Group vs Individual Physical Therapy in a Rural Setting: 
Pros, Cons and Lessons Learned

Michele Tourné PT, DPT PCS  
Samantha Calhoun, DPT  
Michele Harrison, PT MS  
1,3 Humboldt County CCS Eureka, CA  
2 Samuel Merritt University Oakland, CA

OBJECTIVES
1. Compare and contrast Physical Therapy service delivery models: individual therapy (one therapist working with child) to group therapy (more than one child participates in therapy at one time)
2. Describe advantages and disadvantages of group vs individual therapy
3. Discuss outcome measures used to measure change in group setting

METHODS
What we did
- Groups of 4-6 children, ages 4-7 and 8-12 twice weekly for 6-8 weeks
- 9 sessions were offered between 2010 and 2014
- Emphasis on strengthening, endurance, balance, and sports skills
- Enlisted the help of student volunteers and interns to help plan and assist with activities

OUTCOME MEASURES to measure change in performance and compare to same age peers
- 6 minute walk test
- Gait velocity (calculated from 6 min walk test)
- Timed single limb balance
- Functional Reach Test
- Strength: number of sit-ups, push-ups and length of jump
- 30 foot shuttle run

ADVANTAGES TO GROUP THERAPY
- Improved attendance
- Increased willingness to participate in challenging activities
- Therapists able to identify barriers to child's participation in community activity programs
- Children demonstrated more persistence in completing physically difficult activities
- Student volunteers and interns gained experience and knowledge about physical therapy

DISADVANTAGES TO GROUP THERAPY
- Increased time planning, equipment set up and clean up
- Required 1:1 child to adult ratio
- Close student supervision required

WHAT WE LEARNED
Motivation matters - To improve compliance/interest when testing outcome measures children collected cards for laps during 6 min walk test; reached up to touch ball or squeaky toy with forehead during timed sit-up and push up trials.

Learning novel skills improves interest - Children expressed pride after mastering basic sports skills such as trapping ball for soccer, volleyball forearm passes and serves or martial arts moves.

Parent's reported surprise at children's abilities - Some parents stated they were not aware their child could do some of the activities they observed them doing in fitness club.

Children "worked harder" - Therapists and parents observed that children had greater persistence with physically challenging activities during group compared to individual sessions.

Children began playing cooperatively in "pick-up" games - Therapists observed that children began to play reciprocally and organize their own games without adult direction.

Children improved in most outcome measures - statistical analysis was not done as group was not homogenous and some data was incomplete.

WHAT WE LEARNED
- Include non-disabled same age peers
- Partnering with community recreation and sports programs to facilitate inclusion
- Outcome measures that correlate increased fitness and sports skills to improved self-confidence

FUTURE PLANS:
- Partnering with community recreation and sports programs to facilitate inclusion
- Outcome measures that correlate increased fitness and sports skills to improved self-confidence

OUTCOME MEASURES
1. 30 foot shuttle run
2. Strength: number of sit-ups, push-ups and length of jump
3. Timed single limb balance
4. Functional Reach Test
5. 6 minute walk test

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