

California State University, Monterey Bay
Digital Commons @ CSUMB

Capstone Projects and Master's Theses

Capstone Projects and Master's Theses

5-2018

Teaching Disability Awareness to School-Aged Children

Victoria Polanco Ramirez
California State University, Monterey Bay

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes_all

Recommended Citation

Polanco Ramirez, Victoria, "Teaching Disability Awareness to School-Aged Children" (2018). *Capstone Projects and Master's Theses*. 245.
https://digitalcommons.csumb.edu/caps_thes_all/245

This Capstone Project (Open Access) is brought to you for free and open access by the Capstone Projects and Master's Theses at Digital Commons @ CSUMB. It has been accepted for inclusion in Capstone Projects and Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ CSUMB. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@csumb.edu.

Teaching Disability Awareness to School-Aged Children

Victoria Polanco Ramirez

California State University, Monterey Bay

Teaching Disability Awareness to School-Aged Children

Introduction

Often, people are intimidated by the unknown. Exposure to information on people with different disabilities is often limited in schools; therefore, when children see people who are different than them, they may not be very accepting. It is important to provide people who have disabilities with a safe and accepting environment in both schools and the community by starting to build awareness. In order to address this need for them, I have decided to present a lesson to elementary aged children targeting disability awareness. I have created a lesson curriculum for first grade students which will: teach the students about different disabilities, show students how having a disability might feel, and discussing how they could help a person who has a disability.

Needs Statement

Children with disabilities are starting to leave the special education classrooms and joining the mainstream classes. Despite the fact that these students are no longer being excluded, students with disabilities struggle to fit in with their peers; often leaving these children to become victims of bullying. According to Lindsay and Edwards (2013), fifty percent of students who have disabilities feel like they do not belong with their non-disabled peers. This is due to the fact that many peers only interact with the students who have disabilities when prompted to do so; so in other words, the peers do not typically seek out to engage with students with disabilities due to the fact that they do not think these students are capable of doing the same activities as them or because they simply consider the child with disabilities to be different than the typically developing child. It is often lack of knowledge which leads children to believe that people who have disabilities are not able to doing certain things (Ison et al., 2010). This is why it is important for children to be given the information needed to rid of the stigmas connected to the unknown.

It is critical to start teaching children at a young age about disability awareness because it plants the idea from that early age that not all human beings are born the same; however, the fact that someone is different does not necessarily mean they are less capable of doing something. Also, intervening early when it comes to building awareness can make it easier to help shape a child's opinions because during childhood, the child's thoughts, feelings, and attitudes are still evolving (Lindsay & Edwards, 2013).

By tackling the negative concepts linked to having a disability with building awareness in individuals, we are providing people with disabilities with a safer and more accepting environment. If the problem is addressed from an early age, we can help prevent potential victims from being socially ostracized. This is especially important because if a child is made to feel left out, it is very likely that in the long run the child's emotional development will be affected by developing disorders such as anxiety and depression as well as low self-esteem (Lindsay & Edward, 2013). This is why I intend to building awareness and potentially change the attitudes of school-aged children who exclude their peers with disabilities from everyday play and activities through a disability awareness lesson plan.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice

One article states that negative feelings towards people who have disabilities begin developing in children during 1st -6th grade (Billings, 1963). Another article reports a similar theory, that during preschool years, children begin to display negative reactions toward individuals who are different than them (Ison et al., 2010). There are many other articles which also state that young children tend to have negative feelings towards people who have disabilities due to the lack of awareness and knowledge involving disabilities. Providing young children

with lessons similar to the ones I presented for my capstone project will help children change those stigmas tied in with having a disability.

Not only did I choose to teach this age range because there was a lot of research information backing up the notion that building awareness at an early stage of a child's life is a way to decrease the amount of negative feelings developed towards people with disabilities; I also chose to teach this age range because of Jean Piaget's preoperational stage of cognitive development. Children in the first grade are typically around 6 or 7 years old. During this age, children are getting ready to leave the preoperational stage and enter on to the concrete operational stage of cognitive development – the stage where thinking becomes more logical (Berk & Meyers, 2012). During the preoperational stage, children tend to be egocentric. What that means is that they are unable to see a situation from another person's point of view. Because of this, I thought it would be beneficial to have the students engage in the four tasks which required them to put themselves in the point of view of someone who has a disability. Another way the students were encouraged to leave behind the egocentric thinking was through the accommodation discussion. During this discussion, the students had to think about different perspectives from their own. An example of this was when the students suggested adding a ramp in a school in order to accommodate those in wheelchairs. In order to come up with that accommodation, the students had to take the standpoint of someone in a wheelchair and think about how stairs would be inconvenient for them, thus decreasing the egocentric feelings. During this stage, children are also towards the end of the centration process which is when they are only able to focus on one aspect of a situation at a time and are closer to developing a decentration thought process which involves being able to focus on several aspects of a problem (Berk & Meyers, 2012). I believe that the centration thought process ties in with the idea that because

