

Impact of Experiential Learning on Executive Function, Language Development, and Quality of Life for Adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD)

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Abstract : This study reports the outcomes of an 8-week experiential learning program for 6 adults with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (IDD) at a day habilitation program. The intervention foci for this program include executive function, language learning in the domains of expressive, receptive, and pragmatic language, and quality of life. The interprofessional collaboration aimed at supporting adults with IDD to reach person-centered, functional goals across skill domains is critical. This study is a significant addition to the speech-language pathology literature in that it examines a therapy method that potentially meets this need while targeting domains within the speech-language pathology scope of practice. Communication therapy was provided during highly valued and meaningful hands-on learning experiences, referred to as the Garden Club, which incorporated all aspects of planting and caring for a garden as well as related journaling, sensory, cooking, art, and technology-based activities. Direct care staff and an undergraduate research assistant were trained by SLP to be impactful language guides during their interactions with participants in the Garden Club. SLP also provided direct therapy and modeling during Garden Club. Research methods used in this study included a mixed methods analysis of a literature review, a quasi-experimental implementation of communication therapy in the context of experiential learning activities, Quality of Life participant surveys, quantitative pre- post- data collection and linear mixed model analysis, qualitative data collection with qualitative content analysis and coding for themes. Outcomes indicated overall positive changes in expressive vocabulary, following multi-step directions, sequencing, problem-solving, planning, skills for building and maintaining meaningful social relationships, and participant perception of the Garden Project's impact on their own quality of life. Implementation of this project also highlighted supports and barriers that must be taken into consideration when planning similar projects. Overall findings support the use of experiential learning projects in day habilitation programs for adults with IDD, as well as additional research to deepen understanding of best practices, supports, and barriers for implementation of experiential learning with this population. This research provides an important contribution to research in the fields of speech-language pathology and other professions serving adults with IDD by describing an interprofessional experiential learning program with positive outcomes for executive function, language learning, and quality of life.

Keywords : experiential learning, adults, intellectual and developmental disabilities, expressive language, receptive language, pragmatic language, executive function, communication therapy, day habilitation, interprofessionalism, quality of life

Conference Title : ICSPA 2024 : International Conference on Speech Pathology and Audiology

Conference Location : New York, United States

Conference Dates : July 11-12, 2024