

Collaboration in School Settings: A Critical Appraisal of the Topic

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With the 2004 reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act and No Child Left Behind, there has been an increasing emphasis on occupational therapy services that are provided across naturally occurring contexts and routines within the school settings. School-based occupational therapists are interested in maximizing students' achievement and want to know which models of therapeutic intervention are most effective for facilitating students' successful participation within their least restrictive environment. Thus, this critical appraisal of the topic (CAT) sought to answer the following question: For occupational therapists working in school system settings, is there evidence supporting the efficacy of a classroom-based collaborative approach versus a pull-out model of therapeutic intervention for facilitating students' participation in schools? After reviewing 10 articles (Level II-IV evidence), it appears that a collaborative approach to service delivery may be as effective in improving student performance when compared to direct 1:1 pull-out and small group service delivery. However, teachers reported greater satisfaction with services and increased implementation of therapists' suggestions when classroom-based services were provided.

Keywords: collaboration, student achievement, school-based occupational therapy, occupational therapy service

Summary of Key Findings

Summary of Levels I, II, and III. Consultative and large group intervention models resulted in equivalent results on student performance measures when compared to direct 1:1 pull-out and small group models. However, teachers reported greater satisfaction with services and increased implementation of therapists' suggestions when classroom-based services were provided.

Summary of Levels IV and V. School-based occupational therapists are spending increasing amounts of time providing in-class consultative service to support students and overwhelmingly believe that interventions should be integrated throughout their students' school day. Increases in collaborative services correlate with improved teacher understanding of the role of OT and positive perceptions of OT's contribution to student achievement.

Implications

Implications for Consumers

Parents should be aware that all students have a right to receive educationally related services in their least restrictive environment. Parents and/or teachers should clearly communicate their desire for classroom-based interventions to their school therapists. Parents and/or teachers can facilitate collaboration and consultation

Implications for Practitioners

Both direct 1:1 intervention and consultative services provide effective methods for facilitating students' functional performance and goal achievement. Consultation with classroom teachers is essential for ensuring carryover of interventions in the child's natural setting. Teachers report positive perception and increased understanding of OT's role when classroom based models are employed. The use of blended models including direct 1:1 services, group intervention, and consultative methods allow therapists to tailor intervention to match the individual needs of each student.

Bottom Line for Occupational Therapy Practice and Recommendations for Best Practice

Therapists have a responsibility to meet the 2004 Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act's mandate to provide services within the least restrictive environment, maximizing students' participation in the general education curriculum. Current research demonstrates that pull-out and classroom-based consultative interventions represent equally effective methods for facilitating students' achievement. School-based OTs should strive to provide services in students' natural settings to encourage generalization of skills and carryover of interventions.