

MONTESSORI-BASED ACTIVITIES FOR PERSONS WITH DEMENTIA:
EFFECTS ON ENGAGEMENT AND AFFECT

by

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Abstract

This study focuses on the importance of activity as an intervention with persons with dementia. Continuity theory serves as a general guide, along with research on leisure in later life and the theory of personhood in dementia, to explain the importance of engaging persons with dementia in activities. Implementing purposeful activities with persons with dementia has been demonstrated to reduce boredom and agitated behavior and to maximize the functional abilities of the individual. The important role of task analysis and adaptation of the activity to personal needs (motor, psychological, social) and past interests of the individual is central to the study, which utilizes meaningful activities as suggested in the literature from the field of occupational therapy.

The current study addresses specific principles of activity for persons with dementia and applies a well-established educational philosophy from the field of child development to this population. Previous research has demonstrated that Montessori activities, modified for use with persons with dementia, can facilitate positive engagement and affect. Montessori-based activities were incorporated in a model of well-being in dementia (Coppola, 1998; Hasselkus, 1998), conducted in small parallel group settings, (i.e., referred to a group of individuals situated together but individually completing the same task), included a verbal approach to facilitating meaning of the activities. The amount and type of engagement and affect were compared during Montessori-based activities and regularly scheduled activities of 10 older adults with dementia at a university-based adult day service.

Significantly higher levels of constructive engagement (motor or verbal response to activity) and lower levels of non-engagement (sleeping, staring into space) were exhibited during Montessori-activities compared to regular activities. Principles of activities for persons with dementia along with principles of the Montessori-based program are presented. Methodological modifications are suggested, and implications for research and practice are discussed.