Creating Meaningful and Purposeful Activities for Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities Attending a Day Program in Nashville, Tennessee

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Abstract

The purpose of this residency project was to create an activity workbook complete with purposeful and meaningful activities for the staff to utilize with the clients in the day program at Progress Inc. in Nashville, Tennessee. Skilled observations of the clients and staff were conducted in order to gain insights into the daily activities occurring in the day program at Progress Inc. Informal conversations and interviews were conducted with the clients, the staff, and the companions of the clients to help gain a better understanding of the clients. In order to obtain a complete picture of each of the five clients, extensive occupational profiles were created utilizing his/her current individual service plans (ISPs) and interviews, as well as informal conversations with staff, clients, and the client’s companions.

The activity workbook included the following for each activity: benefits for the clients, detailed explanations, how to grade the activities up/down, cost analysis, and photographs of the activity. The activities in the workbook were created to promote happy, healthy, and safe lifestyles, lifelong learning, physical exercise, increased participation in meaningful and purposeful activities, and enhanced quality of life for each of the five clients. The activity workbook and each client’s extensive occupational profiles were presented to Progress Inc.’s staff as a supplemental resource that could be used to enhance the quality of life for each of the five individuals attending the day program at Progress Inc.

Mission Statement

My mission is to promote inclusion and participation for adults with differing intellectual and physical disabilities. I desire to enhance the quality of life of adults with special needs by providing meaningful and purposeful activities that encourage happy, healthy, and safe lifestyles. To help this population grow personally and live their lives to the fullest, I am devoted to designing activities in which all can participate and enjoy.

About Progress Inc.

Progress Inc. is a nonprofit government organization founded in 1971 that offers a variety of services (Progress-Inc., n.d.). Progress Inc. offers services for seniors and individuals with intellectual and physical disabilities such as day programs; residential supports including companion services, homemaker, and personal care; respite care services; transportation services; and employment services. “Supported employment” provides individuals with intellectual disabilities the opportunity to work in a job tailored to suit their abilities with a full time job coach. The “community-based services” include cultural outings, social enrichment opportunities, and volunteer activities. The day program director stated that the clients that do not participate in the “community-based” services or the “supported employment” services stay at Progress Inc.’s facilities throughout the eight hour work day (S. Hutchison, personal communication, November 6, 2013). S. Hutchison stated that during their time spent in Progress Inc.’s day program, the clients typically clean remotes for Comcast or “lounge around” the facilities (personal communication, November 6, 2013). The day program for individuals with intellectual and physical disabilities is the service area within Progress Inc.’s organization in which I worked.
Annotated Bibliography

*Below are three examples of the most relevant articles from the literature review.


The researchers completed a systematic review of the literature on the topic of “…does engagement in meaningful occupation reduce challenging behavior in people with intellectual disabilities?” The researchers identified 13 relevant articles on this topic. The articles were then critically appraised and analyzed utilizing narrative synthesis. The researchers stated that the amount of research on this particular topic is limited and the quality of the research was variable; however, they were able to identify some broad themes throughout the research. The researchers found that low-demand sensory activities and complex task-related activities may be used to reduce challenging behaviors for this population. They also found occupation within a multisensory room is considered more effective than other types of activities. In conclusion, the researchers stated that a “skilled and structured approach for carrying out occupation may be effective in reducing challenging behavior.”


The researchers conducted a review of the literature to explore literature regarding individuals with intellectual disabilities and engagement in meaningful occupation, and discussed implications of the review with regard to occupational science, research, and policy development. The researchers discovered 28 relevant articles after a thorough search through the literature from 1993 through 2013. The researchers reported that individuals with intellectual disabilities appear to be at risk of low participation levels with regard to engagement in activity. With regard to health promotion and this population, the researchers found that these individuals also appear to have low participation levels of physical activity. The researchers stated that “People are regarded to be innately motivated to perform activities; to manipulate objects and engage with their environment, in order to actively pursue the fulfillment of their biological needs.” The researchers reported that having an enriched environment in which to participate in activities can enable an individual to cease a passive lifestyle and provide an opportunity for them to engage in meaningful activities that support adaptive behaviors necessary for life and decrease maladaptive behaviors. Lastly, the researchers reported the importance of co-occupation between service users and staff. The researchers stated that co-occupation has the potential to be a more satisfying and meaningful experience for both service users and staff as opposed to independent or parallel participation.


