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Bridging the Gap Between the Occupational Therapy Department and the Education Department at an Inclusive Preschool

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Bridging the Gap Between the Occupational Therapy Department and the Education Department at an Inclusive Preschool

Brenna Hunt OTD/S

Expert Mentor: Suzanne Satterfield OTR/L, Faculty Mentor: Kristin Mecha OTD, OTR/L, BCP, CLC
Belmont University, School of Occupational Therapy



MISSION AND VISION

- First Steps fulfills their mission through three programs. The Child Development Center is an inclusive preschool for children with special needs and typically developing children through age six. Pediatric Therapy provides Physical, Occupational, Speech, and Feeding Therapy to children with special needs. The Community Outreach Program serves children ages birth to three in the home and other community-based settings. Annually, First Steps reaches over 1,000 children.
- **Mission:** To educate and care for children with special needs and medical conditions alongside their typically developing peers in inclusive environments and support their families.
- **Vision:**
 - Enhance the quality of life for children and their families
 - Eliminate barriers to services for children with special needs
 - Empower families as they seek to meet the needs of their children
 - Improve the community as a whole, child by child, family by family
 - Celebrate each child's unique potential

AGENCY NEEDS

- Bridge the gap between the therapy team and the education team at First Steps
- Integrate occupational therapy practices into the classroom to increase student participation
- Help improve classroom participation and engagement through the use of tools that promote inclusion and equity
- Educate preschool teachers on OT principles and ways they can use these principles to promote development and increase participation

PROJECT GOALS

- Develop a deeper understanding of OT supports in the preschool setting and how they can positively influence participation
- Educate teachers on OT's scope and ways they can use OT principals to promote age-appropriate development and kindergarten readiness
- Demonstrate understanding of OT interventions and professional reasoning by providing OT tools/strategies for children to improve learning and participation.

