

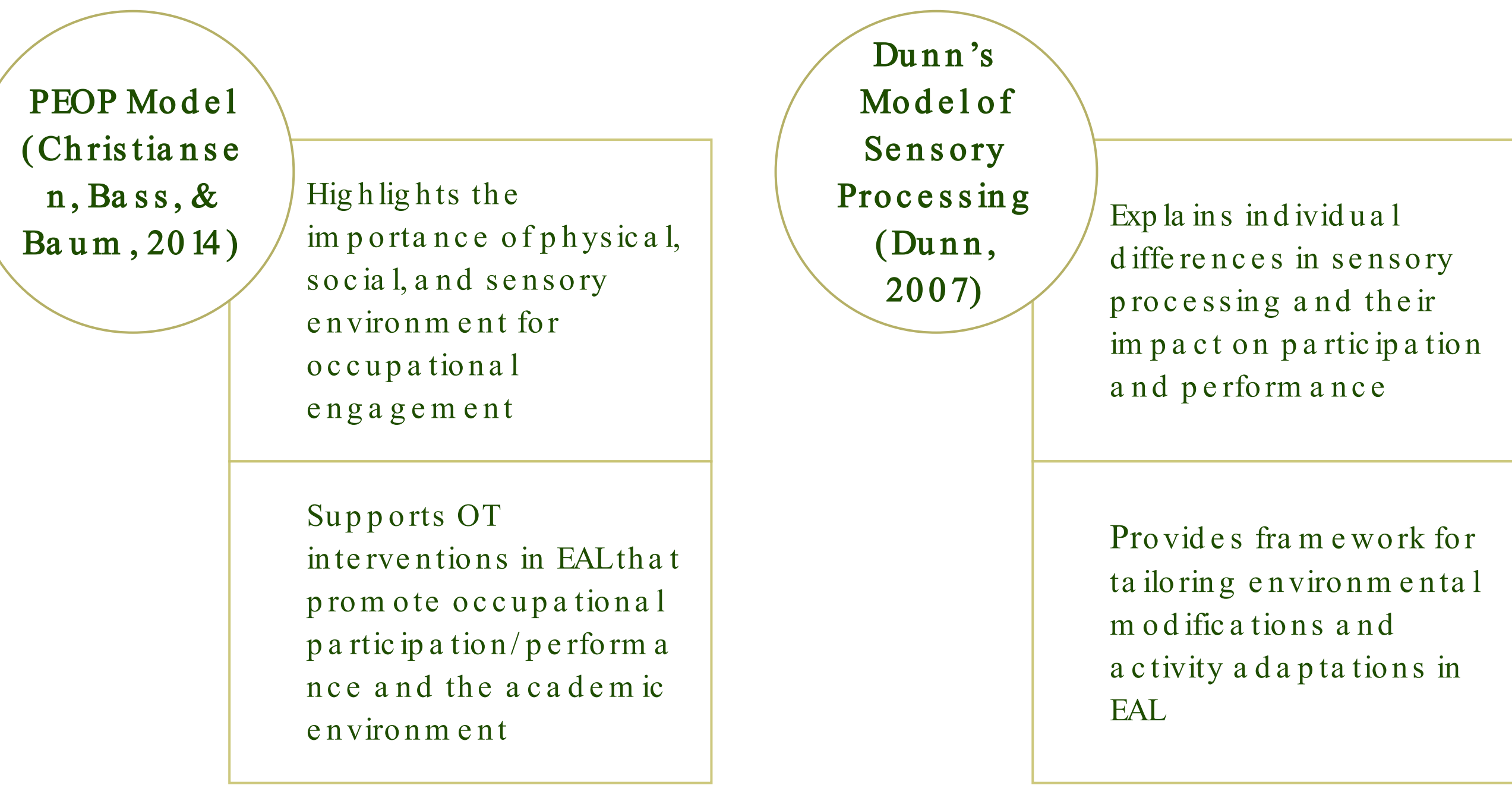
Equine Assisted Learning Through an Occupational Therapy Lens: A Programmatic Perspective

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BACKGROUND

- Literature Review:**
- Children with sensory processing disorder (SPD) often face challenges with self-regulation, engagement, and participation in classroom and barn-based learning (Koenig & Rudney, 2010; Butler, 2025).
 - Alternative schooling options are growing in popularity, especially in Colorado, as families seek non-traditional education (Hendrickson, 2023).
 - Despite benefits, these programs often lack structured sensory supports due to financial, policy, and geographic barriers (Koenig & Rudney, 2010).
 - Without proper support, students risk academic difficulties, social isolation, and increased stress (SPD Foundation, 2014).
 - Sensory challenges—such as over- or under-responsiveness to sound, touch, and movement—can cause stress, avoidance behaviors, and decreased engagement (Singer, 2015; Schueler, 2024).
- Gaps:** Limited research on Occupational Therapy’s (OT) role in the equine assisted learning (EAL) environment and use of evidence-based strategies for sensory-informed interventions in the alternative education setting.

