

Inclusive Faith-Based Learning: Enhancing Participation for Children with Developmental Disabilities

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BACKGROUND

^{1,2} Children with intellectual and developmental disabilities (IDD) frequently experience barriers to participation in community-based occupations, including faith-based education.

^{3,4} Sunday school environments provide opportunities for **social connection, identity development, and engagement** in meaningful spiritual occupations.

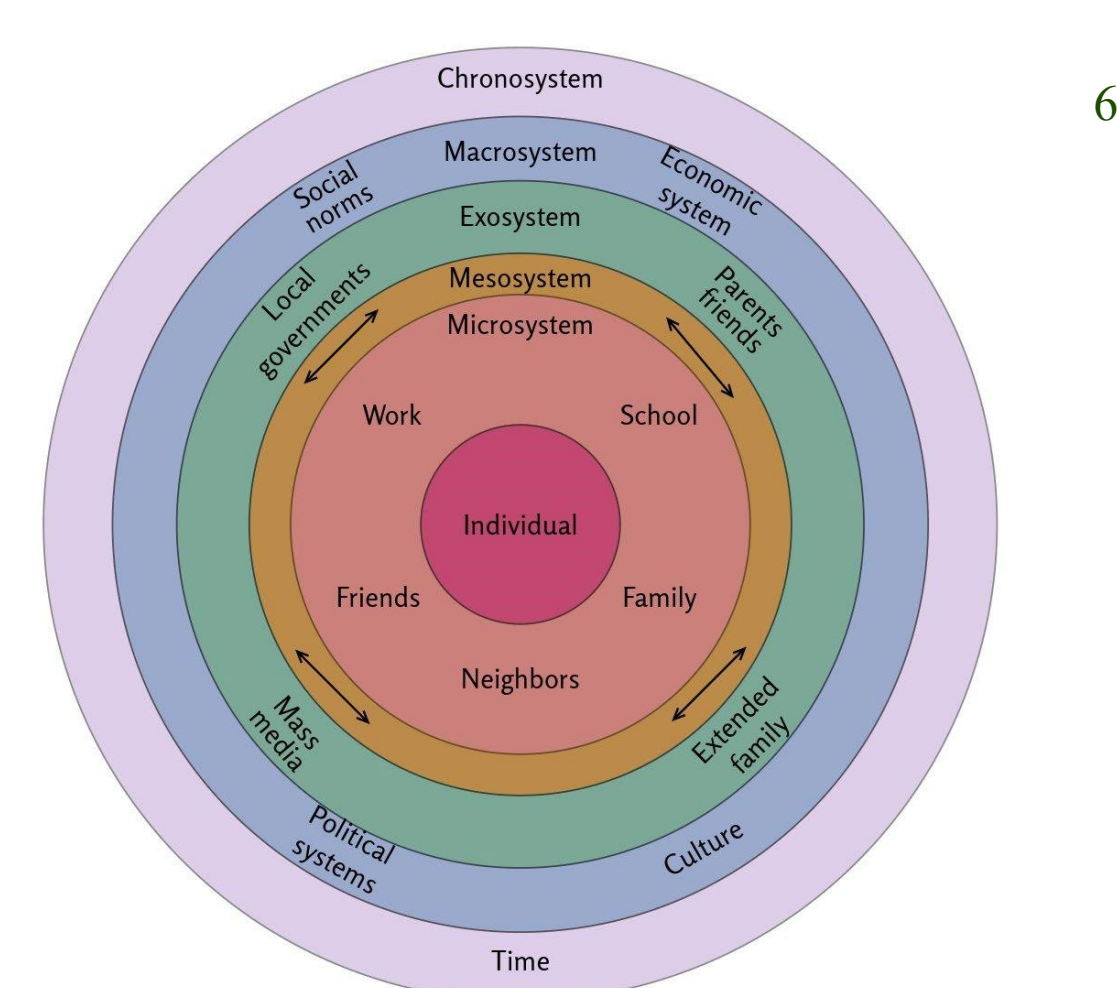
Barriers: limited curriculum flexibility, insufficient volunteer training, and inconsistent environmental supports.

Leads to **reduced participation, dysregulation, and decreased engagement** for children with IDD.

Purpose: development of an inclusive Sunday school curriculum paired with volunteer teacher training.

Aim: enhance participation, engagement, and accessibility by applying occupational therapy principles within a community-based setting.

Guided by Person–Environment–Occupation (PEO) Model and Ecological Systems Theory



GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goal: Develop and implement an inclusive faith-based curriculum and volunteer training program to enhance participation for children with IDD.

Objectives:

1. Develop a structured, adaptable Sunday school curriculum template designed to support diverse developmental needs.
2. Create and deliver volunteer teacher training focused on inclusion, regulation, and lesson adaptation.
3. Pilot the curriculum within the classroom environment.
4. Revise curriculum and training materials based on stakeholder feedback and observational findings.



ACTIVITIES

Activity Category	Activities Completed
PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT	
Stakeholder Collaboration	Conducted meetings with site leadership, similar programs, volunteers, and families to identify participation barriers, classroom needs, and program priorities.
Curriculum Development & Adaptation	Developed a structured, inclusive curriculum using Universal Design for Learning, developmental flexibility, visual supports, and sensory strategies.
Volunteer Training Development	Designed training materials focused on inclusion, sensory regulation, behavior support, trauma-informed care and practical lesson adaptation strategies.
EDUCATION & TRAINING	
Volunteer Education & Training	Delivered two volunteer training sessions, incorporating stakeholder feedback and real classroom scenarios.
IMPLEMENTATION & EVALUATION	
Pilot Implementation	Implemented adapted curriculum within classroom over a four-week pilot period.
Outcome Evaluation	Collected data through 12 volunteer self-assessments, two teacher/parent surveys, 14 participation observations, and eight qualitative stakeholder feedback.
Iterative Refinement	Revised curriculum materials, visual supports, and training content based on evaluation findings or stakeholder input.
SUSTAINABILITY	
Sustainability Planning	Finalized curriculum, participation tools, and training resources into accessible, adaptable materials for ongoing site use.

OUTCOME EVALUATIONS

Project evaluation utilized a mixed-methods approach, incorporating:

- Volunteer self-assessments
- Teacher and parent surveys
- Child participation observations
- Qualitative stakeholder feedback

Evaluation focused on perceived volunteer confidence, classroom feasibility, and observed child participation.

FINDINGS

Findings from this project indicated:

- Volunteers (n=12) confidence facilitating engagement and implementing inclusive lesson strategies increased from **50% pre-training to 91.6% post-training** based on self-assessment surveys.
- Classroom consistency improved through clear expectations for volunteers, structured schedules, and visual supports with readiness checklist.
- Participation observations suggested **increased child engagement during activities when visual supports and prompting strategies were used.**
- Stakeholder feedback highlighted the value of **adaptable curriculum structure, visual tools, and practical training resources** to support inclusion.

DISCUSSION

Applying occupational therapy within a faith-based setting supports improved participation for children with IDD.

Curriculum adaptations and volunteer education supported improved classroom structure and increased volunteer preparedness.

Developed: adaptable curriculum template, sensory tools, visual supports, and volunteer training materials. These supports helped volunteers match childrens needs with lesson demands.

The project also highlighted the role of occupational therapy in expanding inclusive practices within community environments beyond traditional clinical settings. By addressing person, environment, and occupational demands simultaneously, the program supported more consistent participation opportunities.

Long-term impacts: sustained inclusive practices, increased family engagement, and program growth to additional locations.

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REFERENCES