someone has a disability they are unable to do certain things. Children are usually more focused on a person's disability and tend to forget that with practice, determination, and hard work, anyone can achieve their goals. Through the examples I used of Helen Keller, Stevie Wonder, etc., the children were able to see beyond just the aspect of the person's disability.

Consideration of Diversity

Students who are enrolled at the school I presented my capstone at vary in races. According to the CA Department of Education website, 39.7 % of the enrolled students are White, 1.5% are Black/African American, 0.3 % are American Indian/Alaska Native, 4.6% are Asian, 2.7 % are Filipino, 3.7 % are two or more races; however, the majority, 47.5% of the students enrolled, are Hispanic or Latino. From personal experience, I think it is beneficial to be teaching at a school that has many Hispanics or Latinos. I feel like in the Hispanic cultures it is almost a taboo to talk about disabilities. I have two sisters who were diagnosed with autism when I was 13 years old and it was not until I was in college that I really learned what autism was. I think that if children belong to a culture that does not typically spread disability awareness, it is important to teach them about awareness at schools.

Another important statistic shown in the CA Department of Education website is that 11.8% of the students enrolled have a Disability. Teaching disability awareness in a school which has students who have disabilities is important because by teaching these students' peers, we are more likely to decrease bullying, if any, and promote inclusion between the students who have disabilities and those who do not.

Learning Outcomes

I intend to provide three, 45-60 minute lessons about disability awareness to a first grade class at New Haven Elementary School in Manteca, CA.

By the end of my project, the students will be able to:

1. Recognize at least 1 characteristic of any disability mentioned in the lesson.
2. Identify 1 change that can be done in a school environment to accommodate a student who has a disability.
3. Distinguish the differences between behaviors that could be considered helpful vs. unhelpful to someone with a disability.

Method

Day 1

I began by introducing myself and quickly telling the class why I was there. I then started my lesson by asking the children whether they knew what a disability is. In order for the class to get a better understanding, I provided the students with a simple definition disability. Next, I asked them what they thought people with disabilities were capable of doing. After hearing their responses, I showed them pictures of famous people who have disabilities but are/were able to overcome those disabilities (see appendix A). Once I briefly talked about each person in the pictures, I went on to explain specific disabilities, such as: Learning, hearing, visual, speech, cognitive, physical impairments and Autism, in more detail. To end day 1, we read *Talking About Disability* by Jillian Powell, which address a few questions a person might have about someone who has a disability by covering topics such as: physical and social challenges faced by people who have disabilities, the abilities of people with impairments, and the different types of help people with disabilities can get.

Day 2

On the second day, the students engaged in activities which allowed them to get an idea of what it is like to have a disability. I set up a four activities which were intended to roughly

mimic what it is like to have a disability, and provide the children with an understanding of how it might feel to have a certain disability (see Appendix B). At the end of all the activities, I asked the students how it felt to have a “disability”, and how they would have like to be treated while they had the “disability”. We also talked about different ways I could have made the activities easier for them to complete with their “disability”. This lead us into a class discussion about different ways we can make situations easier for people with disabilities. To finish off the day, I read another book, *Don't Call Me Special: A First Look at Disability* by Pat Thomas which emphasizes the idea that it is okay to be different and to have different skills, interests, and abilities as other people.

Day 3

On the last day, I encouraged the students to share what they have learned throughout the three days. In order to determine whether the students can tell between different disabilities, I asked the students to share which disability they found most interesting and to share at least one fact about that disability. I then distributed a worksheet (see appendix C) asking the students to identify what they can do to be a good friend to someone with a disability. To end day 3, I set up an activity where the students has to spell out their name in Braille (see appendix D).