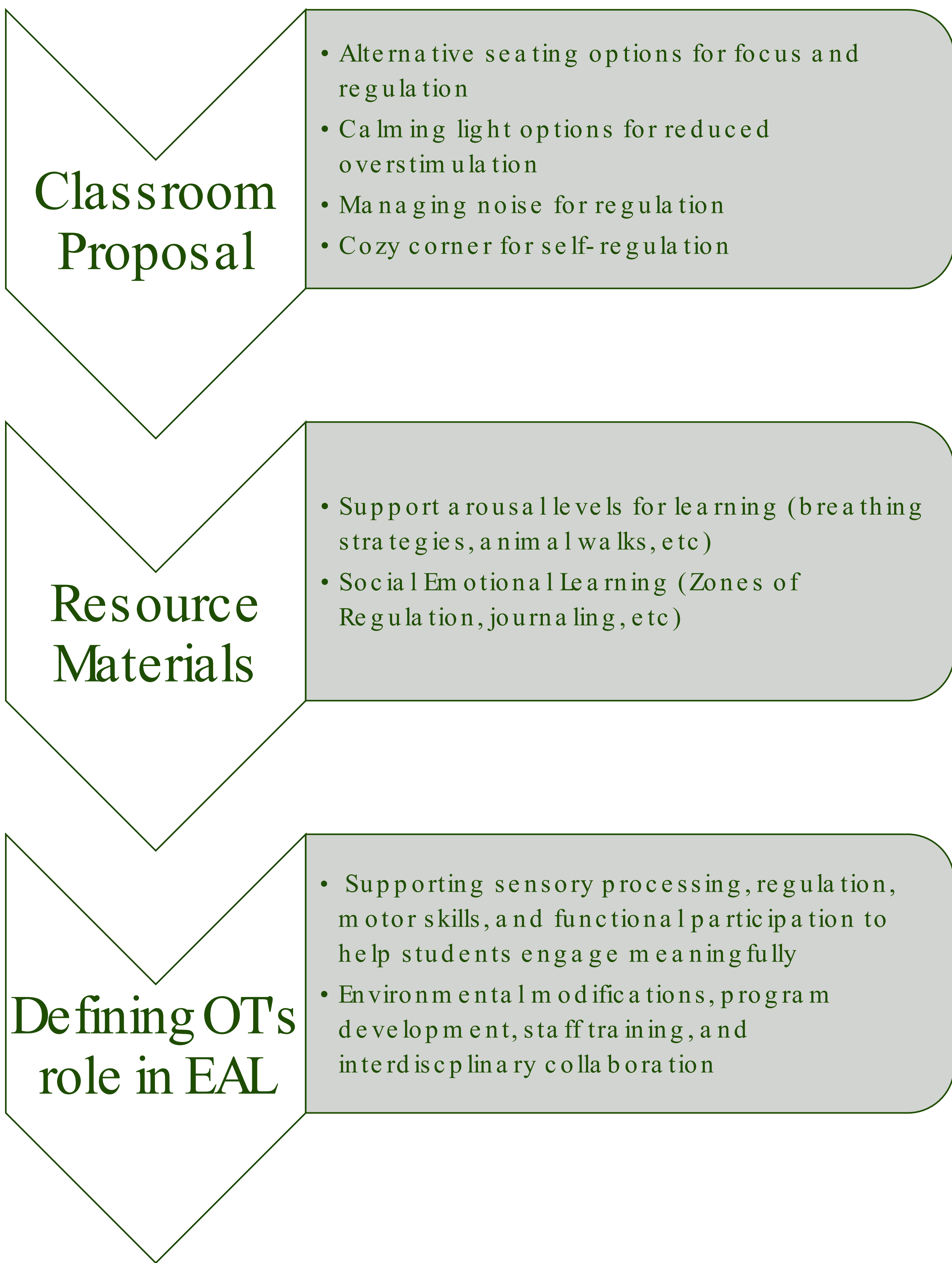
THEORETICAL FOUNDING



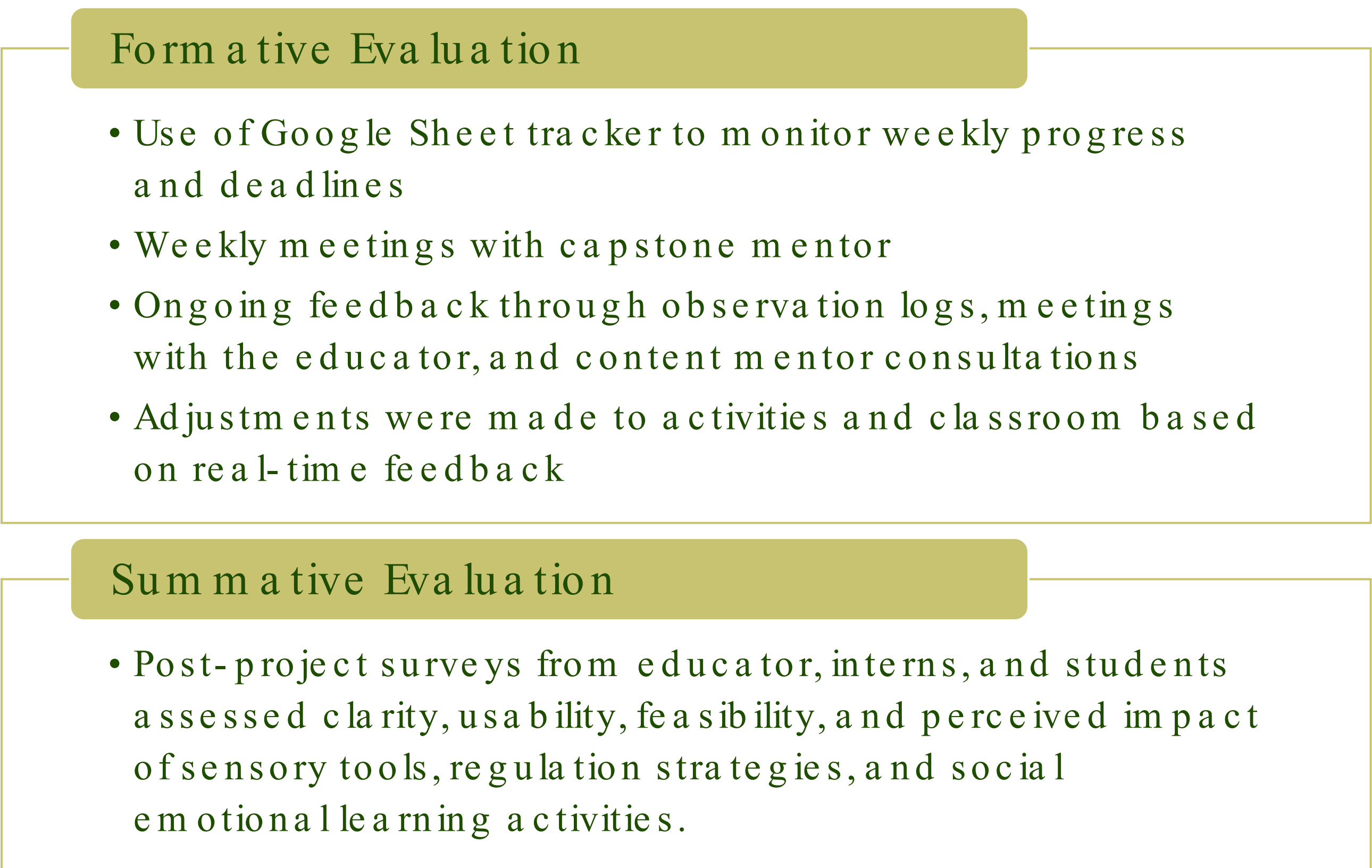
GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

- Project Goal:** to explore and clarify the role of occupational therapy within the EAL setting to increase students’ engagement and occupational performance in both classroom and barn environments.
- Project Objectives:**
- Needs Assessment (by week 4)**
Observe students and interview teacher to identify environmental and occupational performance challenges.
 - Professional Observation (by week 6)**
Interview and observe occupational therapists and Certified Therapeutic Riding Instructors conducting equine assisted therapy and equine assisted activities.
 - Classroom Proposal (by week 12)**
Create sensory-friendly classroom blueprint and develop environmental intervention strategies.
 - Resource Materials (by week 12)**
Develop resources to support regulation and social emotional learning.

ACTIVITIES



EVALUATION



FINDINGS

Student Survey Results	Intern Survey Results	Educator Survey Results
75% felt the content was accessible, but 25% struggled, suggesting instructional differentiation may still be needed. 65% felt the sensory tools like fidgets increased their ability to focus and engage in seated tasks. 55% felt more regulated and able to focus on learning after completion of exercises like breathing, wiggle breaks, etc.	- Both interns strongly agreed that the supports align with student needs; interns felt more confident addressing sensory needs - Intern 1 observed an increase in consistent outlets for regulation, increased peer inclusion and social engagement, and improved student focus during seated tasks compared to last year.	- Strong agreement across all categories: - Materials are clear - Increased confidence addressing sensory needs - High willingness to use strategies - Notable increase in student participation and performance during academic tasks compared to last year.

CONCLUSION

- Outcomes:**
- Immediate:** Improved student regulation, focus and engagement. Increased educator and intern confidence with sensory and social emotional resources.
 - Long-Term:** Demonstrated feasibility of OT integration in alternative educational settings and strengthened student self-regulation and occupational performance/participation.
- Sustainability:**
- Foundation started for ongoing OT consultation and educator training.
 - Durable sensory tools and systems in place for continued use.
- Impact**
- Enhanced inclusivity and participation for diverse learners.
 - Elevated educator capacity and highlighted OT’s role in EAL environments.

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REFERENCES

Please scan to see references, logic model, and deliverables.

