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Utilizing Trauma-Informed Universal and Targeted Occupational Therapy Interventions in a School Setting

Maciah Nobles, OTS

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BACKGROUND & PURPOSE

Background

Trauma has become a public health issue, including within the public school system, as the CDC reports that 64% of Americans have experiences at least one adverse childhood experience (CDC, 2023; Magruder, 2017). It is evidenced that children who have experienced trauma can have difficulty in school with academics, behaviors, cognition, regulation skills, interception, sensory processing, social-emotional challenges, and decreased social participation (Lynch et al., 2020), and experiencing trauma often correlates with sensory deficits (Howard et al., 2020; Linkugel et al., 2020; Purvis et al., 2013).

The public health model can be applied to a school setting as a basis for trauma-informed occupational therapy intervention (Lynch et al., 2020). The “Just Right!” Sensory Curriculum teaches students and teachers to use sensory system language to understand their body’s regulation needs and provides them with education on regulation strategies (Wiggins & Wild, 2020).

Purpose

The purpose of this capstone was to provide Tier 1 and Tier 2 trauma-informed interventions to a rural school district in northeast Nebraska.

RESULTS (Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire)

Student’s Emotional and Behavioral Development as Measured by SDQ 2025

Subscale	Pretest		Posttest		95% CI for Mean Difference	t	p	Cohen’s D
	M	SD	M	SD				
Emotional Symptoms	1.61	2.11	1.82	2.42	-0.97, 0.54	-0.57	0.29	-0.10
Conduct Problems	1.42	2.03	1.24	1.84	-0.24, 0.70	0.71	0.24	0.12
Hyperactivity/Inattention	4.58	3.50	3.33	3.21	0.48, 1.99	3.34	0.00*	0.58
Peer Relationships Problems	1.27	1.61	1.64	1.58	-0.83, 0.10	-1.58	0.06	-0.28
Prosocial Behavior	7.91	2.40	8.03	2.40	-0.60, 0.35	-0.52	0.30	-0.09
Emotional Behavioral Difficulties	8.88	6.29	8.03	6.25	-1.02, 2.72	0.93	.18	0.16

Note. N=33; Mean values for each subtest are shown in both the pre-and post-tests and the results of *t*-tests comparing scores before and after participation in “Just Right!” Curriculum. * = Denotes significant findings.

IMPLICATIONS FOR OT

- Occupational therapists are equipped to provide Tier 1 (universal) and Tier 2 (targeted) interventions in a school setting along with the typical Tier 3 (individualized) interventions.
- Occupational therapists should consider providing education to school staff surrounding trauma-informed classroom strategies to improve students’ overall experience in the public school system (Tier 1).
- There is a need for increased Tier 1 and Tier 2 occupational therapy in the public school system.
- Students benefit from learning about their sensory systems and what their body needs for self-regulation.

METHODS

The capstone project was completed at a rural elementary school in northeast Nebraska, and included Tier 1 and Tier 2 trauma-informed interventions.

Procedures and Activities

- Implementation of “Just Right!” Sensory Curriculum
- Needs assessment and staff interview transcript
- Education to school staff on trauma-informed classroom strategies
- Clinical experience through time spent with school OT
- Creation of “OT approved” centers for use in classrooms
- Creation of sensory room and education to staff on use

Assessments

- Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)
- Observation template
- Teacher Feedback survey