Results

My first outcome was for the students to be able to recognize at least one characteristic of one of the disabilities mentioned in the lesson. On the third day, I asked the students to share one fact/characteristic about the disabilities mentioned throughout the three-day lessons (see Appendix E). With some assistance, the class was able to come up with 29 facts surrounding 8 different disabilities. We also discussed how certain disabilities might affect the people who have them and how every disability may affect people differently. Much of the information given was

information that was mentioned during the first session. Although I did provide a few prompts in order for the children to remember certain facts about the disabilities, the children demonstrated their understanding; I believe this outcome was met through the lesson.

The second outcome required the students to identify 1 change that can be done at school to accommodate a student who has a disability. During day 2 of my lessons, I had the students reflect on the activities they had done. I asked the students to share by a raise of hand whether they believed the activities were hard or not. The majority of the students agreed that the activities were hard (see Appendix F), so as a class we strategized ways I could have changed or accommodated the activity to help the students overcome the “disability” presented in each activity. In order to ensure that the students had grasped the idea of accommodating people who have disabilities, I asked the students to share ways their school could accommodate a fellow student who may have a disability. Appendix G shows a few examples I received from the students. All together we managed to come up with 5 different accommodations. Out of the 5 accommodations, however, only 3 of them were produced with my help. I do not believe this outcome was met. Many students were able to come up with accommodations for people with disabilities who are out in the community but struggled to think of effective ways to make school easier for someone with disabilities. My outcome specified that the accommodations had to be made in a school setting as oppose to what the students continuously provide which was a community environment.

The third outcome was to have students distinguish behaviors that are helpful vs. unhelpful to someone with a disability. In order to measure whether the class had achieved this outcome, I gave each student a worksheet which had different scenarios between the student and someone with a disability. The scenarios on the worksheet consist of helpful and unhelpful

actions. The students were instructed to color the hearts that were considered to be helpful actions. The majority of the class was able to color in all or most of the hearts correctly (see Appendix C1). The worksheet also has 3 blank hearts. The students were asked to come up with their own helpful actions. On the projector, I showed the students examples of ways they could be helpful. Some students copied the examples I use, other had illegible responses, a couple of them left the spots blank, but most of the students were able to fill the blanks independently and with appropriate answers (AppendixC2). When looking at the answers the students got wrong, I saw that many of the students colored in “doing a person with disability’s homework” because they considered it to be a helpful. I understand why a child might consider that so in order to address the confusion, I asked the students whether doing homework for the person with the disability allowed that person to learn; the class agreed that by doing that person’s homework, they were preventing the person from learning and therefore that was not being helpful. I believe the students did achieve this outcome because the majority of them either colored all the hearts correctly or only missed one.

Discussion

Overall, I would say that my project was successful. The students were able to meet 2 out of the 3 learning outcomes I had set up for them. I found that my results were consistent with the findings in some of the articles I used during my research. Tavares (2011), Ison et al. (2010), Lindsay and Edwards (2013), Moore and Nettelback (2013), and Rillotta and Nettelback (2007), all mentioned in their articles that by providing young children with information about disability awareness, their attitudes towards people with disabilities would improve.

I believe I provided the information about disabilities in a way that the students could easily understand. An example would be the activities where the student had make believe disabilities

while completing assigned tasks. I would consider those activities to be a sort of pretend play, which is actually a great way for children in the preoperational stage to learn.

Something I could have done to make my project more inclusive of diversity is that I could have spoken more about “no apparent” disabilities rather than just focusing on the disabilities that are more visually noticeable. I could have also included more information on the way different disabilities affect people of different ages.

If I were to do this project again, there are a few things I would change. First, I would focus more on accommodation that can be done around the schools in order to fulfill learning outcome 2. I found myself focusing too much on ways I could have accommodated the students’ fictional disabilities and on ways we can accommodate people with disabilities out in the community rather than brainstorming ways to make accommodations around a school setting. Another thing I would do differently is I would present my lesson to older children. I would have liked to work with 3rd graders and up. The reason being because since I am not use to working with young children, I found it difficult to find ways to adapt to their styles of learning. I also felt that it was at times difficult to keep the students engaged. I constantly found myself either losing their attention or getting them way too excited for the activities – which often led to having a rowdy class. Also when having class discussion, the students would veer off topic. I think that presenting to an older age group would have resulted in less chaos and more on-topic discussion.

