5-10-2024

Increasing the Participation and Inclusion of Students with Disabilities within the General Education Elementary School Classroom

Katherine Tyre
Georgia State University

INCREASING THE PARTICIPATION AND INCLUSION OF STUDENTS WITH

DISABILITIES WITHIN THE GENERAL EDUCATION ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

CLASSROOM

by

Katherine Tyre

A Capstone Project Presented to the
FACULTY OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY
GEORGIA STATE UNIVERSITY

In Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY DOCTORATE (OTD)

April 2024

!

Georgia State University

CAPSTONE FINAL PAPER APPROVAL FORM

The Capstone Final Paper is the final product that the OTD students need to complete to report his/her Capstone Project and his/her Capstone Experience.

Student's Name	Katherine Tyre
Degree Sought	Occupational Therapy Doctorate (OTD)
Department	Occupational Therapy
Program	Occupational Therapy Doctorate (OTD)

We, the undersigned, recommend that the Capstone Final Paper completed by the student listed above, in partial fulfillment of the degree requirements, be accepted by the Georgia State University.

Sutanuka Bhattacharjya	*Sutanuka Bhattacharjya*	04/26/2024
Faculty Mentor's Printed Name	Faculty Mentor's Signature	Date
Dr. Belle Wilmer	*Dr. Belle Wilmer, OTD, OTL*	4/25/24
Site Mentor's Printed Name	Site Mentor's Signature	Date
Carolyn Podolski	*Carolyn Podolski*	4/26/2024
Capstone Coordinator's Printed Name	Capstone Coordinator's Signature	Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

ABSTRACT

Teachers and other support staff in elementary schools are unable to adequately support students with disabilities in the general education setting. This is a direct result of a lack of resources provided to the teachers, including time, education, and supplies. Without these supports, students with disabilities fall behind their peers without disabilities and are unable to access and participate in class to the best of their ability. These students face lower grades, poor social opportunities, and poor self-regulation when compared to their peers without disabilities, leading to decreased success in their futures. A program has been created to address these concerns to be utilized by teachers and other school support staff. The program contains symptomatic and behavioral information about 26 common pediatric disabilities that may be present in a student in an elementary general education classroom. Each listed disorder or disability includes an exhaustive list of interventions addressing any challenges or other issues these students may face. This resource has been created during a capstone experience, finalizing a doctoral degree in occupational therapy.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

SUMMARY (SPECIFIC AIMS PAGES)

Background

Students with disabilities are often at a great disadvantage when removed from general education classes to be placed in self-contained classes. Quite often, this environment is not what is considered the least restrictive environment (McGovern, 2015), which was originally established to ensure students are placed in the classroom that provides the most appropriate challenge, while still successful. General education classrooms are advantageous for students who can keep up with the work (Danzi et al., 2008), however many teachers are ill-prepared when it comes to supporting students with disabilities (Cosier & Pearson, 2016).

Existing Problem

Students with disabilities are at a disadvantage regarding access and participation within the elementary general education classroom when compared to their peers without disabilities, as a direct result of the lack of supports provided.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this Capstone project is to create a resource for elementary school teachers containing (1) information about common disabilities seen in classrooms, and (2) interventions that can be applied to the classroom to increase the participation and inclusion of students with disabilities.

Specific Aims

The specific aims of this project are to 1) document how students with disorders/disabilities are at a disadvantage in the general education elementary classroom, 2) document interventions that will lessen the gap of access and participation between these students and their peers without disorders/disabilities, and 3) create a resource for teacher use that will provide them with the

skills necessary to increase the participation and access of students with disorders/disabilities within their classes.

Outputs

The outputs of this project include a report on the most common disorders/disabilities within the elementary general education classroom, a report on the specific challenges faced by students with disorders/disabilities in the classroom, and a report on interventions that may be applied to increase the participation and access of these students, addressing the previously determined challenges. In addition, these documents have been compiled into a unique resource for teacher use that will aid in the increased participation and access of students with these disorders/disabilities. The project has also culminated in this final paper and a final presentation.

Significance and Impacts

Access to the materials in this project will provide teachers with the ability to make their students to feel understood, less-disadvantaged, and allow these students more opportunities to participate and access the classroom each day. In the short term, teachers will review the resource and find interventions for their students with disabilities. These students will be provided with the supports necessary to have greater success in school. In the long-term, teachers will become more familiar with the resource and apply these interventions as needed across the whole class. The teachers will also share this resource with peers - increasing the access and success of more and more students with disabilities as time passes.

CHAPTER 1

Literature Review

In today's school systems, general education classrooms are a featured topic. General education classes are those that consist of students of varying levels of learning, abilities, interests, and skills (Adibsereshki et al., 2015). These classrooms present the opportunity for students of all capabilities to co-exist, providing opportunities for peer modeling, peer instruction, and open socialization, encouraging learning and development from all angles (Danzi et al., 2008; Shogren et al., 2015). Despite these advantages, students with disabilities are not participating as within their capability within these classrooms (Simeonsson et al., 2001).