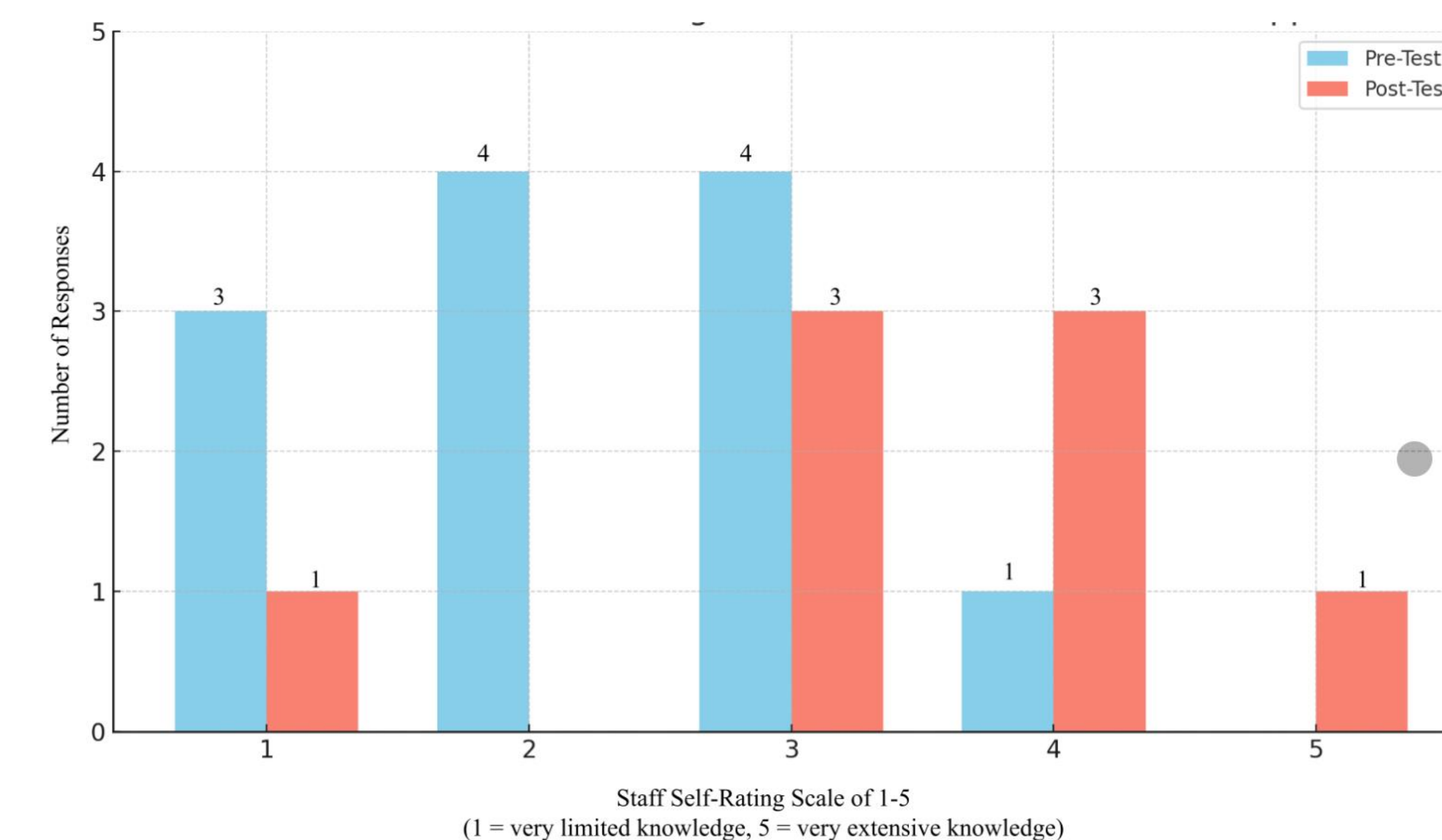
THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Lifespan Development frame of reference highlights the natural development of a person throughout their lifespan and includes each various stage they experience (Llorens, 1974). This frame of reference was used to help guide the project by encouraging students to meet the developmental milestones appropriate for their respective ages and guided the modification of the capstone activities depending on the grade level. Staff members were also educated on age-appropriate behaviors for their students.

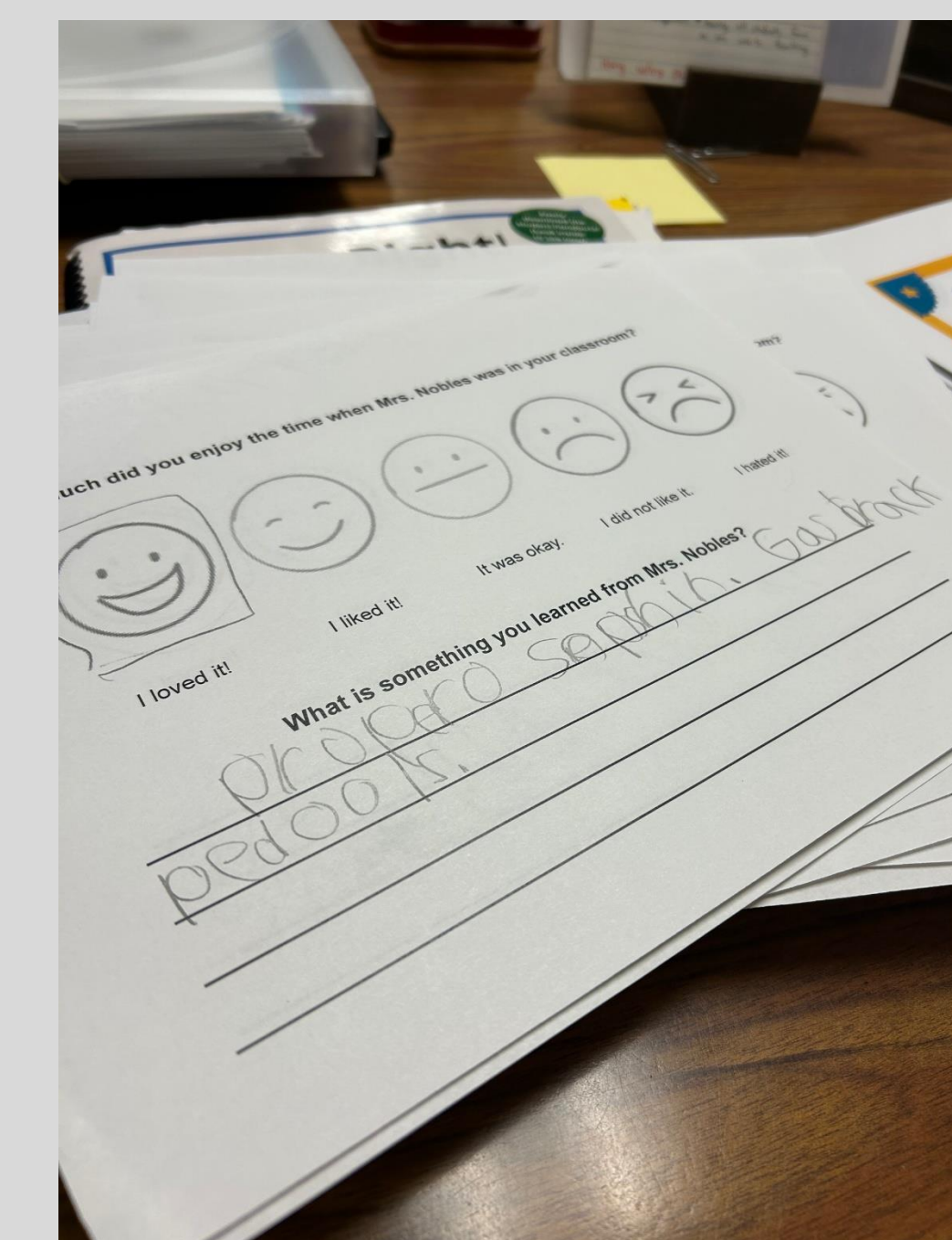
Sensory Integration and Sensory Processing frames of reference focus on addressing sensory dysfunction, which would be defined as over- or under-response to sensory stimuli and an inability to manage the sensory system (Ayres, 1974; Dunn, 2001). These frameworks were used through the project, as students and staff were educated about their sensory systems and given strategies for how to meet their sensory needs through the sensory curriculum, center activities, staff education, and the creation of the sensory room.

RESULTS (Staff Education)

School Staff’s Self-Rated Knowledge of Trauma-Informed Classroom Approaches, Pre-Test and Post-Test



The graph above shows pre-test (N=12) and posttest (N=8) results for staff members response to the prompt “Rate your current level of knowledge about trauma-informed care.” Numbers above bars indicate number of responses that indicated each number of Likert scale.



REFERENCES

