

The Participation of Children with Physical Disabilities in After-school Activities

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- Introduction

The literature has found that participation is important for children's development, and so the researchers wanted to explore children's and parents' experiences of participation

- Objectives

The objectives of this research project were to find out in which after-school activities the children participated, and investigate some of the factors that influenced their participation.

- Methods

This research project involved a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative approaches. An Activity Diary provided information on how the five children spent their time after school. Semi-structured interviews were also held, with both the children and the parents, to explore the children's participation in their activities.

- Results

The children engaged in a variety of activities throughout their week, primarily leisure activities. It was found that the children's personalities, interests and views of activities impacted on their enjoyment of activities and participation. As well as this, the parents' values, and the many ways the parents supported and challenged their children, impacted on their participation and level of independence. Attitudes of peers were also found to influence the children's participation. Interestingly, the physical environment was not found to have a major impact on their participation.

- Conclusion

The parents valued leisure after-school activities, as they provided opportunities for friendship and development. Therefore, they were concerned when this time was shortened due to the time spent in self-care and homework, which was perceived to be excessive by the parents. Participation was influenced by both the children and their parents. The children's interests, views of activities, and values impacted on their choice of activities, and the enjoyment they experienced during participation.

Independence was valued by the parents, although their reasons behind this differed from their children. Finally, both children and parents noted the central role played by parents in supporting their children's participation.

- Contribution to the practice

This research project found that the views, values, and interests of both the parents and children, and the social and physical environment influenced the participation of the children in after-school activities. Occupational therapists therefore need to explore these with children and parents when working in paediatric settings.