References

- Berk, L. E., & Meyers, A. B. (2012). *Infants and children: Prenatal through early childhood* (8th ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson.
- California Department of Education SARC. (2018). School Accountability Report Card.
Retrieved from <http://sarconline.org/Sarc/About/39685936042360>
- Diamond, K. E., & Soo-Young, H. (2010). Young children's decisions to include peers with physical disabilities in play. *Journal of Early Intervention, 32*(3), 163-177.
- Dyson, L. L. (2005). Kindergarten children's understanding of and attitudes toward people with disabilities. *Topics in Early Childhood Special Education, 25*(2), 95-105.
- Ison, N., McIntyre, S., Rothery, S., Smithers-Sheedy, H., Goldsmith, S., Parsonage, S., & Foy, L. (2010). 'Just like you': A disability awareness programme for children that enhanced knowledge, attitudes and acceptance: Pilot study findings. *Developmental Neurorehabilitation, 13*(5), 360-368. doi:10.3109/17518423.2010.496764
- Lindsay, S., & Edwards, A. (2013). A systematic review of disability awareness interventions for children and youth. *Disability & Rehabilitation, 35*(8), 623-646.
doi:10.3109/09638288.2012.702850
- Moore, D., & Nettelbeck, T. (2013). Effects of short-term disability awareness training on attitudes of adolescent schoolboys toward persons with a disability. *Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability, 38*(3), 223-231.
doi:<http://dx.doi.org.library2.csumb.edu:2048/10.3109/13668250.2013.790532>
- Rillotta, F., & Nettelbeck, T. (2007). Effects of an awareness program on attitudes of students without an intellectual disability towards persons with an intellectual disability. *Journal*

of Intellectual and Developmental Disability, 32(1), 19-27.

doi:<http://dx.doi.org.library2.csumb.edu:2048/10.1080/13668250701194042>

Tavares, W. (2011). An evaluation of the Kids Are Kids disability awareness program: Increasing social inclusion among children with physical disabilities. *Journal of Social Work in Disability & Rehabilitation*, 10(1), 25-35. doi:10.1080/1536710X.2011.546296

Appendix A

Real-life examples of people with disabilities



Helen Keller- Lost hearing and sight through illness. Activist, college graduate, author.



Stevie Wonder- Lost sight shortly after birth. Singer, plays different instruments.



Ludwig Van Beethoven- Lost hearing during adulthood. Composer, plays piano. Some of his greatest pieces were created during the time he was losing his hearing.



Aaron "Wheelz" Fotheringham- Born with Spina Bifida (affects spinal cord). Has won BMX freestyle competitions.

<https://www.biography.com>

<http://www.aaronfotheringham.com/about/>

Appendix B
Table of four activities

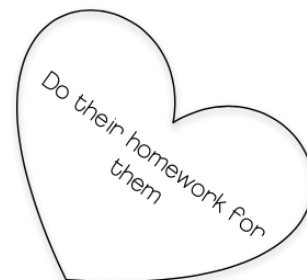
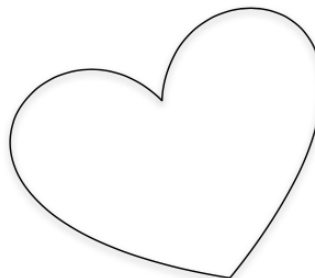
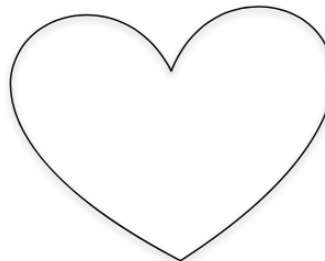
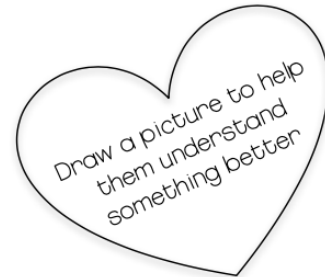
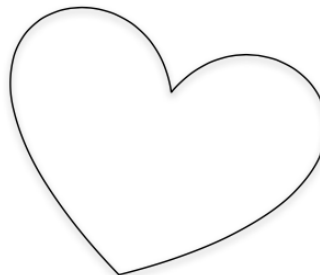
“Disability/Impairment”	Activity	Purpose
Visual	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Must complete ABC & 123 puzzles while blindfolded. 2. Will be given an object to draw, must draw the object while blindfolded. 	Students will see what it’s like to complete a task without being able to see what they are doing.
Physical	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Must put beads in a pipecleaner while they are wearing socks on their hands. 	Students will see what it is like to not be able to use their fingers while completing a task.
Learning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students must complete the Sign Language worksheet with minimal help. Must try to do as much as possible with chart at the bottom covered. 	Students will see what it is like to not fully understand something.
Communication	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Students will receive a random phrase. The student must have classmates guess the phrase without using words to communicate. 	Students will see what it feel like to not be able to use words to communicate with others.

