The Development of a Manual for Working with Individuals with Specific Intellectual/Developmental Disabilities in the Classroom and in the Arts

by

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Abstract

The manual “Working with Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities in the Classroom and in the Arts” was developed to be used by staff, students, and volunteers at agencies that emphasize classroom learning and creative arts with this population. The manual contains material from empirically validated sources, all pertaining to appropriate and effective ways to work with this population in both a general and art setting. The manual is broken down into two sections. The first section, entitled Working with Individual’s who have Intellectual Disabilities focuses on working with individuals with intellectual disabilities in a classroom setting. It first goes into detail regarding two common types of developmental disabilities, Down Syndrome and Autism Spectrum Disorder. Within these sections there is information regarding both teaching and communication tips and techniques. Following this subsection, there is an area entitled Working with Individual’s with Intellectual Disabilities: In General. This area emphasizes key items that should be taught, and how to address the issues that may arise when working in a classroom, or group, setting. Upon completion, the manual was reviewed by staff at an agency that emphasized working with individuals with intellectual disabilities in the classroom and in the arts. An evaluation form was created containing questions regarding the content, appearance, and generalizability of the manual. These completed surveys indicated that while there is room for improvement, the manual is useful in providing information about working with individuals with intellectual disabilities. Time constraint was a major issue with regards to the creation of this manual, and therefore, not everything was included that was wanted by staff. This is why the mean scores in the staff surveys were not higher. Recommendations for the future pertain around an increased inclusion of different diagnoses and art mediums. Attaining more information that addresses these topics could help increase the overall uses of the manual, and assist in generalization to other agencies and programs. It is also recommended that more information be attained regarding conducting specific classes in each of the arts. Having a section providing a detailed example, with specific instructions, on how to run a class with this population would be highly beneficial for those reading it.
Running Head: DEVELOPMENT OF A MANUAL

Acknowledgments

I would like to take this opportunity to thank some individuals who have been supportive and influential throughout the development of my thesis.

Thank you to my placement supervisor, Geris, and my agency supervisor, Diane, for providing continuing support and feedback throughout the creation of this thesis.

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Chapter I: Introduction

In many cases, individuals with intellectual disabilities enjoy learning. Developing or improving skills can create feelings of importance, independence, and intelligence (Green, Reid, Rollyson & Passante, 2005). In addition, learning in a classroom environment can create a variety of group interactions that are important in the development of positive social behaviour (Repp & Karsh, 1992). While working with this population in a classroom setting can yield positive results in both skill development and social interaction, it can be difficult to conduct such a class due to differing levels of functioning and diagnoses (Repp & Karsh, 1992). Because of these difficulties, it is important that teachers be aware of effective and ineffective ways of communicating with this population and how to teach them specific skills in a way that is understandable by all members of the class. The person who is providing the lesson must take into consideration the levels of functioning, diagnoses, and special needs that may affect an individual’s ability to learn and retain information (Green et al., 2005).

Because there are so many areas that an individual must take into consideration when teaching or developing skills in individuals with intellectual disabilities, it is important, especially when just beginning to work with this population, to have relevant resource material. The purpose of this thesis is to develop a manual specifically designed to provide basic information on communicating with and teaching skills to individuals who have intellectual disabilities. The goal of this thesis is a manual that can be viewed by staff, placement students, and volunteers at the agency, which provides a wide variety of information, in a manner that is easily comprehended.

At the time of this thesis, there were no readily available resources, attainable by the agency, detailing specific strategies or approaches to use when working with individuals with intellectual disabilities in a classroom setting. While there were some resources outlining basic information on what to expect when working with this population, proper techniques regarding skill development and communication were not outlined in one specified manual. Therefore, attaining information from a wide variety of sources, and summarizing it all into one readily available manual, would assist in the overall understanding and quality of teaching for new staff, placement students, and volunteers.