Students with disabilities experience a very different classroom than those without disabilities. Students without disabilities, or typical students, participate, access, and learn in different ways than those with disabilities. The school system is built around the functioning and ability of students without disabilities and only within the past 50 years have students with disabilities even been considered for inclusion (Office for Civil Rights, 2023). As wonderful as the creation of the ADA and Section 504 (Office for Civil Rights, 2023) were for including students with disabilities, the improvements made initially have not been expanded upon as these students need (Office for Civil Rights, 2023). Many of these supports involve removing the student from the general classroom, as well, which is often not the least restrictive environment for these students (McGovern, 2015). Many schools pre-date ADA requirements, therefore, these buildings and classrooms are not physically accessible for some students (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2020). In addition to accessibility and support variances, students with disabilities also face a preconceived stigma, impacting their social and emotional wellbeing (Green, 2003).

The lack of supports for students with disabilities begins with teacher education and preparedness. Teachers are not provided with the adequate supports needed to bolster the success of students with disabilities within general education classrooms (McGovern, 2015). Beginning with their education, teachers have very few requirements for disability education (Cosier & Pearson, 2016). Teachers are also not often provided with the additional time and resources needed to improve their knowledge on supporting students with disabilities (Cosier & Pearson, 2016). Currently, teachers are facing a detrimental shortage of staff (Too Few Candidates Applying for Teaching Jobs the Primary Hiring Challenge for More than Two-Thirds of Public Schools Entering the 2022-23 School Year, 2022) leaving even less room for teachers to initiate a dive into the literature (Shernoff et al., 2011). With the ratio of students to teachers rising, students who already do not receive the support they need are receiving even less support as a result (Too Few Candidates Applying for Teaching Jobs the Primary Hiring Challenge for More than Two-Thirds of Public Schools Entering the 2022-23 School Year, 2022). Teachers are not provided with ample free time, resources, or with continuing education opportunities (Maffea, 2020). Even so, there is a vast amount of literature to digest in this field, and for those instructors that are not constantly reviewing the literature daily, this would be quite the undertaking. With minimal resources provided, teachers are faced with the need for something to help bolster their education and to close the informational gap.

Many classrooms across the country are not provided with the supplies and technology required for the participation and access of all students (Durff & Carter, 2019). There is a stark lack of resources available for them to utilize for this purpose (Maffea, 2020). Most teachers are required to request their students bring basic supplies for the classroom, or they must purchase

these supplies themselves (Maffea, 2020). This lack of resources inhibits teachers from closing the previously mentioned gap in knowledge and skills.

Students with disabilities face challenges at every turn of life. These challenges are things that our society accounts for in as many ways as possible, however there are still areas that can be improved. Physical disabilities are somewhat accounted for with ADA and Section 504 regulations with accessible spaces (Office for Civil Rights, 2023). Learning and developmental disabilities are somewhat accounted for with special education classes and Individual Education Programs (Georgia Department of Education, 2019). However, when it comes to general education classrooms, which are evidenced to increase wellness and ability of all students involved, there are not enough aids in place for teachers to make those classrooms as successful an environment as possible (Valiandes, 2015). There is a need for a resource that can provide teachers with the information and skills to enhance the learning, participation, and accessibility of students with disabilities within general education classrooms.

CHAPTER 2

Needs Assessment

The creation of this project began with my personal experiences in the last several years. I have a large family, many of whom are teachers and other staff within schools. I am the first in my family to pursue occupational therapy and I have found a love in school-based work. While expressing this love to these family members, many explained how little they knew about what occupational therapy is and what we do to support their students. Upon further questioning, it became clear that these family members, who are exceptional at what they do, are not prepared to work with students with disabilities. They try their best and wish for these students to succeed like most teachers, however they are not provided with the tools to support these students.

Later in my schooling, I completed a level 2 fieldwork rotation within a school system, with Dr. Belle Wilmer as my clinical instructor. This experience led to first-hand observations of teachers being wholly unable to include certain students in lessons and classwork. The students that were unable to participate usually had an eligibility or diagnosis of some disorder or disability, the symptoms of which they were clearly displaying. Talking with some of the teachers of these students led to the same understanding I gained from my family, that teachers are inadequately supported when it comes to assisting their students with disabilities. These conversations and experiences led to the investigation of what teachers and students with disabilities really need to find success with their day to day lives.

To determine the need for this program, a needs assessment was conducted utilizing a traditional literature review. The literature used included peer-reviewed journals, randomized clinical trials, public health informational sites, and observational studies.

The results of the needs assessment indicated that students with disabilities are not provided with the supports they need to be successful in school as these students regularly have lower grades, lower levels of participation, and lower levels of self-satisfaction with performance than their peers without disabilities within general education (Schwartz et al., 2021). Some difficulties students face, when considering students with physical disabilities, include bathroom access, access to classroom supplies, getting to and from various locations around the school, and even maneuvering about the classroom (Egilson & Traustadottir, 2009). Considering students with learning or intellectual disabilities – students may have difficulties taking notes in time, keeping up with classwork, following a routine, remaining emotionally and physically regulated throughout the day to maintain focus, or even accessing certain types of lessons (Vaughn et al., 2006). These students face many challenges each day, even outside of grades or test scores.