Appendix C

“Good Friend” worksheet

HOW can YOU be a FRIEND?

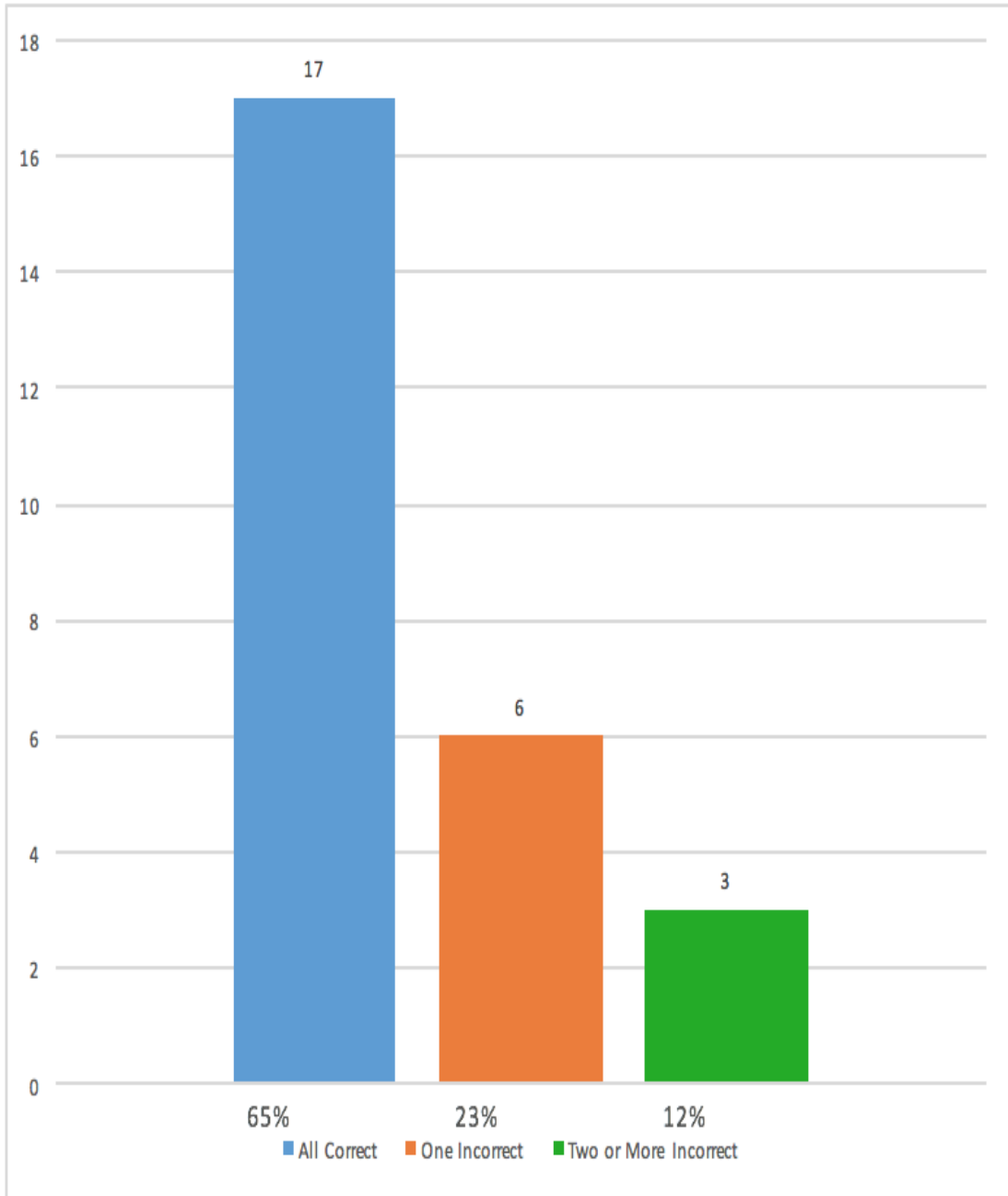
Color all the hearts that are good examples of being a friend to someone with a disability.
Add your own ideas in the blank hearts.



