



Enhancing Safety and Communication Between Police Officers and Individuals with Learning Differences

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Introduction

- Interactions between police officers and individuals with learning differences have not always been safe or positive.
- Individuals with disabilities account for one third of deaths in police interactions (Diamond & Hogue, 2022).
- Police officers receive training on interacting with individuals with disabilities, but individuals with disabilities rarely receive education on how to safely interact with police.
- Improving outcomes should involve educating individuals with learning differences to navigate police interactions safely (Slavny-Cross et al., 2022).

Project Goal and Aim:

- Educate young adults with learning differences how to be safe around police officers
- Give police officers insight into their experiences through collaborative learning

Methods

Site and Population

- The Horizons School prepares young adults with learning differences for independent living

Project Design

- Weekly, one hour group sessions for a total of seven weeks.
- Individual sessions with one student
- One joint workshop with local police officers and a member of Birmingham's City Action Partnership (CAP)

Curriculum

- Be Safe video modeling teaching program with supplemental instruction

Data Collection

- Students completed the Be Safe pre/post test knowledge questionnaire of 20 true/false items and participated in guided discussions
- Local police officers completed pre/post test surveys administered via Qualtrics

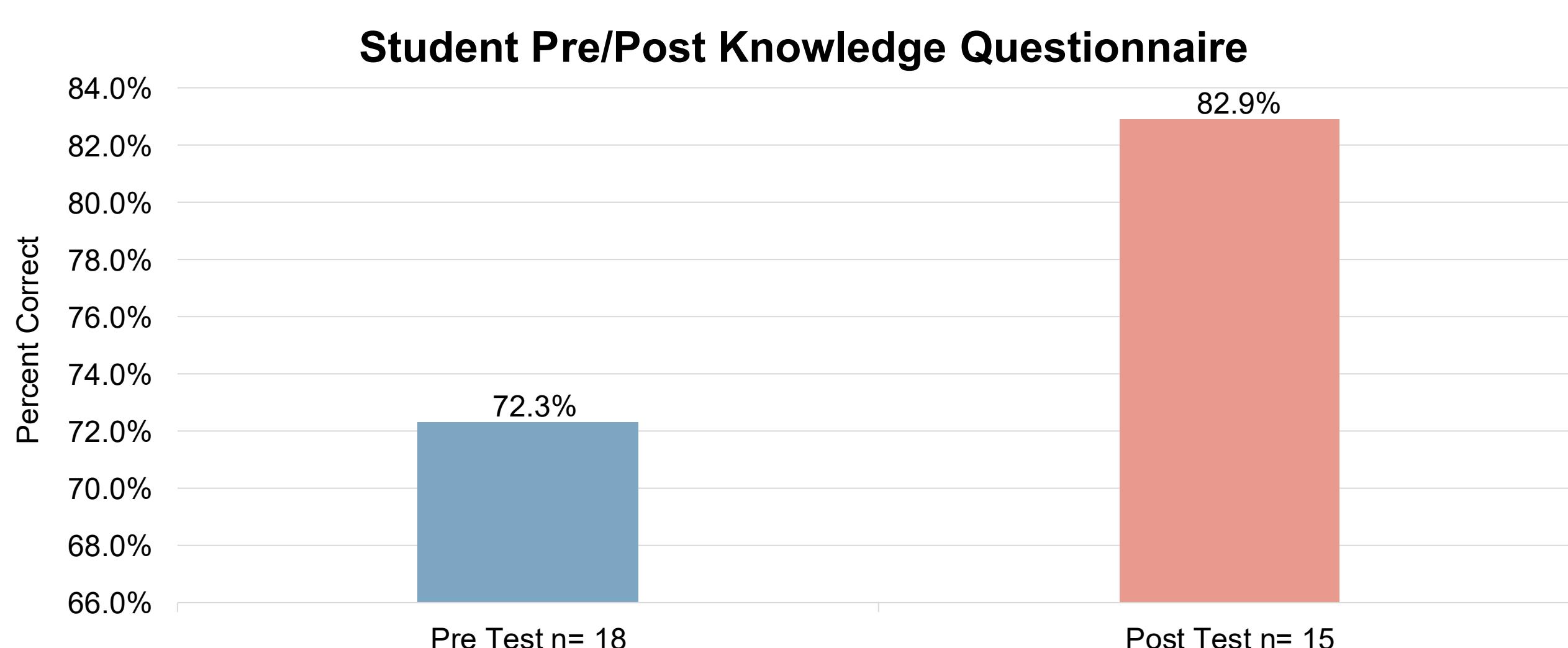
Methods Continued

Table 1. Curriculum

Be Safe The Movie	Week	Content
Episode 1	1	Laws Help Us Be Safe
Episode 2	2	Law Enforcement Officers Help Us Be Safe
Episode 3	3	Uniforms and Safety Tools
Episode 4	4	Stay Calm When You Meet The Police
Episode 5	5	Self-Disclosure
Episode 6	6	The Right to Remain Silent
Episode 7	7	BE SAFE in an Emergency



Results



Knowledge measured by the Be Safe questionnaire increased by 10.6% from pre-test to post-test.

Student Feedback

- "Police don't want to harm us."
- "I have more appreciation for what they do."
- "I used to be nervous but now I am more comfortable talking to them."

Discussion & Conclusion

Findings

- Improvements in survey results suggest that students understood and retained Be Safe concepts.
- Student feedback indicates a positive shift in attitudes toward police officers and increased confidence in navigating potential interactions.

Limitations

- Small sample size
- Inconsistent participation
- Uneven post-test response rate

Implications for OT Practice

- Occupational Therapists should use empathetic and humble approaches to enhance safety, foster understanding, and promote community inclusion to help individuals with learning differences confidently navigate interactions, especially with law enforcement.

Future Research

- Future Research should focus on creating change at the community level by providing opportunities for individuals with learning differences to engage with police officers before an emergency occurs.

References

Diamond, L. L., & Hogue, L. B. (2022). Law enforcement officers: A call for training and awareness of disabilities. *Journal of Disability Policy Studies*, 33(4), 104420732210948. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10442073221094803>

Slavny-Cross, R., Allison, C., Griffiths, S., & Baron-Cohen, S. (2023, July). Are autistic people disadvantaged by the criminal justice system? A case comparison. *Autism: the international journal of research and practice*. <https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC10291366/>

Acknowledgement & Contact information

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