The current supports in place, IEP and 504 Plans, are not as all-encompassing as they must be for student success. Many of these plans do not include evidence-based supports for students with disabilities (Spiel et al., 2014). These plans also rely on teacher and support staff's knowledge of specific disorder/disabilities to determine the most appropriate accommodations. The individuals making these decisions are often not well enough informed on these topics to make an educated decision (Singh, 2007). Many students in general education may not have as obvious detriments as others, either, and do not have any formal accommodations. These students, who are receiving no formal accommodations or services, have needs that are not being addressed, unless their teachers are educated in specialized education.

Given poor structured plans or no plans at all, teachers are required to rely on their own education and experience to provide support to students with disabilities. However, many

teachers are not educated about disabilities and related accommodations (Cosier & Pearson, 2016). Even with many years of experience, many teachers feel unprepared for supporting students with disabilities (Gesel, Foreman-Murray, & Gilmour, 2022). This gap in knowledge and confidence leads to a need for education and research, however teachers and other school staff are already stretched very thin with low staffing and no free time (Too Few Candidates Applying for Teaching Jobs the Primary Hiring Challenge for More than Two-Thirds of Public Schools Entering the 2022-23 School Year, 2022). They do not have the additional resources needed to commit to hours of research for each student that may need additional or alternative supports.

Resources with information on disabilities and interventions do currently exist, however there is a plethora of information out there for teachers to access. Many of these resources focus on specific types of disorders, such as neurologic disorders or learning disabilities, while others go into detail about the specific disorders themselves, such as down syndrome or autism spectrum disorder. Many resources are behind expensive paywalls, as well, restricting access to the content unless hundreds of dollars are spent. Many of these resources are also far too lengthy and detailed for someone who is already facing a lack of time, and just needs a quick fix to a specific classroom behavior (Dias-Lacy & Guirguis, 2017). Finally, many resources are outdated by more than 20 years. Articles and research of this age cannot be solely relied on without further investigation.

Teachers and other support staff need an educational resource that will provide them with the tools to increase the participation and inclusion of students with disabilities. This program must be brief, but rich in content, so it is both highly educational and quick to reference. This program will supply teachers with clinical, evidence-based information that is relevant to the

most common disabilities within general education classrooms, as well as strategies and

interventions to utilize that will help to increase the inclusion and participation of these students.

CHAPTER 3

Capstone Experience Protocol

Capstone Site and Mentor

The site used for this capstone project is Georgia State University (GSU). GSU is a public, 4-year university located in Atlanta, Georgia. The mission of this institution includes advancing the frontiers of knowledge and supporting students from all backgrounds and abilities. GSU places a priority on research, with a goal to solve from the most fundamental questions of the universe to the most challenging problems of each day (Mission Statement, n.d.). Research is a major aspect of GSU life and as a graduate student attending this university, the resources available have been invaluable.

The site mentor for this project is a licensed occupational therapist working in a local school system and at a local college with level 1 occupational therapy students for their pediatric fieldwork rotations. This mentor has provided expert feedback regarding pediatric interventions and school-based interventions throughout the project, along with other ideas relevant to the school system that may fall outside of the realm of occupational therapy, that are only known by experience.

Developing an Evidence-based Program

The resources used to develop this program came from a variety of evidence-based sources. These include public health informational sites, randomized clinical trials, peer-reviewed articles, and observational studies. Many resources were discovered based on searches from prior personal experience in the school system and through discussions with the capstone

site mentor, however any descriptive information or interventions discovered were only included

in the program after determining that the source was valid.

CHAPTER 4

Output for Program Development

The program created will serve elementary-aged students with disabilities within general education classrooms. It is intended to be utilized by the teaching staff of this population. The program is within a PDF document and is 65 pages long. It contains information about 26 common disorders and disabilities that may be present within general education classes. With each disorder is the related prevalence, cause, symptoms, and classroom behaviors or challenges. Addressing each classroom challenge, interventions and strategies to be used by teaching staff are listed on the following page, for each disorder/disability. Additional interventions that may address the general well-being of the student are included, as well. The interventions and strategies within the program are based in research and evidence. There is an additional section of general interventions at the beginning of the resource with the categories of attention, fatigue, fine motor skills, mobility, routine, sensory cubby/corner, sitting still, and transitions. Within each of these categories is an extended list of general interventions to address these major classroom challenges when used at the discretion of the teaching staff. These interventions may be applied to not only students with disabilities, but also students without disabilities, as there may be a tool for any student that proves to be beneficial to their success.

These conditions were selected based on prevalence. First, a list of conditions affecting children between the ages of 5 and 11 were compiled along with each related prevalence. These disorders were found from various resources, including public health information, research articles on pediatric disorder occurrences, and private research-based websites. This list of conditions was then narrowed down based on likelihood of a student with this disorder being present in a general education classroom. Many disorders were ruled out during this stage due to

prevalent intellectual and health factors involved, which would place a student in a different setting, such as hospital/home-bound, self-contained classrooms, or otherwise. If there was the slightest opportunity for a student with any condition to be in a general education class, that condition was not ruled out. For example, most children with rett syndrome often have significant delays, both intellectually and physically, however some do not. Some children with this syndrome can function similarly to peers without a disorder. Therefore, rett syndrome was included in the program. Finally, the conditions were narrowed down based on prevalence and time for project completion. I determined that 26 conditions would be an appropriate number to complete within the allotted time. Then selected the most prevalent 26 conditions. The least prevalent condition included has a prevalence of 1 in 40,000 births.