Appendix C1
Graph of colored hearts

Coloring in the Hearts

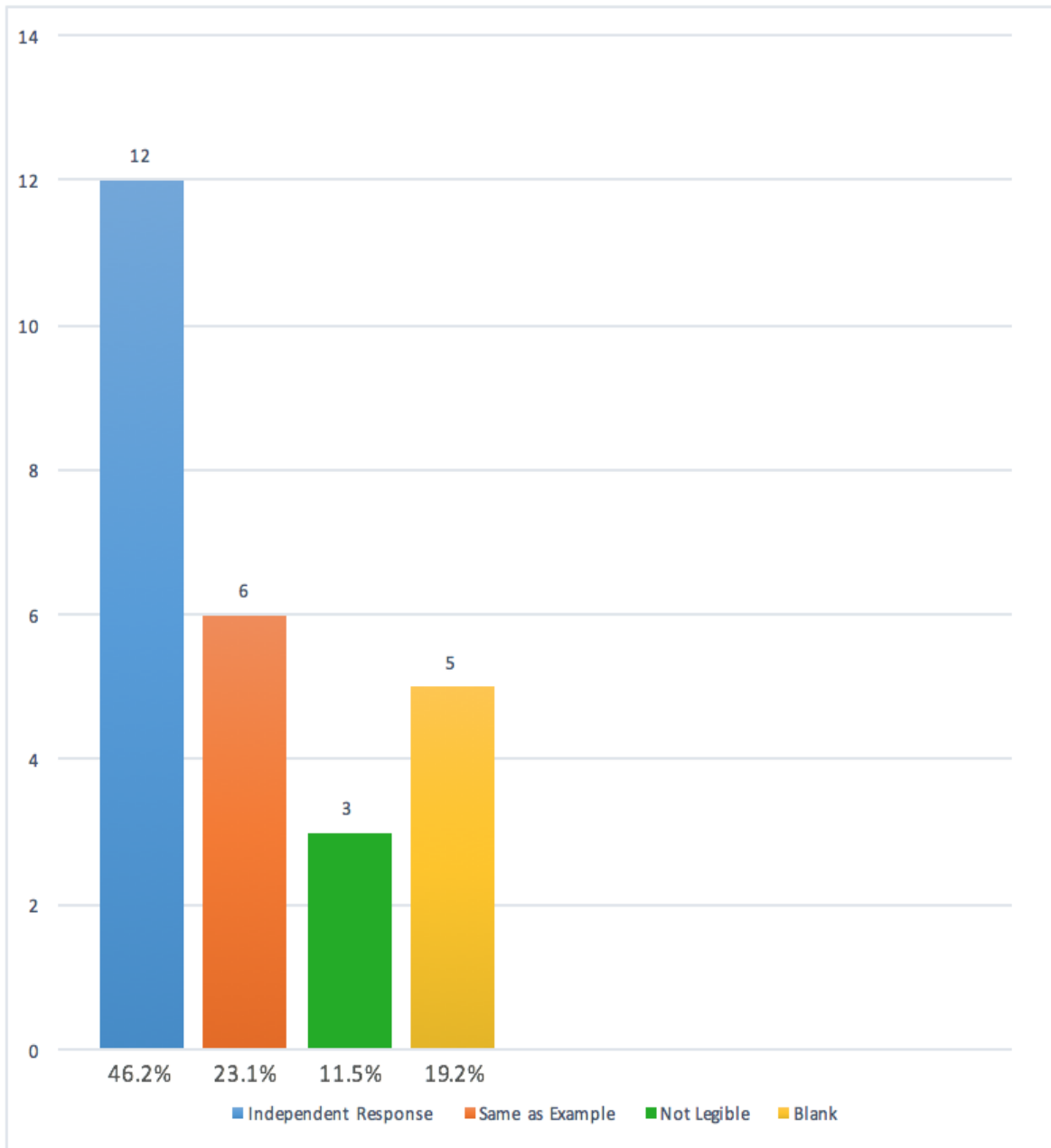
26 Students



Appendix C2
Graph of filled in blanks

Filling in the Blank Hearts

26 Students



Appendix D

Braille name tag activity

My Name in Braille



Appendix E

List of disability characteristics

WE LEARNED ...

1. Hearing disability

* affects hearing.

- Deaf - can't hear at all
- May wear hearing aid to help hear.
- Loud music is bad for your hearing
- People who are deaf may use sign language with others to communicate

2. Learning disability

- Person with disability smart, just may need extra help.
- Could use strategy like pictures to help understand.
- A learning disability could make it hard to understand math. * Affects learning.