Based on previous guidebooks at the agency and staff recommendation, the following items are chosen to be included in the manual: basic information on Down syndrome and Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), effective ways of communication and skill development, accommodating different levels of functioning in a group setting, and the main benefits of working in a classroom setting. Down syndrome and ASD were chosen as the primary focus in this thesis because of their prevalence at the agency that this manual was specified towards. They are also considered to be the more common intellectual disabilities, especially with regards to the creative arts (Buckley, 2005). ASD is characterized by difficulties in communication, social interaction, and repetitive behaviours. The exact reason for this disorder is not clear, but is believed to be as a result of early brain development, with symptoms commonly surfacing between the ages of two and three (Autism Canada Foundation, n.d.). Down syndrome occurs when an individual is born with an extra 21st chromosome. Effects can range from mild to severe, and include a wide range of learning, health, and physical characteristics (Buckley, 2005). This manual also includes a section that addresses working with individuals with Down syndrome.
syndrome and ASD in a creative arts setting. The topics addressed in this segment of the manual include visual art, literary art, media art, and dance/music.

This first section of this thesis addresses current literature that relates to working with individuals with intellectual disabilities in a classroom setting, as well as engaging them in the creative arts. Included in this literature review are recommendations, best practices, and benefits when working with this population. The next section outlines the methods utilized in the creation of this manual. This section primarily consists of the ways information was attained, including literature, staff interviews, and general observation. The main section in this thesis outlines the final results, specifically the manual itself. Lastly, the thesis was summarized and reviewed. This section also contains recommendations for the future and any limitations that were encountered throughout the creation of the manual.
Chapter II: Literature Review

Introduction

Effectively teaching and assisting in the development of skills to individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities is highly important. The learning process can produce positive results in many aspects of an individual’s life, including general knowledge, confidence, and following instruction. Significant effort has been placed on examining the ways in which new skills are taught to this population (Repp & Karsh, 1992). Traditional programs, designed for typically developing individuals, are often ineffective when working with those with intellectual disabilities. Even if instructions are slowed down or simplified, the curriculum may not meet the learning requirements necessary to be successful with those with intellectual disabilities (Green et al., 2005). According to these authors, the emphasis for learning programs with this population is now being directed towards enhancing overall quality of life, rather than increasing scholastic knowledge. Therefore, skill development in this population should focus primarily on items such as basic reading and writing, social interaction, and having age appropriate leisure activities, in order to increase overall life quality and independent living (Kagohara, 2010).

Post-Secondary Learning

As this manual is being tailored towards individuals with specific intellectual disabilities in a post-secondary setting, it is important to review literature on the general subject. This section outlines the importance of skill development which, according to the empirical literature, should be the main focus of post-secondary learning. According to Odom, Horner, Snell and Blacher (2007), an important aspect of working with individuals with intellectual disabilities is ongoing support and care received after they have left a generic schooling system. Key items that are placed as high priority for post-secondary life in this population include goal-setting and planning for the future, developing necessary skills for their adult living, and establishing continuous support that will carry through many aspects of the individual’s life.

Overall, quality of life (QOL) should be the main focus when teaching individuals with intellectual disabilities (Odom et al., 2007). Providing lessons on independent living and how to properly care for one self is highly important to increasing QOL. Social relationships are also important because, like most individuals, having connections and friendships help to increase feelings of belonging and enjoyment (Odom et al., 2007). Therefore, teaching life and social skills should be placed at the highest priority.

Having a plan of action for post-secondary life is vital when working with this population. Having small goals that can be reached in shorter time intervals can increase feelings of success and accomplishment. With this however, it is important to note that supported individuals should play a significant role in educational and future planning. Not only can this increase personal satisfaction with a post-secondary plan, but it can also lead to feelings of self-determination. In a study outlined by Odom et al, (2007), which measured self-determination levels in 94 individuals with intellectual disabilities, it was found that those with greater levels of self-determination fared better with regards to employment, financial independence, and independent living.
Teaching individuals with intellectual disabilities more general life skills is also important. Teaching skills such as safety, hygiene, and independent living will increase overall QOL, and allow for increased confidence and self-determination. Especially regarding individuals with intellectual disabilities, learning how to properly care for themselves in a socially acceptable and age appropriate manner can yield very positive outcomes (Odom et al., 2007).

Lastly, continuous support should also be provided throughout the post-school experience with adults who have intellectual disabilities. One of the best ways to achieve this is through involvement with agencies that provide ongoing and long term support and skill development. By teaching new skills, from academic development to independent living, individuals with intellectual disabilities can continue to learn and gain confidence even after generic schooling has been completed (Odom, Horner, Snell & Blacher, 2007).

