

**Background:** All children should have the opportunity to live productive lives and feel like an accepted member of the community. However, children with disabilities have difficulty accessing and interacting in with peers and family in community environments. Children with disabilities have been found to have decreased quality of life, less satisfying relationships, have less occupational choices, and less opportunities to recreate with other children and their families. Occupational therapy's role in addressing barriers to participation for children with disabilities is noteworthy, but a focus on examining the benefits of community-based programs where occupational therapy can play a vital role is needed. Embedding occupational therapy into existing community programs can help children develop skills outside of the confines of typical service models. Parents and loved ones have been seeking complimentary approaches to help their children therefore examining the efficacy of these interventions should be entertained by the research community.

A complimentary approach that is increasing in popularity is using animals in interventions. Research has supported that children with emotional and behavioral disorders such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder have been found to benefit through animal interactions, specifically equines, in decreasing symptomology and improving social interaction. Integrating occupational therapy services into equine assisted activities may yield promising interventions and improve the quality of life and participation in children. Expanding community opportunities for children with disabilities is vital and needed to improve the life satisfaction and participation.

It is also an exciting time to be an occupational therapy educator. In 2014 the occupational therapy profession developed an educational research agenda to increase scholarly activity to determine the best methods to educate occupational therapy and occupational therapy assistant students. Because of the increasing demands in higher education for accountability, and our own evolutionary changes in degree requirements, it is vital to have an educational workforce with the requisite skills to prepare future clinicians for ever-changing health care delivery systems. Many occupational therapists become faculty members without the necessary educational background to effectively instruct students. While we have experienced faculty members here at ECU –I want to explore how to help all occupational therapy faculty members to be great teachers. This exploration is needed to determine best practices in occupational therapy education improve our ability to prepare our students to enter and thrive in their careers.

**Research Interests:** A primary interest is examining the influence of occupational therapy in equine assisted activities of children with disabilities with emotional and behavioral disorders. A secondary interest is in the scholarship of teaching and learning with a focus on universal design for learning, and instructional design methods to enhance student learning.

**Research Skills:** Quantitative research, mixed-methods research, quasi-experimental designs

**Research Directions:**

- Investigate the efficacy of occupational therapy in equine assisted activities in the development of executive function and social skills in children with emotional and behavioral disorders

- Explore how occupational therapy educators use universal design for learning principles in the classroom, as well as how occupational therapy practitioners can use these same principles to teach clients/patients when working on independence in daily living tasks