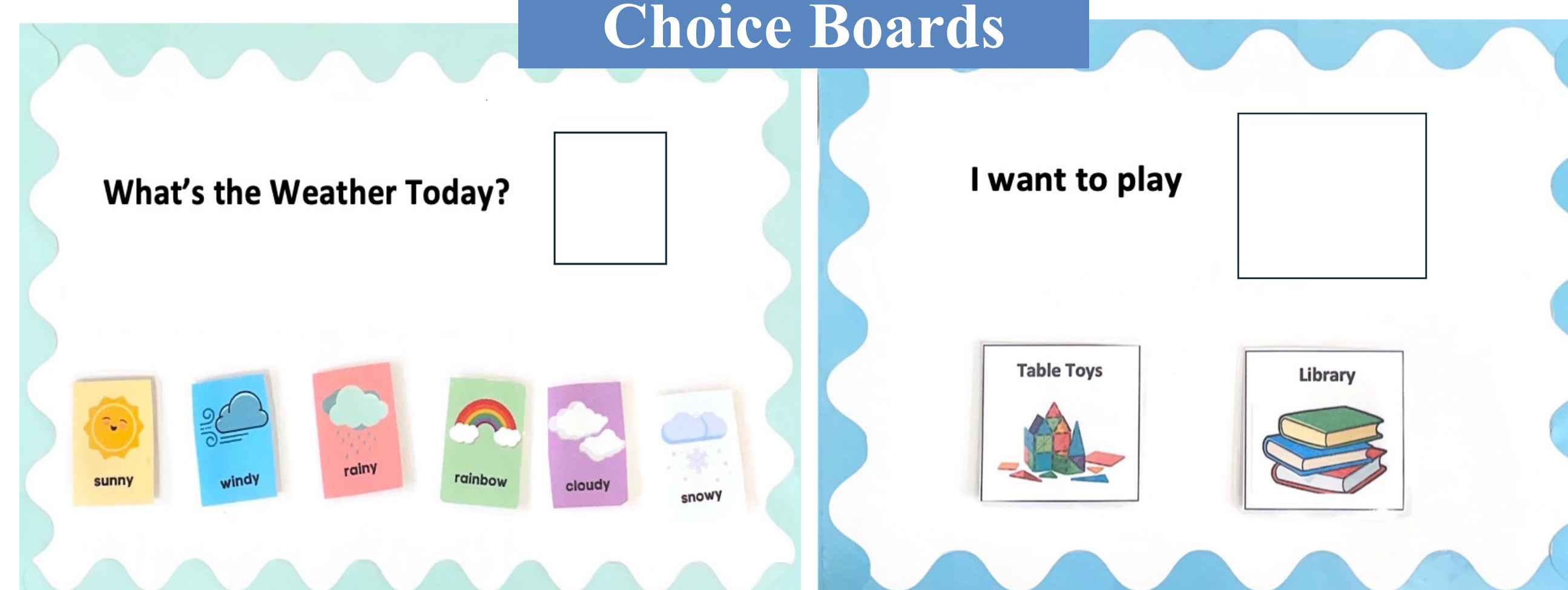
PROJECT OUTCOMES

- Developed an OT support manual for teachers that includes information on sensory processing, fine motor skills, managing challenging behaviors, and social emotional development
- Created an online progress form for occupational therapists, physical therapists, and speech language pathologists to report therapy progress to preschool teachers. This form includes a section for therapists to update teachers on therapy progress, therapy goals, and recommended therapeutic supports in the classroom
- Developed a series of kindergarten readiness handouts for teachers. These handouts include information on promoting development of early literacy skills, early math skills, early STEM skills, gross motor skills, and social emotional learning
- Created multiple OT tools to increase participation in the classroom, including choice boards, visual schedules, visuals to assist with transitions, social stories, and sensory regulation activities

