

Supporting Youth of All Abilities in a Childcare Setting

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BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

- The early years of life are a critical time where foundational cognitive, social, emotional, language and motor skills are being rapidly developed (Dosman, Andrews, & Goulden, 2012).
- It is estimated that 95 million youth from infancy to 14 years old have some form of a disability (Maciver, Rutherford, Arakelyan, Skramer, Richmond, & Todorova, 2019).
- Common conditions affecting the youth population include autism spectrum disorder (ASD), attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), developmental delay, mental health disorders, behavioral disorders, sensory issues, and learning difficulties (Bodison & Parham, 2018; Maciver et al., 2019; Perry, Holland, Darling-Kuria, & Nativ, 2011).
- Five million young children are at risk or currently have challenging behaviors (Zimmerman, Ledford, & Barton, 2017).
- Participation in everyday activities helps promote development, health, and well-being, which is why it is important to address a child's specific needs to facilitate participation (Rosenberg, Pade, Reizis, & Bar, 2019).
- Childcare providers may lack knowledge in child development, managing challenging behaviors, promoting socioemotional development, and working with children who have disabilities (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2015).
- Childcare providers can benefit from being educated on how to implement behavior management strategies with children to prevent and manage challenging behaviors (Kurki, Jarvenoja, Jarvela, and Mykkanen, 2017).
- Occupational therapy can provide services and supports to foster the development of play skills, fine motor skills, self-care, social skills, self-regulation, sensory needs, and communication (Frolek Clark, Jackson, & Polichino, 2011).
- Occupational therapists can educate parents and childcare providers about a variety of supports that can be implemented with a child to promote participation in daily activities (Case-Smith & O'Brien, 2015).

Purpose:

- The purpose of the capstone project was to provide essential resources and staff training to better support youth of all abilities at a childcare facility.
- Gain an understanding of an occupational therapist's role in the childcare setting.
- The capstone project took place at the YMCA Youth Development Center in Aberdeen, SD.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Person-Environment-Occupation-Performance (PEOP)

- The PEOP model of practice emphasizes the interaction between the person, the environment, and the occupations the individual engages in (Cole & Tufano, 2008).
- PEOP is appropriate to apply in a childcare setting because the environment and occupations must be designed to promote successful participation in age-appropriate activities and development.
- The PEOP model of practice is designed to facilitate occupational performance for children of all abilities.
- Occupational therapists can work with childcare providers to meet the occupational performance needs of the children within the facility.

Lifespan Development Frame of Reference

- The lifespan development frame of reference is a series of stages that an individual achieves developmental milestones and grows throughout a lifetime.
- This frame of reference is commonly used with the pediatric population to identify if any developmental delays are present and how they can be appropriately addressed (Cole & Tufano, 2008).
- A child can experience delays in motor, communication, social, communication, or cognitive skills.
- Childcare providers can facilitate positive development, such as providing age-appropriate activities, engaging in a multisensory environment, and being aware of developmental milestones.

Ayres Sensory Integration®

- Sensory integration (SI) involves perceiving, modulating, organizing, and interpreting sensations to optimize performance and participation in daily activities (Mori, 2015).
- Sensory processing and integration difficulties can impact a child's ability to complete activities of daily living and impose challenges with development, learning, playing, and behavior (Mori, 2015).
- Occupational therapists utilize sensory integration interventions with children who demonstrate developmental, learning, or behavioral concerns (Mori, 2015; Schaaf, Benevides, Kelly, & Mailloux-Maggio, 2012).

Behavior Learning Theory

- The behavior learning theory is a combination of the work from multiple theorists including B.F Skinner's operant conditioning theory, Pavlov's classical conditioning theory, and Bandura's social learning theory (Cole & Tufano, 2008; Wells, 2014).
- In childcare facilities, operant conditioning is used with positive reinforcement to increase the number of appropriate behaviors, such as sharing with friends. On the contrary, punishment is used to decrease negative behavior, such as sitting out of an activity after hitting another child.
- Classical conditioning is used in the childcare setting to help teach good behaviors by rewarding them.
- This social learning theory is applied in childcare centers frequently as childcare providers can demonstrate appropriate behavior, play skills, social skills, and manners

METHODS & ACTIVITIES

- Completed numerous hours of guided observation to observe the environment, activities, and specific children who had behavior needs.
- Completed 7 professional development courses on the topics of autism spectrum disorder, early intervention, behavior management strategies, sensory and motor-based strategies, and positive behavior support.
- Collaborated with the mentor and staff to develop 8 staff education binders including several resources and toolkits about development, play activities, the sensory system, sensory activities, and behavior management strategies.
- Assisted the YDC staff with implementing behavior care plans with 4 children utilizing the supports and strategies created for the project.
- Completed four staff education and training sessions on the topics of:
 - Occupational therapy and pediatrics
 - Autism spectrum disorder
 - Sensory processing and integration
 - Behavior management strategies
- Assisted and lead small group activities in all classrooms while providing constructive feedback and tips.
- Created a sensory space to be utilized as a calm down space for children who need a sensory or quiet break.
- Completed all deliverables planned for the project.

RESULTS / CONCLUSIONS

- The pre/post questionnaires results revealed the staff had an increase of knowledge in the areas of developmental milestones, sensory processing and integration, autism spectrum disorder, occupational therapy, fine motor activities, and behavior management strategies.
- Per staff report, the behavior plans for the 4 children lead to positive results.
- The binders and staff education sessions will be a requirement for current employees and new employees to review upon being hired.
- The capstone student had tremendous growth in knowledge and skills related to pediatric occupational therapy.

Conclusion:

- The goal of childcare facilities is to have a safe, inclusive, and positive environment for all youth to achieve success.
- Childcare facilities need to have adequate resources and training on important topics to meet the developmental needs of all children.
- Childcare facilities should incorporate professionals from a variety of backgrounds to complete staff training sessions, provide resources, and assist with developing the youth programs.

IMPLICATIONS FOR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

- The PEOP model, lifespan development frame of reference, Ayres Sensory Integration® frame of reference, and the behavior learning theory are all appropriate theoretical constructs to guide practice when working with the pediatric population.
- Occupational therapists can play a vital role in assisting childcare facilities with program development and educating staff.
- It is recommended to complete a research project in this area to determine if utilizing the interventions reveal statistically significant results.

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