THE EFFECTS OF A MONTESSORI-BASED ACTIVITY ON AFFECT AND ENGAGEMENT IN PERSONS WITH DEMENTIA

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Purpose: Activities for persons with dementia can produce many benefits such as providing cognitive and social stimulation and reducing behavioral problems (Camp, Skrajner, & Kelly, 2005). Montessori-based activities are designed with specific principles in mind such as building on the participant’s existing skills, repetition, and making tasks that are self-correcting (Camp & Skrajner, 2004; van Rijn, van Hoof, Stappers, 2010). The purpose of the current study is to compare the effects of a Montessori-based group activity to typically-offered group activities in a sample of individuals with moderate to severe dementia living in a memory-care unit of a local nursing home. Procedure: Eight individuals meeting the following criteria have been recruited for this study: an existing diagnosis of dementia, regular participation in activity programming, and adequate hearing, vision, and physical ability to participate. We are currently in our second week of experimental data collection. Dependent variables include participant affect (positive or negative) and engagement in the activity (active, passive, or non-engagement), which is measured through direct observation (e.g., Orsulic-Jeras, et al., 2000). During baseline, typical activities will be observed. One participant is observed for a 10-second interval, researchers then record affect and level of engagement. Then, a different resident will be observed in the same manner. Observations will continue to rotate until the activity session is complete. During experimental phase, participants will play “Memory Bingo”. Memory Bingo consists of four cards containing a word linking to corresponding cards that are called out. Participants must flip over the matching card. Data collection in experimental will be identical to the baseline. An A-B-A-B experimental design will be used for data collection. The effects of the intervention will be graphed and visually inspected. Expected Results: It is anticipated that the Montessori-based activity will produce greater levels of positive affect, less observed negative affect, and more active engagement compared to group-based activities that are typically offered. Conclusions and Implications: The implications for the individual participants may include increased enjoyment and participation in activities. The benefits of structured activities can include promoting physical health, providing cognitive and social stimulation, and reducing the occurrence of behavioral problems. There is a need for new activity programs that are interesting, engaging, and appealing to this population. Montessori-based activities may offer a promising alternative approach to activity programming for persons with dementia.