Outcomes of Project-Based Therapy in Individuals with Autism

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INTRODUCTION

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)
The number of adults with ASD is rapidly increasing, and there are limited resources available for this population (Bishop-Fitzpatrick, Minshew & Eck, 2013; Gelbar, Smith, & Reichow, 2014). Thus, there is a growing need for programs/interventions that improve adaptive behaviors necessary for employment in adults with ASD.

Autistry Studios
- Pre-vocational, project-based therapy program for ASD in San Rafael, CA
- Focuses on acquiring technical and social skills through hands-on projects
- Weekly 4-hour sessions
- 1:1 mentoring with clients and typically developing peers

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

The purpose of this study is to measure the progress of adaptive behaviors of individuals diagnosed with ASD enrolled in Autistry’s program.

DESIGN & METHODS

Design
- Exploratory prospective cohort design
- The Brief Adaptive Behavior Scale (BABS) was administered to clients by peer mentors following each session over the course of nine treatment sessions.

Participants
- 11 individuals with ASD enrolled in Autistry’s project-based therapy program

Measure
- The BABS measure of adaptive behaviors was created for this study and informed by The Vineland-II and the BRIEF-II.

BRIEF ADAPTIVE BEHAVIOR SCALE (BABS)

The BABS measures the improvement of adaptive behaviors in Autistry clients, specifically in the domains of executive functioning (EF), socialization (SOC), and self-regulation (SR).
- The BABS quantitatively tracks Level of Assistance High (LoAHigh), and Level of Assistance Low (LoALow), frequency (FRQ), and Total Scores of the three domains.
- Each item consists of two Likert scales that capture the frequency and level of assistance of participants’ adaptive behaviors.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item Description</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Level of Assistance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Client manages frustration well.</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client keeps comfortable distance between self and others</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Client remains on task while working on his/her project</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5</td>
<td>1 2 3 4 5 6 7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1. BABS scoring sample. The frequency scores range from 1 to 5. The level of assistance scores range from 1 to 7. The single FRQ score is circled, the LoALow scores are crossed out, and the LoAHigh scores are circled.

RESULTS

- Total scores for LoALow and LoAHigh improved significantly between weeks 1 and 9.
- FRQ Total and domain scores did not change across weeks.
- LoAHigh and LoAHigh scores for EF and SOC improved significantly between weeks 1 and 9.
- SR scores did not change across weeks.
- Large effect size across all domains

CONCLUSION

- Participation in Autistry Studios effectively improves adaptive behaviors in individuals with ASD.
- The BABS is a sensitive measure and captures subtle changes in adaptive behaviors. The BABS is particularly sensitive to highest and lowest levels of assistance.
- The BABS is a novel assessment and must be interpreted with caution. Future research is necessary to explore the validity and reliability of the BABS.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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