SEN SOR Y-BASED INTERVENTIONS IN THE SC H OOL SETT ING: 
PERSPECTIVES OF PARAEDUCATORS

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BACKGROUN D
Sensory experiences or environmental modifications can:
• Regulate behavior
• Improve sensory modulation
• Improve readiness for activities
• Improve focus for learning

Sensory-based interventions are used by 90% of school-based
OTs
• Sensory-based interventions are believed to
  • Prepare student for learning activities
  • Quickly achieve regulated state
  • Promote behavioral control

Importance of paraeducator perception
• 87% of paraeducator provide behavioral support for
  students
• Efficacy of approach affected by perception of those
  implementing

ME THOD OLOGY
• Phenomenological study
  • Convenience sample from suburban PA
    • Minimum 6 month experience
    • At least 1 student used sensory-based interventions
  • 2 focus groups, 1 interview (recorded/transcribed)

• Validity established through
  • 3 research assistants
  • 1 member checking

• Content analysis process: Data immersion
  • Initial coding, develop code key
  • Group codes into categories
  • Develop final themes

PARTICIPANTS (n=11)
• Woman
• 35-60 years old
• White (82%), Hispanic (9%), African American (9%)
• Some post-secondary education (81%)
• Full time employment (82%)
• Experience:
  • Average 7.5 years as paraeducator
  • Average 2 years in current position

RESULTS

SENSORY-BASED INTERVENTIONS PARAEDUCATORS USE

- Stress balls
- Play dough
- Tactile toys
- Bumbble ball
- Rubber bands
- Strings
- Hole puncher
- Clicker chain

- Therapy balls
- Wiggle seats
- Walk/ship
- Swing
- Scooters
- Spin
- Stationary bike

PARAEDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS OF USE

- Dynamic seating
- Proprioceptive equipment
- Fidget items
- Chewy tubes

- Typically less than 5 minutes
- Break after academic work
- Student selected sensory break
- Student selected preferred activity

- Verbal or nonverbal request
- Behaviors beginning to escalate
- Fidgety, difficulty focusing
- Transition after behavioral incident

E F F I C A C Y OF S ENSORY-BASED INTERVENTIONS

Prevention
"I feel that a lot of times it prevents behaviors from occurring"

Improved behavioral control
"I could just see him calm down with some pressure on his shoulders"
"To help them calm down"
"The sensory interventions seem to help student get more, be more on task, to calm and be able to focus"

Improved participation in learning
"Some of the students who have gotten fidgets will sit longer"
"With the stress balls, they will actually sit and comply and listen during academics"

"They feel better and are able to do what’s expected"

PERCEIVED BARRIERS

Tangible
- lack of supplies
- space
- staffing

Non-Tangible
- student distraction
- work avoidance

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CONCLUSIONS

• Paraeducators are implementing sensory-based interventions
  • Trial and error to find what works
  • Proprioceptive and fidget strategies most commonly used
  • Integrated into school routine

• Sensory-based equipment was
  • Varied and individualized
  • Both typical and non-traditional materials
  • Easily accessible

• Perceived benefits for students
  • Prevent behaviors
  • Improve behavioral control
  • Improve participation in learning

• Study Limitations include
  • Participants from one location
  • Participant experience limited to students with autism spectrum disorder and emotional disturbance
  • Not intervention study; did not attempt to show

CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

• Interventions being used in manner referred to as sensory diet
  • Routinely offered throughout day
  • Facilitating behavioral control

• Barriers to address
  • Make equipment and materials readily available
  • Create sensory space in and out of classroom
  • Consider strategies not distracting to others
  • Plan to decrease work avoidance

• Aspect of sensory-based intervention not mentioned
  • Environmental adaptations

• Perceptions regarding support and training
  • Learned from participating in OT sessions
  • Appreciated support for ongoing planning and problem solving

REFERENCES

References provided separately

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