There are several ways to utilize this program. It is in a PDF document that may be printed or kept electronic. It is meant to be used similarly to a dictionary, in that when referencing a certain disorder, the teacher may find the page needed on the table of contents and turn to that page. When looking at the first page of a condition, the teacher will find information on the prevalence, cause, symptoms, and classroom challenges related to this disorder. It is a brief one-page informational sheet with all the background information any teacher may need, prior to working with an affected student. Much of this information is presented in a manner that educates the user to understand that these behaviors are not at the fault of the child. They are not disrupting class because they think it is fun, they are simply experiencing symptoms of their condition. It can be difficult to separate behaviors from personality with a classroom full of children, however it is important to do this to maintain a positive relationship with each student. An understanding of what else the student might be experiencing is also useful when assessing their mood and behaviors from day to day. For example, many conditions result in extreme

fatigue; however, this is always not common knowledge. It would be beneficial for a teacher to understand that while a student may appear to be disinterested, they are actually fatigued due to their disorder.

After gaining an understanding of the basics of the selected disorder, the teacher can then reference the interventions section, which is on the following page. These interventions address the previously listed classroom challenges, with additional pertinent strategies that address overall health and well-being. Many interventions in each section reference the "General Interventions" section at the beginning of the document. Teachers may then find this section for more details on how to implement this strategy. An example within most conditions is to "Limit or modify writing/coloring and cutting tasks (refer to General Interventions – fine motor)." This intervention is aimed to address various fine motor challenges that many children with disabilities experience, however the specific root of the problem varies from child to child, even if they share the same disability. When a user then refers to the general interventions section, they will find the heading of "Fine Motor" with explicit details on different interventions and strategies they may apply. Some strategies included are aimed at improving grasp, pressure, and endurance.

These methods and interventions are meant to be utilized as often as needed. Initially, it may be best to implement a small number of interventions at one time, depending on the student. This intervention should be applied until the student proves to be consistently successful over time using this intervention and emotionally accepts the intervention. This prevents students from becoming overwhelmed, negating the purpose of the strategies. Many interventions are meant to be used as a steppingstone to achieve something greater, without additional interventions. An example of this is utilizing a small writing utensil to improve grasp. Ideally the

student will correct their grasp and will be able to use a normal sized utensil in time. Some interventions are meant to be used throughout a student's schooling, however. An example of this would be for students with physical disabilities. Many of these students require alternative desks and seating arrangements, as well as classroom supplies to be stored in a different, more accessible location. This is an accommodation the student might need for the rest of their life. To determine what is appropriate and when to remove an accommodation, utilize trial and error while maintaining an open line of communication with the student and their guardian. Sometimes a student may not be ready to lose an accommodation, however some may utilize these as a crutch and are ready to move on. It varies from student to student.

Those who may successfully implement this program include teachers, paraprofessionals, direct support staff, indirect support staff, and even parents. No additional training is required for implementation. What assists one student may not assist another student – frequent observation and hands-on assistance are required when determining when an intervention is or is not a good fit for a student. Each student may require different strategies day-to-day as well, therefore the use of professional discretion is required to determine what works best for each student and at what time.

When implemented, this program will increase the participation and access of students with disabilities within the general education classroom. The evidence-based interventions will not only address a student's challenges, but also their self-regulation skills, assist with earning higher grades, and increasing their understanding of the daily lessons. Overall, this will improve their ability to be a successful student in elementary school, which bolsters their success as they age and mature.

CHAPTER 5

Discussion and Impact

The literature review and needs assessments conducted throughout this resource emphasize many shortcomings of public elementary schools and school systems in general. Teachers are inadequately supported from the start of their own schooling to the end of their careers (Cosier & Pearson, 2016). Even experienced teachers lack confidence in their skills to support their students with disabilities, which in turn leads to worse outcomes for these students who are already disadvantaged when it comes to formal supports (Gesel, Foreman-Murray, & Gilmour, 2022). These formal supports, IEP and 504 Plans, are elaborate and time consuming to create and keep up with, and they do not address every need and challenge of a student in class (Spiel, Evans, & Langberg, 2014). Without the appropriate supports from the school system and their teachers, students with disabilities are set up for failure from the very beginning of their schooling. Many of these students face lower grades and lower levels of confidence in understanding the material (Schwartz, Hopkins, & Stiefel, 2021). Elementary school is where students start setting routines, learning foundational skills, and gaining confidence in their ability to learn. Students with disabilities deserve the same access to these major steps in life as their peers.

The creation of this program was intended to fill in the gaps of knowledge and skills for teachers and support staff mentioned previously. This program supplies teachers with a resource that is easy to use and understand. It will not require a lengthy period of time to access, find the content needed, and to understand the content needed. Access and use of the program will require no more than a quick look at two pages of materials when referencing a specific disorder or disability, addressing the challenge of current resources being far too lengthy (Dias-Lacy &

Guirguis, 2017). The interventions are intended to be quick changes that can be utilized with minimal supplies, addressing the lack of resources teachers face, both in time and in physical supplies. The use of this program will also aid students in staying in their current placements, avoiding a more restrictive environment, and reaping the many benefits of the general education setting with mixed ability peers.