**Skill Development**

Because skill development is so important for this population, best practices should be a main source of information. General teaching methods were emphasized within this population, as techniques are supposed to be as simple to understand and put into practice as possible (Repp & Karsh, 1992). These strategies include: the use of immediate reinforcement after a correct response is given, correcting answers that are incorrect in an appropriate manner, providing information in a way that is easy to understand, having structure, being repetitive, and giving appropriate time for questions to be answered or asked (Repp & Karsh, 1992). In terms of teaching in a classroom environment, positive social cues are highlighted, including raising one’s hand, and not speaking over other students.

The use of immediate reinforcement is an important strategy to take into consideration when working with individuals with intellectual disabilities (Green, Reid, Rollyson & Passante, 2005). In Green et al.’s (2005) study, it was found that having a positive environment, consisting of both tangible and social reinforcement, yielded the most positive results with regards to working in skill development with individuals with intellectual disabilities. Therefore, simply providing individuals with praise or another desired reinforcer upon successful completion of even small tasks can increase their ability and overall desire to learn. While reinforcing correct responses is highly important, it is also essential to correct responses that are incorrect. When an incorrect response is given the individual must be made aware and also be given the opportunity to provide the correct response (Green et al., 2005). According to Martin and Heller (2004), it is effective to provide gestural or verbal prompts to the individual and reinforce them once they have stated the right answer, especially in a group setting. Another important aspect to focus on is providing instructions that are very literal and easy to follow. They found that providing instructions in the form of a task-analysis, while using necessary prompts, was highly successful when teaching three individuals with intellectual disabilities spelling skills. Other important aspects with regards to learning include having a structured schedule, and following it (Martin & Heller, 2004). With many diagnoses, knowing what will be occurring in the near future can create feelings of comfort, which can make for a better learning experience for the individual (Green at al., 2005). Being repetitive with regards to instruction and content is also very important, as it can help increase the chance that an item will be remembered and utilized (Green at al., 2005). Lastly, giving individuals time to answer questions before providing prompting is
important in the retention of new information (Kagohara, 2010). Some individuals may have processing or speech problems, which may increase the amount of time it takes them to provide an answer (Kagohara, 2010). It is important that they be given the time that they need, instead of immediate prompting.

**Working in a Classroom Setting**

Working in a classroom or group setting can have both positive and negative aspects with regards to learning (Repp & Karsh, 1992). It can be difficult to engage an entire audience, especially with differing levels of functioning and diagnoses, with one main focus or lesson. Students who are lower functioning may not understand a lesson if it is addressed to those who are higher functioning; however, individuals may become bored if a lesson is too easy. This is why it is important to find a balanced approach that meets the special needs of all individuals involved. This can be achieved by separating classes whenever possible, providing two different activities for differing levels of functioning, and remembering that each individual has a unique learning style and will commonly need individual instruction (Repp & Karsh, 1992). The main benefit in working in a group setting is an increase in prosocial behaviour and interaction with others (Repp & Karsh, 1992). As stated previously, quality of life is a highly important aspect to focus on when teaching skills to this population (Kagohara, 2010). Because of this, the social skills attained from working with both teachers and fellow students should be considered high priority.

**Benefits of Creative Art**

A subsection of this manual focuses on conducting creative arts lessons with individuals with intellectual disabilities. According to Leckey (2011), creative arts can help increase mental well-being and increase physical abilities of those who engage in it. It can also provide a positive means of engaging in age appropriate leisure activities for this population which, as mentioned by Kagohara (2010), is highly important. Self-expression, increase in motor functioning, and overall skill development, are all possible benefits that may arise from using creative arts with this population (Leckey, 2011). The following sections involve information from empirical literature regarding the benefits of a variety of creative arts:

**Visual Art:**

A case study by Beavis (2008) outlined the experience one particular woman with a mild learning disability had with art therapy. This study illustrated the woman’s positive encounter with visual art therapy and discussed in detail the progress she made each week because of this therapeutic method (Beavis, 2008). The woman, as well as her therapist, noticed that after 4 years of art therapy she experienced enhanced emotional control and displayed a more positive outlook on life (Beavis, 2008). This case study provided an in-depth look at how effective art therapy can be when used with adults with learning disabilities.

Crawford et al., (2010) state that art therapy, along with standard care, can be associated with higher rates of enhanced mental health and social functioning when compared with just standard care alone. People with intellectual disabilities can attain positive results from both the process of art making and the trusting relationship they
construct with their therapist and peers also involved in the process. According to Crawford et al., (2010), one of the most important aspects of using visual arts therapy is that feelings, emotions, or events can be communicated, without the need to be verbal. Therefore, for non-verbal individuals, or for those who are not comfortable with expressing themselves, visual art can provide them with a fun and safe way of communication.