3. Visual impairment

- Trouble with eyesight.
- person who cannot see.
- May need a guide dog to help cross the street.
- May need special books, big words or Braille.

* affects their seeing.

WE LEARNED ...

4. Autism

- difficulty telling people how they feel, expressing self.
 - May flap arms, rock or walk back and forth.
 - Some people have "more autism" than others. (different levels)
- may*
* affects ability to talk to other people.

5. Speech Impairments

- Not being able to talk.
 - May use sign language to communicate with others.
 - ~~May~~ repeating words is a form of speech disability. (stutter)
 - Some are born with speech impairments, others get it later. (Helen K.)
 - People could use pictures or iPad/computer to communicate.
- * affects way they communicate.

6. Physical disability

- Legs don't work, can't walk.
 - Some disabilities are temporary.
 - Body part doesn't work like it's suppose to.
 - could be born with it, could happen later.
- * affects way they do things

WE LEARNED...

● 7. Cognitive Impairment * affect thinking

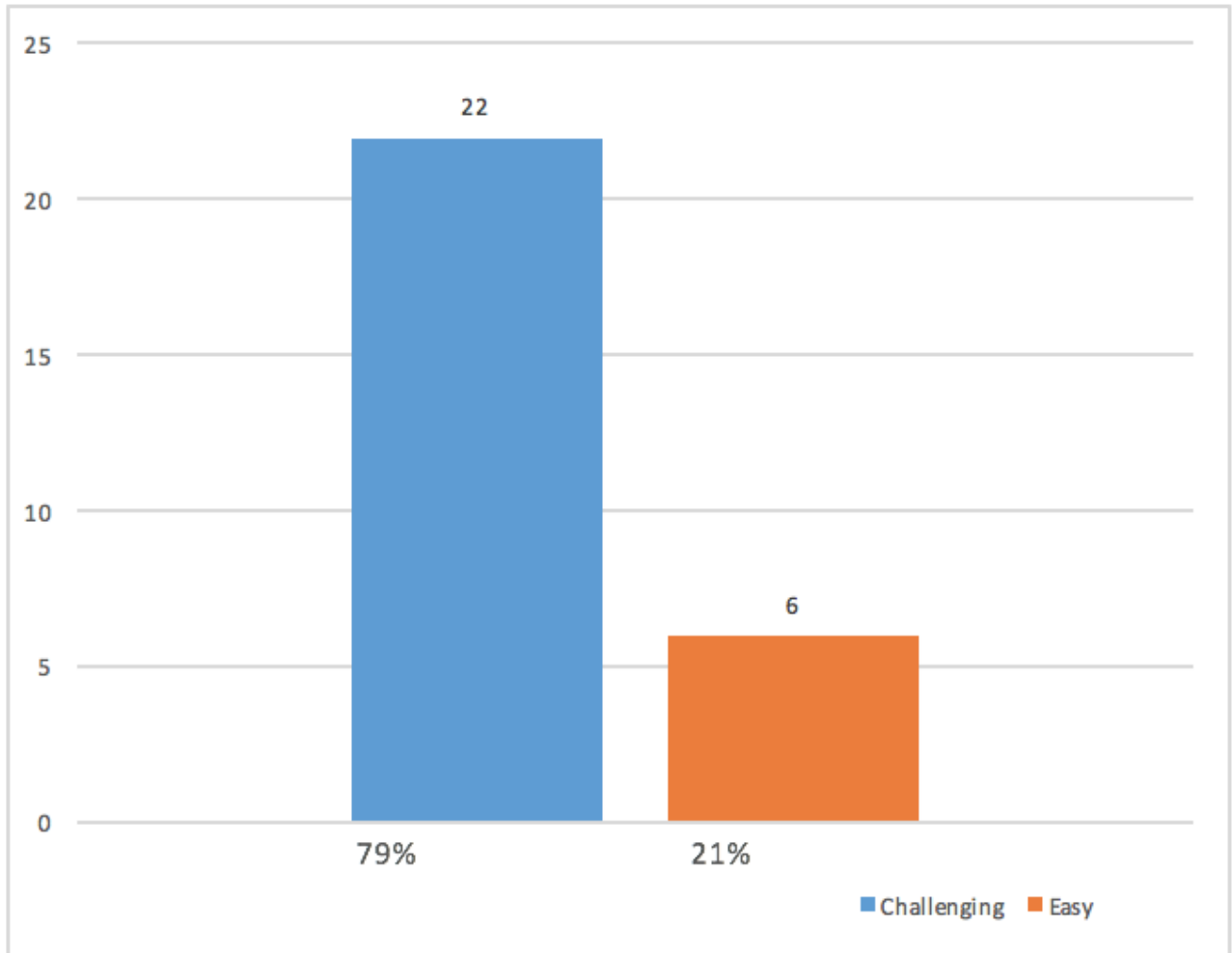
- The "thinking" impairment
- Affects thinking and learning
- similar to the learning impairment.
- You can be born with it.

