

# SENSORY-BASED INTERVENTIONS IN THE SCHOOL SETTING: PERSPECTIVES OF PARAEDUCATORS

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## BACKGROUND

Sensory experiences or environmental modifications can:<sup>1</sup>

- Regulate behavior
- Improve sensory modulation
- Improve readiness for activities
- Improve focus for learning

Sensory-based interventions are used by 90% of school-based OTs<sup>2</sup>

Sensory-based interventions are believed to

- Prepare student for learning activities<sup>3</sup>
- Quickly achieve regulated state<sup>4</sup>
- Promote behavioral control<sup>5,6,7,8,9</sup>

Importance of paraeducator perception

- 87% of paraeducator provide behavioral support for students<sup>10</sup>
- Efficacy of approach affected by perception of those implementing<sup>11</sup>

## METHODOLOGY

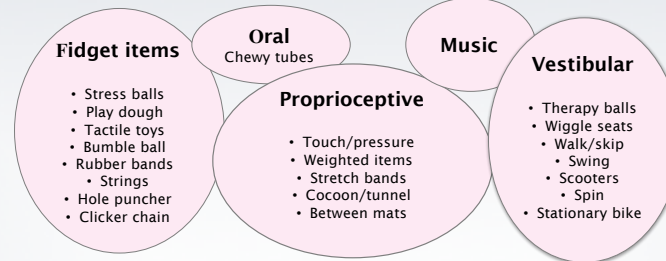
- Phenomenological study
- Convenience sample from suburban PA
  - Minimum 6 month experience
  - At least 1 student used sensory-based interventions
- 2 focus groups, 1 interview [recorded/transcribed]
- Validity established through
  - 3 research assistants
  - 1 member checking
- Content analysis process<sup>12</sup>
  - Data immersion
  - Initial coding, develop code key
  - Group codes into categories
  - Develop final themes

## PARTICIPANTS (n=11)

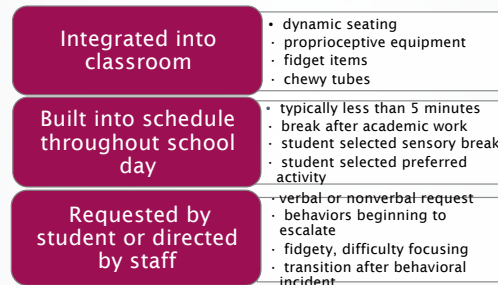
- Woman
- 35-60 years old
- White (82%), Hispanic (9%), African American (9%)
- Some post-secondary education (81%)
- Full time employment (82%)
- Experience:
  - Average 7.5 years as paraeducator
  - Average 2 years in current position

## RESULTS

### SENSORY-BASED INTERVENTIONS PARAEDUCATORS USE



### PARAEDUCATOR PERCEPTIONS OF USE



### EFFICACY OF SENSORY-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

## 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