Not only can art therapy play a major role in an individual’s healing process, it can also help therapists and teachers determine emotions that can be useful in treatment and intervention. Since the environment when engaging in visual art can be a positive and relaxing one, therapists often find patients revealing feelings and subjects that have never been brought up previously (Persons, 2008). By looking at the subject, colour, simplicity, and harshness of a piece, therapists can obtain necessary information without the need for verbal communication from the patient (Beavis, 2008).

**Dance/Music:**

According to Cluphf, O'Connor and Vanin (2001), the use of dance with individuals with intellectual disabilities can be a form of self-expression, a way to increase levels of socialization, and increase physical health as a form of enjoyable exercise. Many individuals who engage in dance state that this particular form of art is great for expressing oneself in a non-verbal manner. By using style of dance, music, and body language, an individual can express themselves to others through their performance. Dance can also be a source of social interaction for many, which is important in those who have intellectual disabilities. Finally, dance can improve physical health by providing individuals with a fun and effective way to exercise. Cluphf, et al., (2001) found that using a 12-week aerobic dance program with adults with intellectual disabilities increased their overall Cardiovascular endurance.

Music can also be beneficial for individuals with intellectual disabilities in a variety of ways. Similar to visual arts, it can offer a means of self-expression for those who are unable, or find it difficult, to share emotions, feelings, or events (Carr et al., 2012). Writing lyrics, learning instruments, or engaging in singing exercises can provide individuals with an opportunity to learn a new skill, which is highly important when working with individuals with intellectual disabilities (Carr et al., 2012).

**Media Art:**

Engaging in age appropriate leisure activities is important for individuals with intellectual disabilities. For many people, the use of technology and media are huge aspects of their everyday lives. Therefore, it is important that individuals with intellectual disabilities be taught how to effectively and appropriately use different forms of technology. A study by Cromby, Standen and Brown (1996) examined the effectiveness of technology-based learning on individuals with learning disabilities. It was found that the use of computers and other virtual environments were an effective, accessible, and affordable option when teaching these individuals. Teaching skills regarding proper technology use can increase self-confidence and create an added environment where social interaction can occur.
The Problem

There are many empirically validated journal articles that contain relevant information on working with individuals with intellectual disabilities. Basic information, best practices, and different interventions can all be attained by locating and reviewing these articles. While these articles contain a wide array of information regarding many different subjects, there are some difficulties to take into consideration when using this as a primary learning tool for staff, placement students, or volunteers. These difficulties include being written using technical language (often at a higher reading level), and being expensive and difficult to locate for those who do not have access to online databases. Having a manual that contains a variety of information in an easy to attain and understand format can address these issues as well as provide a valuable resource for many different agencies.

Articles on the use of creative arts, with any population, can be limited and not easily available. When these articles are located, they often contain general information and studies, but do not provide sufficient information on specifically running classes and providing examples of activities surrounding the arts. While the information in these articles is useful, the fact that they do not provide specific sections on how the arts themselves were conducted is a major limitation.

Manual

Manuals are often used as training and information tools for a variety of individuals working in different fields. They can provide a simple and easy resource that can portray instructions, general information, and act as a how-to guide for many different subjects. In a study by Welch and Holborn (1988), which examined using a training manual for teaching child-care workers how to use contingency contracts, it was found that using this type of resource increased the targeted behaviour changes (negotiation and writing skills). In addition to an overall increase in these skills, social validity was attained through a satisfaction rating scale completed by those who participated. Another study by Peterson (1984) looked at the effects of two different training manuals that taught safety skills to children who were frequently left home alone. Use of these training manuals, which provided different forms of instruction and general information on home safety, resulted in an increased understanding of the topic.

Conclusion

Teaching individuals with intellectual disabilities new skills, or developing already existing skills, can provide feelings of intelligence, confidence, and independence (Kagohara, 2010). Because of this, it is important that those teaching the skills understand how to do so in the most appropriate and effective manner. There are many things to take into consideration that can increase the effectiveness and enjoyment of a lesson, especially when working with a variety of individuals with different functioning levels and diagnoses. Having staff, placement students, and volunteers be aware of benefits and best practices regarding a variety of occurrences that may take place on a daily basis could assist them in making sure that the information and care that they are providing is aiding the individual in the most positive means possible.