● 8. Spina Bifida * affects Aaron's walking.

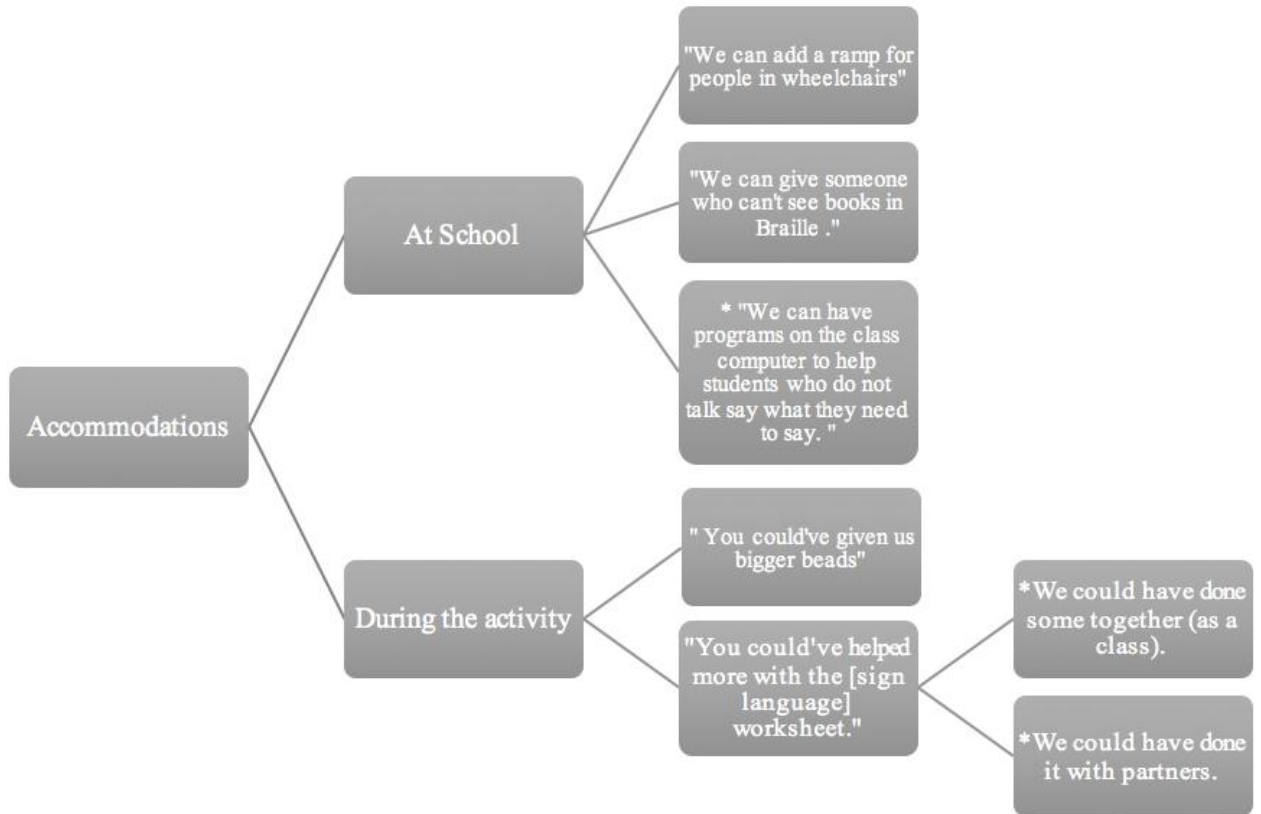
- Aaron "Wheelz" has it.
- He was born with it.
- Can sometimes affect your walking.

Appendix F
Graph measuring difficulty level of activities

Students Opinion on the Activities 28 Students



Appendix H
Examples of accommodations



*Students needed assistance coming up with this idea