The purpose of this study was to investigate the meaning behind activities in an adult day program for individuals with intellectual and physical disabilities. The program has 10 staff members and 10 clients of the day program. The investigators conducted interviews with the staff members and the clients of the program and also observed the staff members working with the clients during activities in order to gather information. The researchers did a thematic analysis of the data and found that when the clients participated in activities and engaged with the staff, both the staff and the clients found the activities meaningful. The investigators also discovered that the clients and the staff found activities to be meaningful if they were participating together and also if the activity was a good “person-environment-occupation fit.”
Learning Goals

- Research current trends and best practice on how to design and grade meaningful and purposeful activities for adults with intellectual and physical disabilities.
- Research current trends and best practice about the meaning of choice for adults with intellectual and physical disabilities.
- Collaborate with the staff, clients, and companions/guardians at Progress Inc. in order to enhance program development for the adult day program.
- Organize and analyze all data collected from interviews, focus groups, and observations and develop an occupational profile for each client to use as a guide for creating meaningful and purposeful activities.
- Design and create quality activities for each of the five members of the day program at Progress Inc.; specifically, designing meaningful and purposeful activities that can be graded up or down depending on the differing abilities of the attending adults.

Outcomes

- Keep a list of all MESH terms used to research relevant literature.
- Read and then write annotated bibliographies on all relevant literature.
- Make a concept map including all relevant articles in order to keep track of all relevant literature and the relevant concepts of each article.
- Provide transcripts of all email conversations between myself, the staff, and the companions/guardians of the clients.
- Provide transcripts of all interview/informal conversations between myself, the staff, and the companions/guardians of the clients.
- Provide the written “minutes” of the meetings in which I attended at Progress Inc.
- Provide extensive occupational profiles for each of the five clients including current abilities, interests, likes, dislikes, and limitations (physical/cognitive), etc.
- Provide written descriptions of the activities created and the ways to grade them up or down.
- Provide photographs of all the materials needed to implement the activities.
- Provide a cost analysis of each activity created.
Examples from the Activity Workbook

Activity: Decorating Easter Eggs

*How to grade the activity up or down:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Was the activity too hard for the client? Try these suggestions.</th>
<th>Was the activity too easy for the client? Try these suggestions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Clients may need a demonstration of this activity before getting started.</td>
<td>• Try decorating the eggs by glueing on pieces of yarn or other small objects.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If a client is unable to do the activity on their own, try using hand over hand assistance if the client will allow it.</td>
<td>• Try having the clients stand to complete the activity in order to improve balance and build muscle strength.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If clients are having trouble dying the eggs, have the clients decorate the eggs with markers, crayons, or paint.</td>
<td>• Try having the clients copy/follow a pattern on the paper created by a staff member or have them make up a pattern on their own.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If a client is having a difficult time using a spoon or the metal egg holder, try placing the egg in a whisk and dipping in the dye.</td>
<td>• For the plastic eggs, try purchasing blank stickers and have the clients color the stickers first and then put them on the eggs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If clients are having a difficult time with dying or coloring the eggs, try having the clients place stickers on the eggs instead.</td>
<td>• Try making characters on the eggs. Example provided in the photo to the left.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Try using stamps with ink on the eggs instead of dye.</td>
<td>• Try having the clients paint or draw letters on the eggs. They could draw letters, numbers, or their name on the egg.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If the client is having difficulty holding onto the eggs, try having the clients place the eggs in the carton to decorate.</td>
<td>• Make an Easter egg garland out of plastic Easter eggs by punching holes in the tops and bottoms of the eggs and putting string through the holes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If the clients are having a difficult time with the boiled eggs, try decorating plastic eggs with stickers or markers.</td>
<td>• Try decorating the eggs and then having a staff member hide them and have an Easter egg hunt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• If clients are having difficulty peeling stickers from the pad, have a staff member peel the stickers off in advance and stick them on the edge of the table for easy access for the client.</td>
<td>• Encourage the client to sit up straight at the table resting their forearm as they decorate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• For clients with low vision, try to use contrasting colors as this makes it easier for them to see. For example, the boiled eggs are white, so try using darker colors to decorate that will be easier to see on the egg. Also, try taping a darker sheet of paper to the table so that the egg will be more visible. Also, there is a magnifying glass available at Progress Inc. for the use of those with low vision.</td>
<td>• Try giving the client a complicated picture with smaller areas to paint/color on the egg to increase fine motor coordination in the hand and fingers (see picture to left).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• For clients that become tired easily, it might be helpful to suggest taking breaks approximately every 10 minutes.</td>
<td>• Have the client do two things at a time. For example, have them carry on a conversation while decorating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• For clients with a limited attention span use a timer. When the timer goes off allow a 2 minute break. Then return and work another 10 minutes.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Benefits: This activity will help the client to increase development of the following cognitive abilities: judgment, concept formation, cognitive flexibility, sustained attention, working memory, recognition, generalization, impulse control, and coping and behavioral regulation. This activity also promotes the client to develop the following body functions: fine motor coordination, dexterity, bilateral integration, and functional reach. This activity also promotes artistic and creative abilities, and may help the client to develop their social skills when working in a group.
**Activity: Sewing**

