“We Are All Able”: Exploring Students’ Perceptions of Disability & the Differently-Abled

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ABSTRACT

This project aimed to provide education to fourth and fifth grade students about individuals who are differently-abled, in order to increase their knowledge, awareness, and understanding about disability. It was hypothesized that this might impact the students’ perceptions of peers who are differently-abled, as well as their future interactions with them. A disability awareness learning program was designed and implemented in coordination with a scheduled art class. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data using NVivo software revealed two main themes: understanding disability and viewing disability with fear or anxiety.

DISABILITY AWARENESS

Literature on bullying suggests that targeting children in the peer group level may be an effective way to address the problem of bullying. The authors of the study also noted the difference in disability awareness training, which is thought to be more effective at promoting positive attitudes toward individuals with disabilities with the potential for lasting benefits. Ella & Nettleton (2017), found that the two main themes: understanding disability and viewing disability with fear or anxiety are often observed in typical peers as well.

SERVICE LEARNING

Service learning is known for its reciprocal benefits; it can provide for both the student and the community, but it must be carefully designed and implemented. In this study, the students were engaged in four learning sessions about disability, including interactive discussions, video presentations, an “ability” simulation, and self-reflection activities. The four lessons were part of an art-based curriculum, taught to all fourth and fifth grade students during the duration of the five-week study. The students were free to write from the story at any time, but few, if any, parent comments were received. The pre-and post-questionnaires were completed by students through answering QR codes on their personal iPads to complete the online survey through Qualtrics. Before the pre-test, students engaged in four learning sessions about disability, including interactive discussions, video presentations, an “ability” simulation, and self-reflection activities. The four lessons were part of an art-based curriculum, taught to all fourth and fifth grade students during the students’ regularly scheduled art classes. This was followed by a discussion of different types of disabilities; appropriate language use and ways to approach an individual with questions about differences; personal strengths and skills that could be used to help others; strengths and skill sets of individuals with disabilities that help them be successful. Students were then asked about their experiences with disabilities before the program and how they felt about it.

RESULTS

Among the fourth and fifth grade students who participated in the study, data showed that 32.5% were Caucasian/White, 12.5% were African-Americans, 21.6% were Hispanic/Latino, and 27.5% were males (n=40). The students ranged in age from nine to eleven years old. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data using NVivo software revealed two main themes: understanding disability and viewing disability with fear or anxiety. The students were then asked if they had any previous experiences with individuals who are differently-abled. The students were then asked if they had any previous experiences with individuals who are differently-abled. The students were then asked if they had any previous experiences with individuals who are differently-abled.

CONCLUSIONS

Ocational therapists are concerned with the participation of individuals of all abilities into the workforce. When barriers to successful participation may be caused by society and self-esteem. It is vital for individuals with disabilities to participate as fully in society as possible. Because of the commitment of occupational therapists to improving individual quality of life through participation and advocacy efforts, the profession is uniquely qualified to provide programs of this type in school or alternative settings. Although service learning is a type of experiential learning, the two differ in that service learning is more collaborative and emphasizes civic participation. A possible benefit of experiential-type learning is increasing self-awareness of personal stereotypes and challenging them while transforming stereotypes into meaningful experiences.

PROJECT DESIGN

After the pre-test, students engaged in four learning sessions about disability, including interactive discussions, video presentations, an “ability” simulation, and self-reflection activities.

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REFERENCES

Odom, S. L. (2006). Three themes that may play an important role in disability awareness training programs: successful "celebrities" with disabilities; and question and answer sessions. In P. A. Diefenbach & D. A. Smith (Eds.), Disability awareness training, service learning, and peer perceptions of disability. A qualitative, phenomenological research design was chosen and implemented in coordination with a scheduled art class. Thematic analysis of the qualitative data using NVivo software revealed two main themes: understanding disability and viewing disability with fear or anxiety.

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Differences in sociocultural and educational experiences may contribute to differences in how students perceive individuals with disabilities. Differences in sociocultural and educational experiences may contribute to differences in how students perceive individuals with disabilities. Differences in sociocultural and educational experiences may contribute to differences in how students perceive individuals with disabilities. Differences in sociocultural and educational experiences may contribute to differences in how students perceive individuals with disabilities.

DISCUSSION

Strengths of this study include that it was able to be delivered in the classroom during regularly scheduled class time, as well as that it had multiple components delivered over multiple sessions. Students were encouraged to use their observations at a future date. Relevant literature discusses the impact of experiential learning on student understanding and development.

One limitation of the study is that no conclusions can be drawn about the effectiveness of individual interventions, since questions were posed to the students about the program as a whole. Students were then asked if they had any previous experiences with individuals who are differently-abled. The following main outcome measures were included: perceived enjoyment, overall satisfaction, and self-esteem.

This presentation poster was designed by FPPT.