When utilized, the interventions and strategies included in this program can make a significant impact in the classroom regarding behavior, general understanding of the content, overall performance, grades, and general mood. The interventions are aimed at increasing participation and access within the classroom. With these two aspects improved, a student will potentially see a rise in their ability to attend to class, to understand the material, and to perform on assignments and tests. Using this program will provide students with disabilities with equitable access to educational opportunities within the general education classroom.

LIMITATIONS

This project has potential limitations. The capstone site was not the ideal site for this project. Initially, I planned to work within a school, alongside a school-based occupational therapist. However, working on site was not permitted by several public school-systems, therefore requiring the capstone site to be Georgia State University. The program was initially designed to be literature based, however additional in-person experience with teachers and other staff would be beneficial. Additionally, there are many more disorders and disabilities that could be included in the program, however the limitation of time within this project was prevalent. The program was to be completed within 14 weeks, during the capstone experience, and in that time, I was able to compile information on 26 disorders and disabilities. This encompasses most common disorders, however there are many more that did not make the paper due to time constraints.

Future research may focus on more experiential approaches and information. With further research, more conditions may be added, as well.

SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

This program will be sustained for many years following the student's completion of the capstone experience. The student will first disseminate the program to occupational therapy students and faculty at the site. At the end of this dissemination, the student will implore the necessity of these students to share information from this resource with their peers going forward in their careers as applicable. This includes sharing information with pediatric therapists, parents, teachers, and any other interested and relevant parties. The student will implore the need to continue sharing of this program over time, as well. Those interested in the materials may be provided with the electronic resource and dissemination presentation at request. By continuing to share this project, new teachers across the area will have access to this information, furthering the impact on students with disabilities.

This program may be implemented by any professionals working with students in an elementary school, including teachers, paraprofessionals, and other support staff (OT, PT, SLP). No additional training is required for implementation. The only constraint to consider is the time it may take to access the resource and read the brief materials that are needed. This program may be generalized to older populations, as well as other populations within elementary school, like special education. If one is faced with a condition that is not found within this document, information on similar conditions or symptoms may still be relevant within this resource, as well. The sustainability of this program will require the resources to print a long document within standard margins, web-availability to e-mail/view the resource in an electronic format, and a small amount of time to explain the program benefits to each new user. Updating the program may require assistance from relevant professionals in time, however this will be done on a voluntary basis.

CONCLUSIONS

This program will increase the participation and accessibility of students with disabilities within general education classrooms for years to come, following the sustainability plan. These students, with improve participation and access, will then receive an improved education, and therefore see more success in their futures. All students require a proper basis of education to succeed in the community, and the completion of this project will provide teachers with the tools needed to take one more step in that direction for students with disabilities.

Many techniques utilized in the resource stem from occupational therapy practices and research, therefore this program may be passed along by occupational therapists within schools as a means for educating teachers and other support staff.

Future research will be necessary to increase the number of researched disorders and disabilities, spanning as many as exist, despite prevalence. The program will also require updates as research on interventions continues and as school systems change with the passing of time.

REFERENCES

Al-Subaiei, M. S. (2017). Challenges in mixed ability classes and strategies utilized by ELI teachers to cope with them. *English Language Teaching, 10*(6), 182. https://doi.org/10.5539/elt.v10n6p182

Adibsereshki, N., Abkenar, S. J., Ashoori, M., & Mirzamani, M. (2015). The effectiveness of using reinforcements in the classroom on the academic achievement of students with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Intellectual Disabilities, 19*(1), 83-93. https://doi.org/10.1177/1744629514559313

Cosier, M., & Pearson, H. (2016). Can we talk? The underdeveloped dialogue between teacher education and disability studies. *Sage Open*, *6*(1), 2158244015626766.

Coster, W., Law, M., Bedell, G., Liljenquist, K., Kao, Y.-C., Khetani, M., & Teplicky, R. (2013). School participation, supports and barriers of students with and without disabilities. *Child: Care, Health and Development*, *39*(4), 535-543. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/cch.12046

Danzi, J., Reul, K., & Smith, R. (2008, April). Improving student motivation in mixed ability classrooms using differentiated instruction. *Eric*. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ed500838

Dias-Lacy, S. L., & Guirguis, R. V. (2017). Challenges for new teachers and ways of coping with them. *Journal of Education and Learning*, *6*(3), 265. https://doi.org/10.5539/jel.v6n3p265

Durff, L., & Carter, M. (2019). Overcoming second-order barriers to technology integration in k–5 schools. *Journal of Educational Research and Practice*, *9*(1). https://doi.org/10.5590/jerap.2019.09.1.18

22

Egilson, S. T., & Traustadottir, R. (2009). Participation of students with physical disabilities in

the school environment. *The American Journal of Occupational Therapy*, *63*(3), 264-272.

https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.63.3.264

Georgia Department of Education. (2019). IEP and related services resources. *Special Education*

