

Activities for Residents with Dementia Using Montessori Techniques

Orsulic-Jeras, S; Schneider, N. M.; Camp, C. J., Nicholson, P. & Helbig, M. (2001). Montessori-Based Dementia Activities in Long-Term Care: Training and Implementation. *Activities, Adaptation & Aging*, 25, 3/4, 107 - 119.

“Providing meaningful activities in long-term care settings increases the quality of residents’ lives by providing a greater sense of self-worth and adding purpose to life. Similarly to the children with whom Maria Montessori worked, when given activities seen as purposeful, residents exhibit lower levels of agitation and increased positive affect (pg. 118).”

Cameron Camp and his colleagues at Menorah Park Center for Senior Living in Beachwood, Ohio have been using Montessori-based activities in their long term care settings for persons with dementia for some time. These activities are discussed in this article. Modifications sometimes needed to be made from the Montessori classroom activities for children to cause the activities to be more accessible and useable for elders. For example, words under a picture or words alone may be used in sorting activities for elders whereas only a picture would be used with children. Persons with dementia often can identify single words and short phrases after they have lost the ability to recognize pictures (pictures may be difficult to distinguish because of sensory deficits or compromised brain functioning).

Picture (or word) sorting works well as an individual activity. Picture (or word) cards to be sorted can be given to a resident who is sitting idly. Pictures from two distinct categories such as plant/animal or adult/child, etc. (subjects tailored to fit the individual’s interests such as sports make an excellent choice) are given to the resident who sorts them into the appropriate category. One staff member is able to walk around and provide assistance to several residents who are individually engaged in the sorting activity. Higher functioning residents can mentor a resident with more advanced dementia through this activity.

Group sorting is similar to individual sorting and has been found effective with persons in a more advanced stage of dementia. A large board is used with two separate halves – one for each category (such as “male/female”). To enhance participant’s focus in group sorting, each participant gets a copy of every picture (or words) that will be discussed. This gives everyone the opportunity to comment on the cards. The activity focus is social interaction, reminiscence and discussion – not decision-making.

This article lists the Montessori Principles as well as gives descriptions of Memory Bingo and Question Asking Reading (QAR) -- other activities discussed in the article. Both of these activities are used for groups. They can be adapted for use with persons with mild or moderate dementia. Memory Bingo can even be used for persons with more advanced dementia.

The staff members who help residents with activities at Menorah Park participated in three training sessions: *Understanding Dementia*, *The Montessori Method*, and *Presenting Montessori-Based Activities*. The manual to supplement the staff training sessions was developed by Cameron Camp and his colleagues.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE: It is particularly helpful to be able to adapt activities as persons with dementia progress through more advanced stages of the disease process. The activities that are discussed in this article allow for that. Using Montessori-based activity programming may be a way to provide persons with dementia individual as well as group activity opportunities.