*How to grade the activity up or down:*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Was the activity too hard for the client?</th>
<th>Try these suggestions.</th>
<th>Was the activity too easy for the client?</th>
<th>Try these suggestions.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Clients may need a demonstration of this activity before getting started.</td>
<td>● If a client is unable to do the activity on their own, try using hand over hand assistance if the client will allow it.</td>
<td>● Try having the clients copy/follow a pattern of different color thread created by a staff.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If a client is unable to hold the fabric with one hand and sew with the other, try having a staff member hold the fabric while the client sews.</td>
<td>● If clients are unable to hold the fabric with one hand and sew with the other, try having a staff member hold the fabric while the client sews.</td>
<td>● Try having the clients stand to complete the activity in order to improve balance and build muscle strength.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the client is unable to grasp the smaller metal needle, have them use the thicker plastic needles. These are easier to grip.</td>
<td>● If the client is unable to grasp the smaller metal needle, have them use the “needle threader.” If they are still unable to thread the needle, try having a staff member thread it.</td>
<td>● Try having the clients sew on buttons or beads.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For clients that cannot thread the needle, try having them use the “needle threader.” If they are still unable to thread the needle, try having a staff member thread it.</td>
<td>● For clients that have trouble following a pattern, try having them sew a straight line first. Once they are able to do this accurately, try slowly introducing harder patterns. You can start with a line, then a square, then a triangle, then a circle, then a start, and so on.</td>
<td>● Encourage the client to sit up straight at the table resting their forearm as they sew to encourage good posture.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For clients that have low vision, try to use contrasting colors as this makes it easier for them to see. For example, if a client chooses lighter fabric, then try having them use a darker color for the string. Also, there is a magnifying glass available at Progress Inc. for the use of those with low vision.</td>
<td>● For clients with low vision, try using contrasting colors as this makes it easier for them to see. For example, if a client chooses lighter fabric, then try having them use a darker color for the string. Also, there is a magnifying glass available at Progress Inc. for the use of those with low vision.</td>
<td>● Have the client do two things at a time. For example, have them carry on a conversation while sewing.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For clients that become tired easily, it might be helpful to suggest taking breaks approximately every 10 minutes.</td>
<td>● For clients that become tired easily, it might be helpful to suggest taking breaks approximately every 10 minutes.</td>
<td>● Try having the clients make a pillow.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For clients with a limited attention span use a timer. When the timer goes off allow a 2 minute break. Then return and work another 10 minutes.</td>
<td>● For clients with a limited attention span use a timer. When the timer goes off allow a 2 minute break. Then return and work another 10 minutes.</td>
<td>● Try having the clients make a stuffed animal.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Try having the clients do lacing cards.</td>
<td>● Try having the clients do lacing cards.</td>
<td>● Try cross-stitching.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Benefits:** This activity helps the client to increase development of the following cognitive abilities: judgment, concept formation, cognitive flexibility, sustained attention, working memory, impulse control, and coping and behavioral regulation. This activity also helps the client to increase development of the following body functions: fine motor coordination, dexterity, bilateral integration, and functional reach. This activity also promotes artistic and creative abilities, and will help the client to develop their social skills when working in a group and sharing supplies.
References