Services and Supports. https://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-

Assessment/Special-Education-Services/Pages/IEP-Resources.aspx

Gesel, S. A., Foreman-Murray, L., & Gilmour, A. F. (2022). Sufficiency of teachers' access to

resources and supports for students with disabilities. *Teacher Education and Special*

Education, *45*(3), 204-226. https://doi.org/10.1177/08884064211046237

Green, S. E. (2003). "What do you mean 'what's wrong with her?'": stigma and the lives of

families of children with disabilities. *Social Science & Medicine*, *57*(8), 1361-1374.

https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/S0277-9536(02)00511-7

Maffea, J. (2020). Lack of resources in classrooms. *English Department: Research for Change -*

Wicked Problems in Our World. 38.

https://research.library.kutztown.edu/wickedproblems/38

Majoko, T. (2016). Inclusion of children with autism spectrum disorders: Listening and hearing

to Voices from the Grassroots. *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*, *46*(4),

1429-1440. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10803-015-2685-1

McGovern, M. (2015). Least restrictive environment: Fulfilling the promises of IDEA. *Widener*

Law Review, *21*, 117.

Mission Statement. Georgia State University. (n.d.). https://www.gsu.edu/mission-statement/

Obiakor, F. E., Harris, M., Mutua, K., Rotatori, A., & Algozzine, B. (2012). Making inclusion

    work in general education classrooms. *Education and Treatment of Children*, *35*(3), 477-

    490. http://www.jstor.org/stable/42900597

Occupational Therapy Practice Framework: Domain and Process—Fourth Edition. (2020). *The*

    American Journal of Occupational Therapy, 74(Supplement_2),

    7412410010p7412410011-7412410010p7412410087.

    https://doi.org/10.5014/ajot.2020.74S2001

Office for Civil Rights. (2023, July). Protecting students with disabilities. *U.S. Department of*

    Education. https://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/504faq.

Rotter, K. (2014). IEP use by general and special education teachers. *Sage Open*, *4*(2),

    2158244014530410. https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244014530410

Rune J. Simeonsson, Dawn Carlson, Gail S. Huntington, Janey Sturtz McMillen, J. Lytle Brent

    (2001) Students with disabilities: a national survey of participation in school activities,

    Disability and Rehabilitation, 23:2, 49-63, DOI: 10.1080/096382801750058134

Schwartz, A. E., Hopkins, B. G., & Stiefel, L. (2021). The effects of special education on the

    academic performance of students with learning disabilities. *Journal of Policy Analysis*

    and Management, *40*(2), 480-520. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1002/pam.22282

Shernoff, E. S., Mehta, T. G., Atkins, M. S., Torf, R., & Spencer, J. (2011). A qualitative study

    of the sources and impact of stress among urban teachers. *School Mental Health*, *3*(2),

    59-69. https://doi.org/10.1007/s12310-011-9051-z

Scruggs, T., Mastropieri, M., & McDuffie, K. (2007). Co-Teaching in inclusive classrooms: A

    metasynthesis of qualitative research. *Exceptional Children*, *73*, 392-416.

    https://doi.org/10.1177/001440290707300401

Shogren, K. A., Gross, J. M. S., Forber-Pratt, A. J., Francis, G. L., Satter, A. L., Blue-Banning, M., & Hill, C. (2015). The perspectives of students with and without disabilities on inclusive schools. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, *40*(4), 243-260. https://doi.org/10.1177/1540796915583493

Singh, D. (2007). General education teachers and students with physical disabilities. *Online Submission*, *12*. https://doi.org/10.18848/1447-9494/CGP/v14i07/45389

Spiel, C. F., Evans, S. W., & Langberg, J. M. (2014). Evaluating the content of individualized education programs and 504 plans of young adolescents with attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder. *School Psychology Quarterly, 29*(4), 452-468. https://doi.org/10.1037/spq0000101

Steed, E. A., Shapland, D., & Leech, N. (2022). Early childhood teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of their elementary school's approach to social emotional learning: A mixed methods study. *Early Childhood Education Journal, 50*(7), 1121-1132. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10643-021-01248-4

Too Few Candidates Applying for Teaching Jobs the Primary Hiring Challenge for More than Two-Thirds of Public Schools Entering the 2022-23 School Year. (2022, September 27). *National Center for Education Statistics*. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press_releases/09_27_2022.asp.

U.S. Government Accountability Office. (2020, June 30). K-12 education: School districts need better information to help improve access for people with disabilities. *U.S. Government Accountability Office.* https://www.gao.gov/products/gao-20-448

Valiandes, S. (2015). Evaluating the impact of differentiated instruction on literacy and reading in mixed ability classrooms: Quality and equity dimensions of education effectiveness.