While there is a large selection of literature and resources regarding working with this population, it may be difficult to attain and understand due to lack of simplicity in writing. Therefore, the final goal for the creation of this manual is to provide a resource for staff,
placement students, and volunteers, that contains a variety of information and techniques, outlined from many different sources, which is easy to attain and understand.
Chapter III: Method

This manual, which outlines strategies for working with individuals with intellectual disabilities in a classroom setting, was developed at the request of staff at H’art School. It was designed as a resource for new staff, placement students, and volunteers, and addresses effective and appropriate ways of communication and skill development with this population. In order to develop this manual, the literature on best practices in working with intellectually disabled individuals was reviewed. The information was integrated and summarized in a clear and concise manner.

The agency for which this manual was created operates similarly to a school setting. This means that for each day there is a schedule to be followed, containing a variety of subjects that are offered for all students. There are approximately 30 students, each coming on different days, who have differing diagnoses, levels of functioning, and ages. Some of the known diagnoses prevalent at this agency include autism spectrum disorder, Down syndrome, and acquired brain injury (ABI). There are also students who are dually diagnosed, displaying both an intellectual disability and a mental health diagnosis. Along with students at this agency, there are a variety of staff, volunteers, and placement students all with different educational backgrounds. As a result, the manual was prepared in a simplistic manner tailored towards individuals from different educational backgrounds.

Topics chosen for this manual were based on staff request and observation. The subjects in this manual include basic information on two different diagnoses (ASD and Down’s syndrome), staff recommendations and best practices with regards to working with this population in a classroom setting, and conducting creative arts classes with this population.

Most of the literature was gathered from the St. Lawrence College library database. Key subjects included: general information on working with individuals with intellectual disabilities, working with this population in a group setting, and the benefits of using different creative arts with this population. The main focus of these articles was individuals with intellectual disabilities with age groups ranging from youth to senior populations. A majority of the articles attained were also created within the last 15 years in order to make sure any practices or techniques were current and relevant.

Another large source of information for this manual was the book *Handbook of developmental disabilities* (Odom, Horner, Snell & Blacher, 2007). This book outlines different ways of working with individuals with intellectual disabilities, and how to produce the best and most positive outcomes in the lives of those within this population. One of the most valuable sources used in the creation of this manual was staff recommendation and opinion. This was attained through the creation and distribution of general questions regarding topics they felt were important to accentuate when working with this population (see Appendix A). These were not formally included in the manual; however, they provided a foundation for topics that would be included and emphasized. Other information was attained through reviewing and summarizing empirically validated journal articles and books. After attaining a variety of information from different sources, all items collected were organized in a way that was easy to follow and understand. Attaining information using a variety of sources is highly important when creating any sort of manual. This ensures that information is accurate, valid, and includes sufficient
information to be a successful learning tool for those utilizing it. It is for these reasons that the creation of this manual revolves primarily around general research studies and information from staff members.

Upon completion of this manual, it was given to current staff, placement students, and volunteers to review. It was also placed on file to be utilized by any future individuals involved with the agency. Staff feedback was also attained through a series of questions regarding the validity and relevance of the manual (Appendix B).
Chapter IV: Results

Manual

The final product of this thesis is a manual on working with individuals with intellectual disabilities in the classroom and in the arts (Appendix A). The manual was designed to be used as a resource for staff, placement students, and volunteers working with this population. It contains a variety of information from many different sources on tips and techniques regarding working with individuals with intellectual disabilities, and is written and organized in a way that is easy to understand.

This manual is divided into two sections. The first section, entitled Working with Individual's who have Intellectual Disabilities, focuses on working with individuals with intellectual disabilities in a classroom setting. It first goes into detail regarding two common types of developmental disabilities, Down syndrome and autism spectrum disorder. These areas were chosen because of their prevalence at the agency that this manual was specified towards. They are also considered to be the more common disorders, especially with regards to the literature pertaining to the creative arts (Buckley, 2005). Within these sections there is information regarding both teaching and communication tips and techniques. Following this subsection, there is an area entitled Working with Individual's with Intellectual Disabilities: In General. This area emphasizes key items that should be taught, and how to address the issues that may arise when working in a classroom, or group, setting. The second section of this manual titled The Arts focuses on working with individuals with intellectual disabilities in the creative arts. The arts that are described include visual art, dance, music, and media art. Within each of these descriptions the benefits, important areas of focus, and lessons/activities are addressed.

