



Using Focus Groups in Curriculum Design: Exploring Teachers’ Perspectives of Student Self-Advocacy

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Introduction

- The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) mandates that students’ Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) include a transition goal by the time they turn 16
- Transition goals include information related to employment, education, independent living skills, self-advocacy, home management, etc.
- Students do not seek appropriate services to assist with transition
 - Students believe they do not have a disability
 - Students do not desire to disclose their needs
 - Students do not possess essential skills to seek services or supports
- Responsibility shifts from the teacher or support staff to the individual to access accommodations
- Self-advocacy is an essential skills to possess for this transition period
- Research indicates that students who advocate for themselves are more successful in the post-secondary system and in the workplace
- There is minimal research on teachers’ perspectives of student self-advocacy and on the essential skills related to getting services to assist with transition into life after high school

Methods

Site and Population

- Equip is a non-profit in the Greater Birmingham, Alabama area
 - Partners with local school districts to teach life and vocational skills
 - Adult Day Program - Thrive

Research Design

- Collaboration with educators, students, Equip staff, and occupational therapy student
- One 60-minute focus group
- Self-Advocacy Curriculum created from focus group data and clinical observations

Recruitment

- Recruitment by email
- Inclusion: one year of teaching experience, employed by Equip, board-certified teacher
- Exclusion: holding of any managerial position at Equip

Data Collection and Analysis

- UAB HIPPA Compliant Zoom
- UAB Occupational Therapy recording device
- Transcription completed through Zoom and occupational therapy student
- Written journal of clinical observations

Results

Focus Group Themes

(1) Adult Support

“When you have parents that are willing to talk about life in general... it goes a long way...but since parents and the traditional family is not as important... it is becoming something that the schools and teachers are having to teach and deal with more. Like manners, behavior, anything like that”

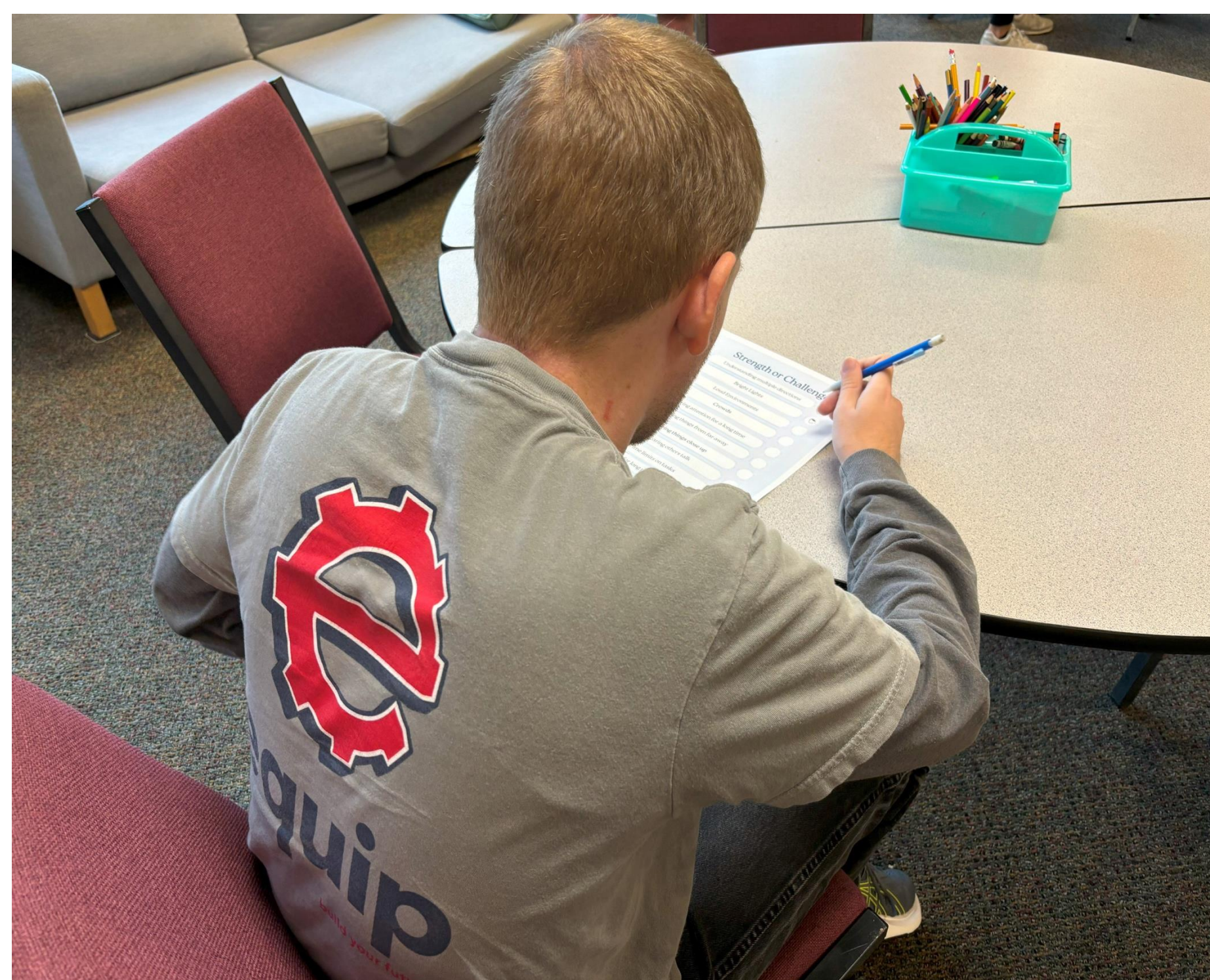
“... And teachers have so many things on their plate that are not really related to actual teaching, just like boxes they have to check.”