Studies in Educational Evaluation, 45, 17-26.

https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.stueduc.2015.02.005

Valiandes, S., & Neophytou, L. (2018). Teachers' professional development for differentiated

instruction in mixed-ability classrooms: investigating the impact of a development

program on teachers' professional learning and on students' achievement. *Teacher*

Development, 22(1), 123-138. https://doi.org/10.1080/13664530.2017.1338196

Vaughn, S., Wanzek, J., & Denton, C. A. (2007). The SAGE handbook of special education. *In.*

SAGE Publications Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781848607989

Watson, T., & Berry, B. (2022). Using classroom clickers to increase academic engagement for

elementary school–aged students with disabilities. *Journal of Special Education*

Technology, 37(2), 266-275. https://doi.org/10.1177/01626434211004455

Wright, J. (2023). Promoting success among elementary students with disabilities using the

response to intervention model: A case study (dissertation). *Saint Leo*

University ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

APPENDIX 1

Learning Objectives

Learning objectives	Short-term objectives	Learning activities	Outcome measures	Timeline for completion
1. The student will develop a complete understanding of the most common disabilities within general education classrooms and how those disabilities present in the classroom.	1A. The student will increase their knowledge on the most common disabilities within elementary school classrooms. 1B. The student will increase their knowledge on how the most common disabilities present within classrooms.	1a. The student will conduct 3+ anonymous surveys with teachers of general education classrooms off-site. 1b. The student will conduct a literature search using prior experience as guidance to determine the most common disabilities in general education elementary school classrooms and how they present.	i. A list of the most common disabilities within general education classrooms ii. A list of how the most common classroom disabilities present within the classroom	The end of week 4 of the Capstone semester
2. The student will demonstrate an understanding of how students with disabilities are at a disadvantage when participating within the classroom.	2A. The student will increase knowledge on the presentation of the most common disabilities within classrooms. 2B. The student will increase knowledge on how students with disabilities fail to participate or access within the classroom.	2a. The student will conduct 3+ anonymous surveys with teachers of general education classrooms off-site. 2b. The student will conduct a literature review guided by prior experience regarding the presentation of the most common disabilities and on how students with disabilities fail to participate within classrooms.	i. Documentation of how those with common disabilities have difficulties participating within a classroom.	The end of week 7 of the Capstone semester
3. The student will gain an understanding of supports that	3A. The student will increase their knowledge on methods that can be	3a. The student will conduct a literature review guided by prior experience on	i. Documentation of common interventions used within general	The end of week 11 of the Capstone semester

will aid in increasing the participation and accessibility of students with disabilities within general education elementary classrooms.	applied to the classroom to increase participation. 3B. The student will increase knowledge on supports that teachers are able to implement within the typical classroom.	supports for students with disabilities within elementary classrooms. 3b. The student will conduct 3+ anonymous surveys with teachers of general education classrooms off-site.	education classrooms to increase participation of students with disabilities.	
4. The student will improve their ability to aid teachers in increasing the participation and accessibility of students with disabilities within the classroom.	4A. The student will review literature on effective practices to increase participation and accessibility within the classroom. 4B. The student will disseminate a resource for teachers that will provide supports to increase the participation and access of students with disabilities within the classroom.	4a. The student will conduct 3+ anonymous surveys with teachers of general education classrooms off-site. 4b. The student will conduct a literature search on the topic, guided by prior experience.	i. A resource for teachers to identify useful strategies to increase the participation and accessibility of students with disabilities within the classroom.	The end of week 12 of the Capstone semester

APPENDIX 2

Supervision Plan

Capstone Student Roles and Responsiblities

1. Demonstrate an understanding of and follow the Georgia State University policies and procedures for the capstone experience.

2. Complete the 14-week (560 hour) capstone experience, with no more than 20% of the time completed off-site. The student is responsible for ensuring missed hours are made up appropriately as agreed upon by the student, site mentor, and the capstone coordinator.

3. Complete any relevant tasks assigned by the site mentor to ensure a successful learning experience as well as a successful outcome of the capstone experience.

4. Initiate communication with the site mentor, occupational therapy faculty, and the doctoral capstone coordinator when expected to do so or as needed to ensure success of the capstone experience.

5. Demonstrate respectful communication with faculty, the site mentor, the doctoral capstone coordinator, and other individuals who may be part of the capstone experience or at the capstone site.

6. Provide appropriate feedback to the site at the formal midterm and final evaluation.

7. Utilize constructive feedback from faculty, the site mentor, and the doctoral capstone coordinator for both personal and professional growth, and to ensure successful completion of the capstone experience.

8. Demonstrate a professional approach to the capstone experience. This includes, but is not limited to, time management, observation of deadlines, maintenance of communication with the capstone team, and respectful interactions with those at the capstone site.

9. Self-direct the capstone process, including planning, development, and completing the capstone experience and project.

10. Take initiative to finalize all documentation with the site mentor, faculty mentor, and doctoral capstone coordinator.

11. Complete and disseminate the final capstone project within the time frame determined by the academic program and the capstone coordinator.

Site Mentor Roles and Responsibilities

1. Orient student to capstone site, policies and procedures, expectations, other personnel, and stakeholders.

2. Assist student as needed to perform specific learning activities consistent with the student's learning objectives, including connecting student with other faculty members, and making site resources available as able.

3. Provide evidence of expertise in given area (documentation of terminal degree, current CV or resume, verification of completed specialty training / certification).

4. Collaborate with the capstone student and team to create specific mentorship responsibilities.

5. Provide supervision/mentorship through the duration of the experience.

6. Provide insightful, constructive feedback on student's performance and any deliverables during the experience at scheduled meetings and throughout the experience as needed. This can be in-person or via e-mail, text message, phone call, or video call.

