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Behavior Outcomes and Student Learning Resulting From Working with Individuals with Disabilities in Fitness Setting

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It is well-documented that nearly 50% of individuals with mobility impairing disabilities do not engage in any form of exercise, primarily due to accessibility barriers within fitness facilities. One of the major obstacles is the limited access to knowledgeable fitness trainers who are willing and comfortable working with individuals with disabilities (IwD). To address this challenge, a university in Pennsylvania collaborated with a local community program offering group exercise classes for IwD. Students from occupational therapy and exercise science participated in this program for one semester, aiming to enhance their knowledge and comfort in working with IwD in a fitness setting. **PURPOSE:** This study aims to examine the impact of a community-based adapted fitness program on student learning and behavior when serving IwD. **METHODS:** An explanatory single case study design was employed to investigate the learning process and behavior changes of student participants, utilizing Albert Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory as the primary framework. After obtaining IRB approval, student participants that joined in the community-based adapted fitness program were invited to take part in voluntary semi-structured interviews. Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed. Data analysis was completed by evaluating the transcribed interviews through a categorical aggregation approach to identify patterns, emerging themes, and develop broad and naturalistic generalizations. **RESULTS:** The four primary themes identified were collaboration, comfort, competence, and experience. These themes presented themselves in the student participants as they joined in interprofessional collaboration. The collaboration forced them into a cycle of increased or decreased comfort, competence, and reciprocal learning that ultimately led to an effect on their self-efficacy. **CONCLUSION:** Providing allied health students with an experiential learning opportunity significantly enhanced their comfort, capability, and confidence in working with IwD in a fitness setting. This experiential learning in an adapted fitness setting presents a valuable opportunity to improve the knowledge of future fitness trainers and mitigate one of the reported accessibility barriers experienced by IwD in fitness facilities. **SIGNIFICANCE/NOVELTY:** The experience and learning of the student participants led to increased willingness and ability to work with IwD in a fitness setting, improving accessibility.