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# The Use of Sensory Spaces in Schools

Syeda S. Mahmood

Grand Valley State University, [mahmoods@mail.gvsu.edu](mailto:mahmoods@mail.gvsu.edu)

Erin E. Mallekoote

Grand Valley State University, [meeer@mail.gvsu.edu](mailto:meeer@mail.gvsu.edu)

Ashley Rister

Grand Valley State University, [ristera@mail.gvsu.edu](mailto:ristera@mail.gvsu.edu)

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The Use of Sensory Spaces in Schools

Syeda Mahmood, Erin Mallekoote, Ashley Rister

Grand Valley State University

### **Abstract**

**Objective:** This mixed methods continuing line of inquiry was conducted in order to identify how occupational therapists (OTs) report that sensory spaces are being used in Michigan public school settings. This includes who uses the spaces, what purpose the space serves, and the training that individuals utilizing the spaces have received.

**Methods:** A link to a survey, which was adapted from Abbot, Wills, and Hanert (2015), was posted on the Michigan Alliance of School Physical and Occupational Therapists' (MASPOT) listServ and Michigan Occupational Therapy Association's (MiOTA) facebook page in June of 2016 in order to recruit participations. The inclusion criteria for participants included currently practicing school-based OTs, practitioners who treat children with sensory needs, and having access to a designated sensory space. The survey was administered via survey monkey and included twenty-three quantitative questions and five qualitative questions. The survey asked questions that sought to answer the various ways in which school-based OTs in Michigan are using, collaborating within, training in the use of, and supervising the use of sensory spaces in Michigan schools.

**Results:** Survey results revealed that the three primary school personnel who determine which students use the sensory spaces are the OT (100%), the special education teacher (70%), and paraprofessionals/aids (35%). Forty-one percent of participants reported that limited or no documentation system is utilized to record or supervise what occurs in the sensory spaces. Sixty-seven percent of participants stated that they feel sensory spaces are not being used by school personnel the way they are intended to be used. Majority of responses included reports of misuse of the rooms and poor follow through on instructions provided by the OT.

**Conclusion:** OTs receive specialty training that guides the use of school sensory spaces. Participants report that barriers to effective use of sensory rooms include a lack of ongoing

communication, supervision, and consistent documentation. The literature supports these concepts and suggests that universal competency trainings, documentation systems, and supervisory processes must be developed and implemented in order to ensure proper and effective use of sensory spaces in schools.

**Keywords:** Multisensory environments, schools, school-based, sensory integration, sensory processing disorder, sensory spaces.