

## Project Description & Sites

**Areas of study:** 1) Program and Policy Development 2) Education 3) Advocacy  
**Population:** TK-6<sup>th</sup> grade students with and without identified disabilities, School faculty and families, OT students, OT Professionals  
**Site:** Ascension Lutheran School, Early Childhood Center and Elementary School  
**Description:** My doctoral capstone centered around outdoor education's role in supporting sensory development in children from TK- 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Throughout my project, I made contributions to Ascension Lutheran School's through developing nature-based classroom resources for children with sensory development impairments.



## Needs Assessment | Literature Review

**Needs Assessment:** The impact of teacher training or coaching on sensory development is limited. Teachers are involved daily with the care of children and may utilize SI and SP interventions to promote their students' development and growth.

**Literature Review:** The current literature supports that that occupational therapists value the benefits of working outdoors with children in developing sensory skills (Wilkinson et al., 2019). The dynamic nature of having classrooms outdoors creates constant new sensory stimuli to support learning for children (Carter, 2016). Changing conditions and textures outdoors provide many opportunities for children to problem-solve and create engaging social interactions.

## Christ | Scholarship | Service

"The highest heavens belong to the LORD, but the earth He has given to mankind." Psalm 115:16

"Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others." Philippians 2:3-4

## Project Completion and Outcomes

**Outcome Measure 1:** My doctoral capstone project consisted of identifying the role of occupational therapy practitioners in outdoor education, along with the potential influence of outdoor education on sensory development. To understand more about their outdoor education program, Nature Explore, the student spent time observing and assisting in the outdoor classrooms at Ascension Lutheran School. The student obtained more information regarding the needs of the staff on site through my expert mentor and school principal. Additionally, the student spent time researching sensory development, strategies, and therapy in the outdoors. By gathering this information, the student compiled a website along with other educational handouts regarding sensory development and outdoor education to be distributed to staff and families at Ascension Lutheran School.

**Outcome Measure 2:** In order to endorse occupational performance in the pediatric population with sensory development, the student served on the board of the Garden Team of Ascension Lutheran School since its inception and developed a proposal for an addition to the amphitheater and garden site. The addition consisted of sensory equipment accessible to many ages and disabilities. The student provided resources for progressive nature-based education centered around occupational performance in the school system by designing a curriculum guide along with policies and procedures with a sensory integration outlook in nature-based classrooms.

## Mission & Vision Statements

**Mission Statement:** To serve and promote occupational performance in the pediatric population through program development aimed at increasing the quality, quantity, and benefits of transformative outdoor learning for sensory development.

**Vision Statement:** Transforming the school system to provide progressive nature-based education to empower children who have experienced negative sensory processing impairments.

## Deliverables

- Compilation of digital resources expanding on evidenced based practice in the areas of (a,b,c)
- Certificate of Completion for CEUs
- Evaluation Plan
- Occupation-based formally written Reflection
- Proposal for an addition to the amphitheater and garden site
- Curriculum Guide
- OT-based Scope of Work
- Minimum of 3 Educational Handouts
- List of Policies and Procedures

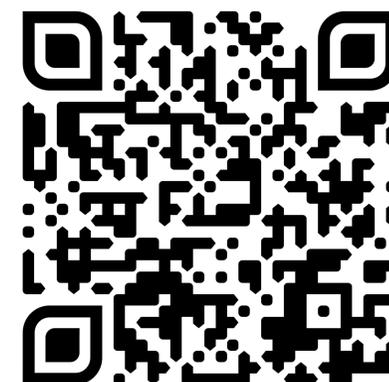


## Future Implications for OT

**Impact on OT:** Compilation of digital resources, evaluation plan, curriculum guide, handouts, and list of policies and procedures are available to future OTD students, staff and families of Ascension Lutheran School; future scheduled in-service class for staff outlining sensory development.

**Impact on my career:** My capstone allowed me to acquire specialized knowledge in sensory development and pediatrics in a school setting which I plan to utilize in my future career.

Student may be contacted at kusnierekd@huntington.edu



## KEY REFERENCES \*Full reference list and image reference list available upon request

Carter, D. (2016). A nature-based social-emotional approach to supporting young children's holistic development in classrooms with and without walls: The social-emotional and environmental education development (SEED) framework. *International Journal of Early Childhood Environmental Education*, 4(1), 9-24.  
 Clifford O'Brien, J., & Kuhaneck, H. (2020). *Case-Smith's Occupational Therapy for Children and Adolescents*. Elsevier.  
 Critz, C., Blake, K., Nogueira, E. (2015). Sensory processing challenges in children. *The Journal for Nurse Practitioners*, 11(7), 10-16. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.nurpra.2015.04.016>