(2) Discomfort in Advocacy Situations

“I think there's also just such an aversion to the uncomfortable like any amount of discomfort. They are just completely repelled by like having an uncomfortable conversation... or just anything that feels uncomfortable, they don't want to do like they haven't been taught how to just, like, kind of plow through the discomfort and get it done.”

(3) Impact of Social Media

“I would say like social media has a lot to do with that too. Like they all think that they can, like be YouTubers or gamers or whatever... they have an unrealistic expectation of what is actually possible.



“...So maybe some of those norms too are kind of going away because like in the olden days, like no one would have been like this is my number, text me instead... social skills obviously are a big issue.

(4) Miscellaneous

“... You mentioned mental health. I think there's a huge lack of resources, I guess, out there”

“... When things get hard, they (students) have no idea how to handle it. They have very little ability to get through a difficult situation without somebody holding their hand through it”

Results Continued

Self-Advocacy Curriculum

The curriculum consists of three lessons emphasizing five core components:

- (1) The importance of self-advocacy, (2) identifying individual needs, (3) understanding rights, (4) determining who to discuss needs with, and (5) strategies for effective communication

Discussion & Conclusion

Discussion of Findings.

- To effectively implement the developed curriculum, several key factors must be considered before stepping into the classroom or working with a client.
 - Strong, trusting relationships with the individuals
 - Conversational lessons
 - Including real-world scenarios and experiences
 - Add visuals (GIFs, Tik-Toks, videos)
 - Meeting individuals where they are at

Limitations

- Breaking of exclusion criteria
- Low focus group participant number
- Narrow geographical area

Implications for OT Practice

- Consider implementing this curriculum among students or clients to enhance self-advocacy skills, thereby increasing engagement in personalized, relevant educational, life, and workforce experiences

Future Research

- Within site placement of Equip:
 - Implementation of self-advocacy curriculum to research student carryover of advocacy behaviors before and after participating in lessons
 - Testing student understanding of self-advocacy before and after participating in the lessons
 - Development of a mental health curriculum for Equip

Acknowledgement & Contact information

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