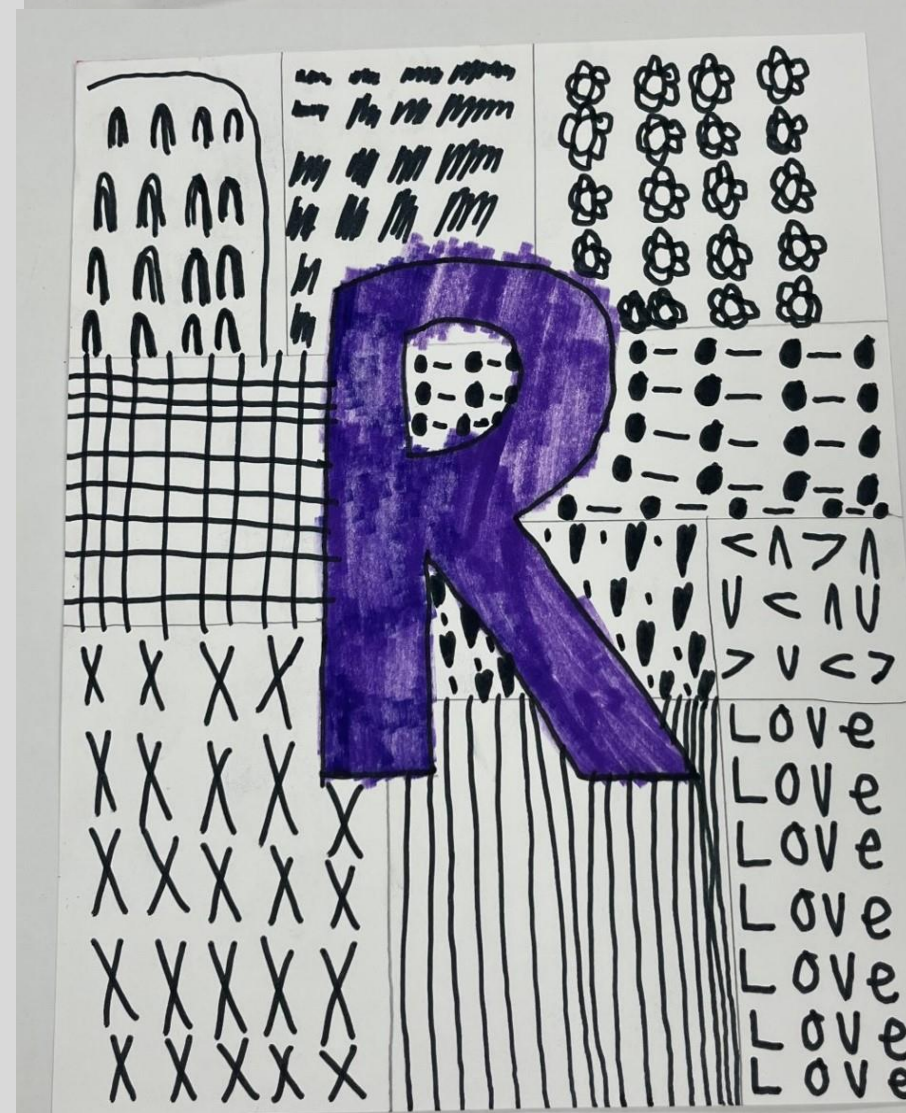
- Overall, peer helpers had a more positive outlook on their peers with disabilities after participating in this program (see figure 1-3)



## IMPLICATIONS

- Occupational therapy has a role in increasing social opportunities for students through peer-mediated services
- School-based occupational therapists can also:
  - Educate teaching staff on the importance of social participation for students with disabilities
  - Educate teaching staff on adaptations and modifications to promote participation in play and leisure activities within the school curriculums (i.e., art, P.E, foods and consumer science, etc.)
- Occupational therapists should encourage diverse opportunities that promote inclusion of students with disabilities with their typically-developing peers
- Increase the use of tier II intervention approaches that utilize a student's natural school context to promote inclusion and increase occupational performance

## THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

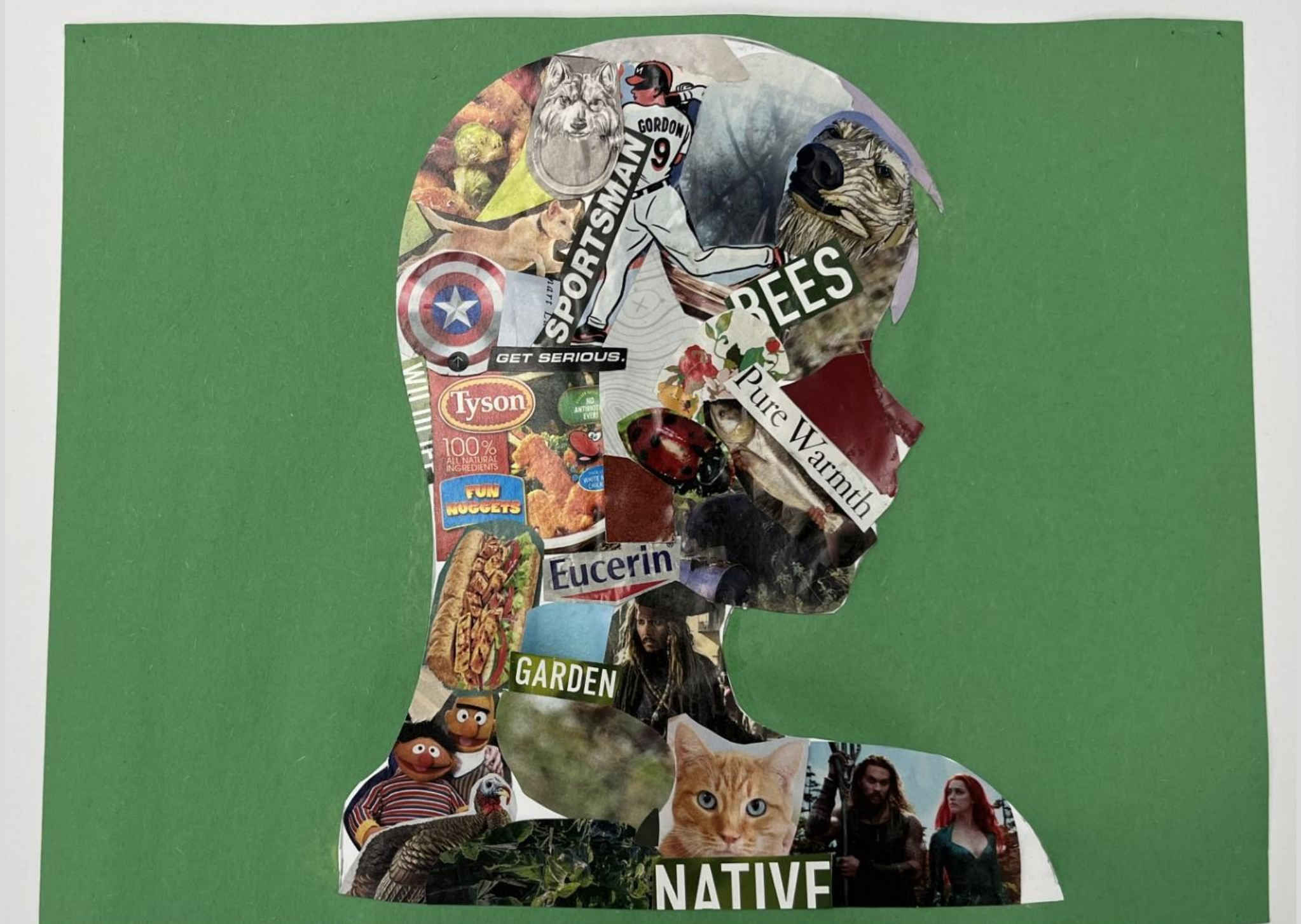


### The Ecology of Human Performance (Dunn et al., 1994)

- Promotes occupational performance by *establishing, restoring, altering, adapting, preventing, or creating* interventions that intervene with the person, their context, and/or task
  - Peer mentors served as *facilitators* in the student's social environment
- Physical skills and abilities of the student were considered when choosing appropriate art activities and accommodations.

### Social Participation FOR (Olson, 2010)

- Assumes children with disabilities experience difficulties interacting with their peers due to challenges with modulating their physical, cognitive, and psychological states.
  - Increases risk of social rejection/isolation
- Encourages interventions that included participation in structured activities with peers to promote optimal social functioning
- Self-perceptions of the student's own social participation is encouraged.
  - Perceptions were gathered via pre/post surveys for the students with disabilities.



## REFERENCES

To access references, click the QR code below:

