

Perceived Effectiveness of Nature-Based Occupational Therapy Programs to Improve the Occupational Performance of Children



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SETTINGS AND BACKGROUND

Setting: Nontraditional Pediatrics. Nature-based programs: “outdoor environments that retain their uncultivated features and have been relatively untouched by human development, including buildings.”⁹

Background: One of the primary occupations of children is that of play. Children are playing outdoors less due to increased screen time, more solitary play, parental safety concerns. School is more academic with less opportunities for play.^{2,3} This results in children being weaker, less resilient, less imaginative with decreased attention spans, difficulty controlling their emotions, and difficulty navigating their environment.⁶ Due to very little existing research, a study examining the perceived effectiveness of nature-based occupational therapy programs on occupational performance of children is needed.

PIO QUESTION

Are nature-based occupational therapy (NBOT) programs perceived to improve occupational performance of children?

SIGNIFICANCE

Supports occupational therapy’s distinct value by:

- Expanding practice into nontraditional settings enhances the unique value of occupational therapy
- Describing an alternative service delivery model for children
- Exploring the opportunity for improvement of occupational performance in a novel manner

LITERATURE REVIEW

Benefits of Outdoor play:

- Improves cognitive, social and emotional skills^{2,6,8,13}
- Promotes positive healthy outcomes¹³
- Children learn to take risks, overcome fears, and create imaginary worlds⁶
- Enhances better sensory systems⁶

ConTIGO Approach by L. Park-Figueroa, OTR. “Connection and Transformation in the Great Outdoors” One of the few occupational therapy programs using interventions in nature-based settings for children ages 3-11 years old with developmental disabilities.⁹

METHODS

Participants: 43 parents of children who attend 4 different NBOT programs in 3 states.

Design: Anonymous survey

- 14 closed ended multiple choice questions investigating family perception of:
 - Overall benefit of NBOT
 - Improvement in skills: coordination, social, emotional/regulation, cognitive
 - Improvement in occupational performance skills (ADL’s and school performance)
- 3 open-ended short answer questions asking families to describe:
 - Top 3 benefits of NBOT
 - NBOT in their own words
 - Aspects not liked in NBOT

RESULTS

- 78.6% of parents rated NBOT overall **very valuable**
- 90.2% reported **Significant or slight improvement** in coordination, social, emotional/regulation and cognitive skills
- 51.4% reported **Significant or Slight improvement** in occupational performance skills
- 61.9% reported their child is **more likely** to play outside
- 47.6% reported their child is **significantly** able to better handle other challenges in their life
- Top three **benefits** listed:
 - Social Interaction
 - Confidence
 - Emotional Regulation

Qualitative Descriptions

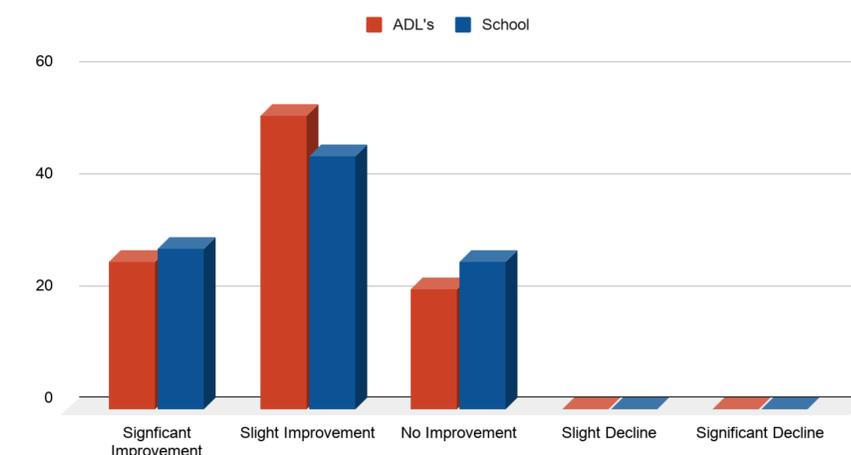
“Children pushing their boundaries in a natural setting, using the natural environment instead of a contrived environment for executive functioning and physical activities”

“Being out in nature is more real life versus being in a therapy room. It is much better with real life experiences and your child enjoys it so much more”

Improvement in Skills



Improvement in Occupational Performance



SUMMARY

Results demonstrate that NBOT programs are perceived as effective models of service delivery for enhancing occupational performance in children. Skills and occupational performance were improved. Results were consistent with prior findings related to benefits of outdoor play in general. Since there is limited literature exploring the value of nature-based play within the context of occupational therapy, this study is relevant. Nature-based occupational therapy programs are essential, valuable, and unique programs that are perceived as effective in treating children.

REFERENCES

Please scan for a list of full references.

