

Getting Children Ready for School: An Unmet Challenge for Occupational Therapists in Developing Countries

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Participating in school activities for the first time is one of the most momentous and challenging events in a child's life. However, very little attention has been given to occupational therapy's role in helping children with special needs transition into school life, particularly in developing countries where OT services are not usually an integral part of the school system.

This presentation will highlight how occupational therapists from a developing country address issues related to transitioning children into school, including: identifying contextually-relevant competencies children need in order to successfully participate in school; collaborating with families and other professionals in preparing the child with special needs for school; and dealing with school politics, limited resources and social prejudices against children with special needs. It will propose a model of practice for OT's working with school age children in developing countries. This model is based on an analysis of the curricula and assessment reports of different schools; qualitative research data regarding the experiences of parents of children who entered school for the first time; and data from discussions with different school teachers and administrators.

This presentation aims to initiate discourse among OT's working with children regarding the profession's role in assisting children and their families deal with the challenges of going to school for the first time. It is envisioned to help initiate establish practice guidelines that address the many complex issues related to school transition and encourage OT's working in developing countries advocate for the institutionalization of programs that will facilitate the transition of children with special needs into school.