

2457

Translating and cultivating culturally-relevant occupations: promoting community inclusion through vocational participation using an occupational therapy-designed curriculum for children with developmental disabilities living in Ghana, West Africa.

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In many West African countries, individuals born with developmental disabilities are deemed unable to contribute to their communities due to centuries-old stigma and are often completely excluded from society. The most effective way to overcome this stigma and transform community perspectives is to enable excluded individuals to demonstrate their value and contributive potential via vocational training.

The objective of this work is to increase community inclusion of people living with developmental disabilities by creating an adapted vocational curriculum. Individuals receive vocational training in adaptation, modification, and task analysis to equip them with the skills necessary to participate in productive vocations native to their home villages.

This program is being piloted at a boarding school for children with developmental disabilities in Southern Ghana. An occupational therapist is working with each individual student to tailor a vocational curriculum specific to their individual strengths, areas of challenge, and village vocations.

Results of this work indicates that children with developmental disabilities are able to participate in vocational activities when given the opportunity through an adaptive curriculum. Participation in vocations has not only expanded their own visions for future employment and village inclusion, but has begun changing the perspectives of the village members around them.

West African countries are in dire need of individualized vocational programs for persons with disabilities to empower them to be contributive community members and be welcomed into the social collective. Occupational therapists' expertise in activity analysis, adaptation, and modifications make them the ideal candidate for designing and implementing these programs.