Students & Persons with Dementia: Learning through Service

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Disclosure Statement

• We are employed by the Texas Tech University Health Sciences Center (State of Texas) in our capacities as course instructors and clinical supervisors.

• TTUHSC had collaborative community service agreements with two long-term care facilities in our community.

• We do not receive financial or non-financial compensation from the long-term care facilities when we bring students to provide community service activities.
Benefits of Service-Learning (S-L)

- Community Service
- Volunteerism
- Field Education
- Perception/Worldview Shifts
- Enhanced Community Relations
Evidence-Based Practice (EBP) for Dementia

• Multisensory information
• Emotionally charged, personally relevant information
• Paired with motor movements
• Repeated priming

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Improved Communication & Memory
Project Participants

- SLP Graduate Students
  - \( n = 40; \) 20 per facility
- Residents with dementia from 2 Long-Term Care Facilities
  - \( n = 16: \) 4 per group; 2 groups at each facility
Goals for SLP Students

1. Acknowledge person first (rather than disorder).
2. Consider impact of relationship between a person and those with whom he/she interacts.
3. Demonstrate the following skills:
   a. Conduct a chart review
   b. Complete a cognitive-communicative screening and write report
   c. Lead a Montessori-based therapeutic activity
   d. Collect data re: residents’ level of engagement
   e. Evaluate peers conducting an interactive session with resident(s)
Goals for Residents

1. Participate in activities that promote positive physical, emotional, and social interactions.
2. Constructively engage with individuals in environment.
3. Reveal life challenges and strengths as a result of dementia to caring students who demonstrate unconditional positive regard at all times.
Procedures

• Total of 4 Visits--Student Roles:
  • Leader/Facilitator for small group activity
  • Peer evaluator for small group activity
  • Data collector during small group activity for assigned resident
  • Screener for cognitive-communicative strengths and weaknesses for assigned resident
Montessori-Based Activities for Small Groups

• Sorting
  • Promote and maintain the ability to stay on task
  • Promote the development of both gross and fine motor skills
  • Promote hand-eye coordination
  • Reinforce skills necessary for everyday living, such as sorting and separating
Montessori-Based Activities (Cont.)

- Organizing
  - Promote and maintain the ability to stay on task
  - Promote the development of both gross and fine motor skills
  - Promote hand-eye coordination
  - Reinforce skills necessary for everyday living, such as sorting and separating
Montessori-Based Activities (Cont.)

• Polishing
  • Promote fine and gross motor skills
  • Develop hand-eye coordination and sequencing of actions
  • Provide immediate feedback for actions taken on the environment
Montessori-Based Activities (Cont.)

• Folding Clothes
  • Enhance fine and gross motor skills
  • Develop hand-eye coordination
  • Create a sense of order and independence
Montessori-Based Activities (Cont.)

• Pouring (back up activity)
  • Enhance fine and gross motor skills
  • Develop hand-eye coordination
  • Create a sense of order and independence
Measures Used

• Measures
  • Resident Evaluation
    • Rated every 2 minutes
    • Desired Behaviors vs. Less Desired Behaviors (primary & secondary) during Montessori-based, small group activities
  • Student Facilitator/Peer Evaluation
    • During Montessori-based activities
  • Student Journal Entries
    • Prior to project, after 1st visit, after project completion
  • End-of-program Student Survey
    • Perspectives on service learning
    • Attitudes toward community involvement
Results from Student Surveys: Perspectives Regarding Service Learning Experience

- took more responsibility for own learning
- daily life application
- better understanding of course lectures and reading assignments
- more service learning should be implemented into more classes
- increased awareness of roles of health care professionals in other disciplines
- interest in additional service learning classes
Student Journal Entries:
Example #1
(Before Project)

“I am excited to get a chance to see the inside of a long-term care facility and get an idea about what working with a resident would entail...I want to engage the residents and get them to participate in the activity that I lead...I want to learn better ways to communicate and interact with elderly people with dementia. I was always embarrassed around my grandpa because I wasn’t comfortable enough to know how to respond. From this experience, I want to gain confidence and competence around people with dementia.”
Student Journal Entries: Example #2
(After first visit)

“Next week is my turn to lead the activity, so I’m nervous about that...The activity I observed today was ‘organizing.’ I thought that the leader handled the situation well...There was more chaos than peacefulness, although that was probably caused by our presence! I am looking forward to doing a (cognitive) screening with my resident because I am curious about her cognitive ability...The personal contact I had with her has made the screening more meaningful to me. I can now see implications for the screening after being around the residents...I hope that my leading activity goes smoothly next week and the group fully participates.”
Example #3 (Project Completion)

“I am going to miss visiting the residents, and I am a little sad that the project is over...I felt like I did make an impact and difference in the lives of the residents...I did not expect to be as comfortable and to enjoy this project as much as I did...This experience has given me more knowledge as to how to act and treat those with dementia...I think this is a great experience for someone in my same position.”
Conclusions

• Students perceived benefits from participating in a service learning project.
• Student learning appears to be a promising method for bridging classroom and clinical instruction.
• Residents seem to enjoy small group, hands-on activities and primarily demonstrated desired (vs. less desired) behaviors.
Questions?
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