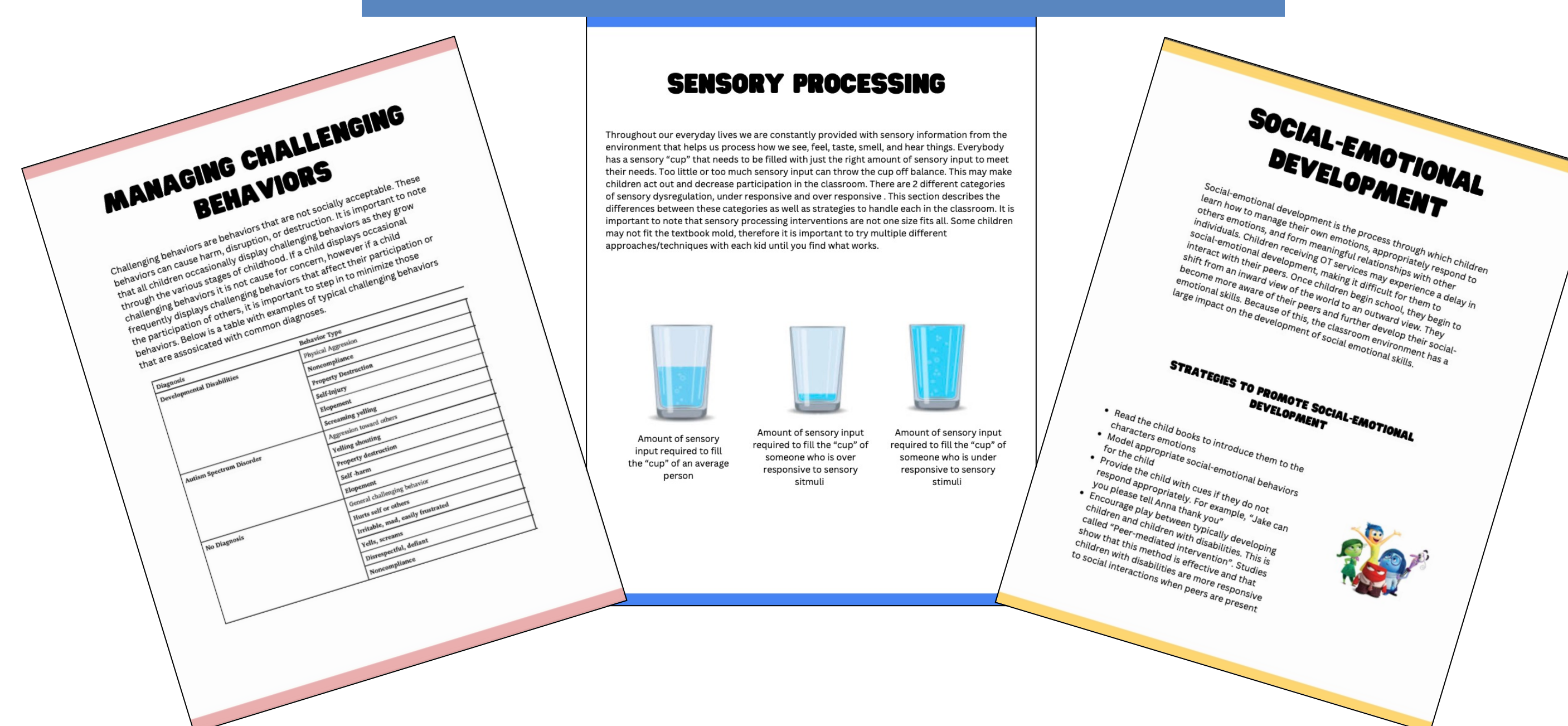
Visuals to Assist with Transitions



Choice Boards

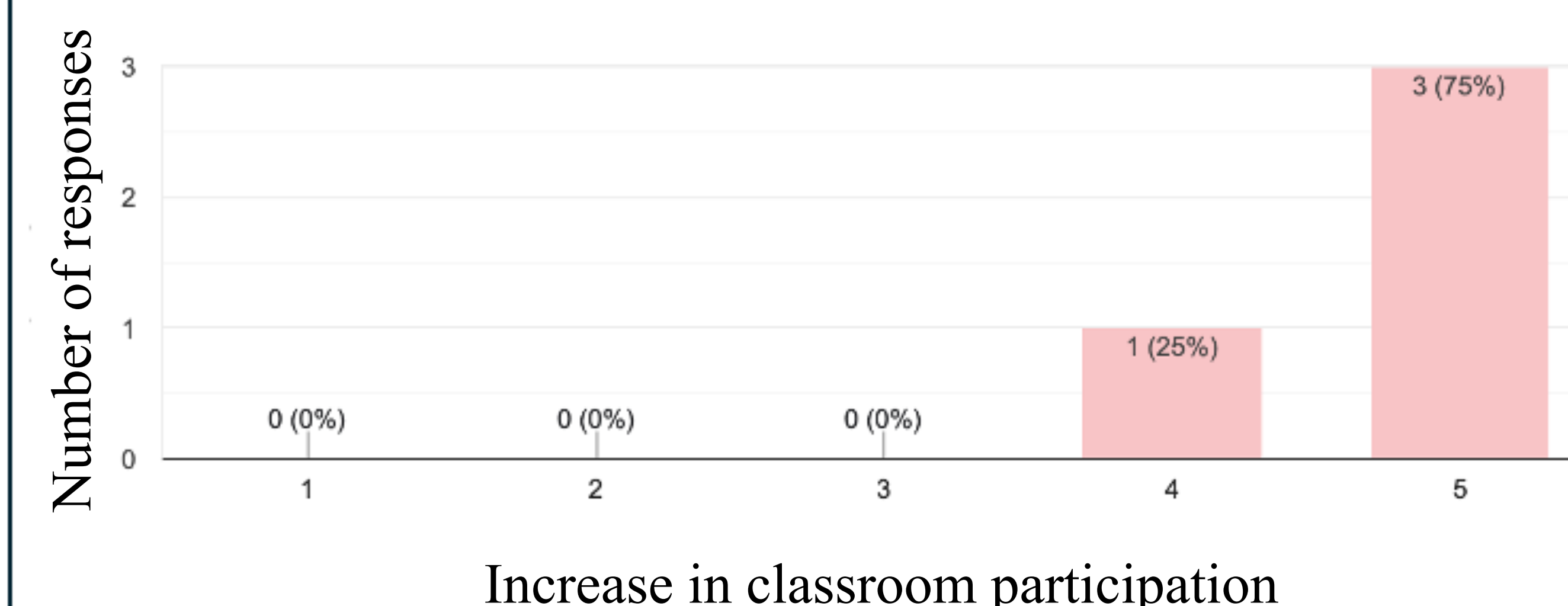


Educational Materials for Teachers



OUTCOMES SURVEY

On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being "a little" and 5 being "a lot", how much do you think the occupational therapy tools created for your class during this capstone project have helped increase child participation during routine classroom activities?



Quotes From Survey

"The wonderful tools that were created were very helpful. The children gained motivation, focus, and engaged"

"The children's self-esteem would be nourished because individually they felt proud in being chosen in selecting their favorite song with the visual tools. They smiled and danced to their favorite song!"

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following people who made this capstone project possible:

- My expert mentor, Suzanne Satterfield, for her continued support, encouragement, and guidance throughout this experience
- The therapy team, teachers, and staff at First Steps Inc. for sharing their breadth of knowledge with me and welcoming me as part of their team for the past few months
- My faculty mentor, Kristin Mecha, for her ongoing advisement and feedback throughout the entire capstone process