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Sensory Processing versus Behaviors in Preschool-Aged Students

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Sensory Processing versus Behaviors in Preschool-Aged Students

Megan Brugnone, Amy Stormes MOT, OTR/L, and Kelle DeBoth Foust PhD, OTR/L

Background

- **Sensory processing:** how sensory information is organized within an individual's body
- Types of input:
 - Visual
 - Auditory
 - Tactile
 - Taste
 - Vestibular
 - Proprioceptive
 - Interoceptive
- **Behavior:** a person's reaction to internal or external stimuli
- Focus of capstone:
 - Anxious/Nervous
 - Social-Emotional
 - Introverted/Withdrawn
 - Attention-Related
 - Aggressive-Related
- Stimuli can be perceived as both sensory and behavior because a person cannot turn off their nervous system, and/or react, all at once (Richardson & Moses, 2021).
- Teachers often mistake behaviors as sensory concerns; however, OTs can help to educate teachers on these subjects (Wild & Steeley, 2018, Critz et al., 2015).
- Sensory and behavioral checklists can help identify some common differences between the two, while also recognizing what is observed in the class and/or at home.



Capstone Activities

- Researched similarities/differences of sensory versus behavior, specifically in children
- Created questionnaires for teachers to express their knowledge and observations of sensory versus behavior within their classrooms
- Created a template for OTs to use to incorporate items from the checklists into a student's IEP
- Created a sensory integration handout for teachers to use as an additional source
- Completed observations in seven classrooms
 - Four inclusive classrooms
 - Three cross-cat (behavior) classrooms
- Created four separate checklists
 - General (behavior) checklist
 - Sensory checklist (teacher version)
 - Sensory checklist (parent version)
 - OT checklist (combination of the general and the sensory checklist (teacher version))



Follow the QR code to view checklists and capstone presentation

Brief Bio

I am an Occupational Therapy Doctoral student with high aspirations to work with kids following graduation. I want to be an OT that improves the lives of children, while continuing to help differentiate sensory processing versus behavioral needs within school systems.



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