7. Collaborate with capstone team to develop and maintain a system for documenting the student's completed hours and track any tasks and activities accomplished during the experience.

8. Collaborate with the capstone team to guide the capstone student through a needs assessment regarding the capstone project.

9. Provide guidance and assistance on the logistics of completing the work-related requirements at the capstone site, which could include workflow at site, general hours of operation, and access to workspaces and other resources.

10. Proactively communicate with the capstone team regarding any potential concerns or disputes, following the steps listed below.

11. Provide formal evaluations on the students' performance at the midterm and final points of the capstone experience.

12. Regularly communicate with the capstone team either in-person or via e-mail, text message, phone call, or video call.

Scheduled Meetings

The site mentor and the student will meet routinely at established times. These meetings will be conducted every other week, either in-person or over a video meeting for 30 minutes. These meetings will be scheduled at the beginning of the capstone experience and at the convenience of the site mentor. The student will be expected to provide any scheduled deliverables to the site mentor two days prior to the meeting for the mentor to review. The student will keep an updated record of each meeting, including the topics discussed during the meeting, feedback provided, and finished deliverables. Both the student and the site mentor will sign a record after each meeting and upon the completion of the capstone experience. The student may additionally interact and meet with the site mentor throughout each week as needed and as time allows.

Communication Methods

The student and the site mentor may communicate in-person or via email, phone call, text message, and online virtual meetings. The student is expected to initiate and maintain regular communication with the site mentor. The site mentor is expected to respond within a timely manner during normal work hours (9am-5pm, Mon-Fri). There is no expectation to communicate outside of work hours, however it is allowable if both parties are agreeable.

Specific Requirements of the Project:

The student is expected to complete a 14-week (560 hours) capstone experience in which no more than 20% of the time can be completed off-site. The student will develop a time log that will be filled out weekly to track completion of the required hours. This time log will be initialed by both the student and site mentor at the end of each week. At the end of the capstone experience, the student and site mentor will verify the total number of hours completed and both will sign the completed time log.

The student is also expected to produce deliverable materials throughout the capstone experience. The student will develop a timeline in which deliverables are expected to be submitted for review by the site mentor. The student will submit these deliverables either in-person or via email. The student will keep a record of this timeline along with a place for the student and site mentor to sign upon the completion of each deliverable. At the completion of the capstone experience, the student is expected to disseminate these deliverables in accordance with the policies of Georgia State University's OTD program.

Collegiality/Resolving Disputes:

Throughout the capstone experience, the student and the site mentor will maintain an open and collaborative relationship regarding the goals of the capstone project. Both parties are expected to maintain respectful and professional interactions throughout the experience.

In the case that a conflict arises during the student's time at the capstone site, the student and site mentor will schedule a meeting to discuss the conflict. A record of any meetings will be kept, detailing the dispute and efforts made towards resolution. If a meeting is not sufficient to resolve a dispute, the issue will be escalated to the student's capstone mentor with Georgia State University, and if needed, to the Georgia State University capstone coordinator. Open communication will be maintained between the mentor and the student to ensure that conflicts are addressed as they arise and to collaboratively identify solutions.

Contingency Plan

Should the student fail to complete a task or submit a deliverable by the set due date, the student must notify the site mentor immediately, as soon as the student is aware that this will occur. The student and mentor will agree upon a new completion date, and the student will self-direct the completion of the task within the agreed upon time. An additional meeting will be added to the meeting schedule if there is not already a meeting of the week of the new due date. If the student does not complete the task within the new timeframe, the process will repeat while also notifying the capstone coordinator of the failure to complete a task in a timely manner.

OTD Program Curricular Design:

The student's capstone project will be designed in line with GSU's OTD program curricular design as listed below:

1. **Understanding and utilizing occupation to promote health and wellness.**

   School-based, evidenced strategies will be taken into account when developing this capstone project to promote the students' health and wellbeing, as well as their ability to participate within their daily occupations within the context of school.

2. **Use of evidence-based practice to support the doctoral capstone project.**

   The student will consult the most recently conducted research and current literature regarding in-class participation and strategies to bolster this while conducting the capstone project.

3. **Understanding and using professional ethics and values.**

   The student will demonstrate an understanding of and adhere to the values and ethics of the occupational therapy profession throughout the capstone experience.

4. **Enhancing advocacy and leadership skills**

   The student will improve their ability to advocate for students with disabilities that require additional supports within the classroom. The student will utilize current and grow new leadership skills throughout the experience via advocacy, education, and collaboration with staff at the site.

5. **Lifelong professional growth and development.**

   The student's completion of the capstone experience will provide the student with an expanded, specific education on a topic that the student views as critical for their future career. The skills gained through the process will benefit the student in the field of school and pediatric occupational therapy in their future.

6. **Enhancing diversity, inclusion, and cultural competence.**

   The implementation of this capstone project will directly promote the inclusion of students with disabilities within the classroom. This project will include diversity and cultural components to enhance the quality of the information provided. This will improve both the diversity and cultural competence of the staff using the resource provided.