Manual Feedback

Feedback from staff (opinion-based) on the manual was attained through the distribution and completion of a questionnaire sheet (Appendix B). Questions related to the overall usability, generalization, and appearance of the manual. A Likert scale was used with numbers ranging from one to five for each question (1 - strongly disagree, 2 – disagree, 3 - neither agree nor disagree, 4 – agree, 5 – strongly agree).

The mean scores from each staff survey are 3.4, 3.4, and 3.5, with an overall average score of 3.43. This indicates that, while there is room for improvement, the manual is useful in providing information about working with individuals with intellectual disabilities. Table 1 provides the average score from all 3 completed surveys in terms of each individual question. Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Average Score / 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This manual is simple to follow and understand.</td>
<td>2.67/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information is relevant with regards to client population.</td>
<td>4/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information in this manual is up-to-date.</td>
<td>4/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information in this manual is useful, and provides a variety of subjects regarding adults</td>
<td>4/5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
with intellectual disabilities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>This manual has a professional and easy to read appearance.</td>
<td>2.67/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provided the opportunity, I would be comfortable using this manual as a tool for future staff, students, and volunteers.</td>
<td>3/5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>This manual could be generalized to other agencies similar to this one.</td>
<td>3.83/4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unfortunately, at this time, feedback was not given in sufficient enough time to allow a majority of the requested changes to be made. However, changes that were reviewed and considered most relevant and important were addressed.
Chapter V: Discussion

Thesis Summary
This thesis focused on establishing a manual for working with individuals who have intellectual disabilities in the classroom and in the arts for staff, placement students, and volunteers. The manual was based on empirical literature and best practices in the field, and was designed in a manner so as to be user-friendly. At the time that this thesis was created it was conveyed, by staff at H’art, that there was no readily available resource on working with individuals with intellectual disabilities in the different creative arts. It was also communicated that while there were resources available regarding working with this population in a classroom setting, they were often difficult to locate and written in a manner that was not accessible for individuals without a background in this field.

The second section of this manual entitled The Arts focuses on working with individuals with intellectual disabilities in the creative arts. The arts that are described include visual art, dance, music, and media art. Within each of these descriptions the benefits, important areas of focus, and lessons/activities are addressed.

Strengths
A substantial strength of this manual is that it utilizes a variety of empirically validated sources throughout. Information is obtained from many different areas, and integrated into one easily attainable source for staff, placement students, and volunteers working with this population. Because information was attained in such a way, it can be concluded that it primarily addresses “best practices” with regards to its content.

Another strength of this manual is that it provides information in an easily accessible and comprehensive manner, for individuals from different educational backgrounds. A variety of staff, students, and volunteers can utilize this resource and learn how to effectively work with this population in the classroom and in the arts. Knowing how to work, both in general and in the creative arts, with individuals with specific intellectual disabilities can lead to an overall increase in the effectiveness of communication and skill development within this population.

A final strength of this manual is that, while it primarily focuses on empirically validated sources, it also incorporates staff input. Because this manual was created by the request of staff at H’art, it was important to make sure that their experience and expertise was addressed as well. The staff also reviewed the manual in detail to ensure that all possible criteria was addressed, and that points could be added or removed contingent on what they felt would be appropriate for their agency.

Limitations
The main limitation of this thesis is that not all aspects of working with this population in a classroom, and in the arts, were addressed. For example, only ASD and Down Syndrome were addressed due to commonalities in general and specifically at the agency, however, there are other intellectual disabilities that could be included for a comprehensive approach. Visual art, dance, music, and media art, were the domains of The Arts that were emphasized, but other forms such as literary art and theatre could also be incorporated.
Another limitation of this manual is the lack of specific examples and lesson plans. It would be highly beneficial to attain more information, using formal staff questionnaires or increased empirical data, on different ways in which both academic and creative arts classes can be facilitated. Providing direct examples would be a beneficial resource for staff, students, and volunteers.

The final limitation is the lack of research pertaining to the use, and effectiveness, of manuals. Conducting more research could result in a better understanding of how the manual should be written, laid out, and conducted in an evidence based manner.

Multilevel Challenges to Service Implementation

Client Level Challenges. It can be difficult to enhance motivation for many individuals with intellectual disabilities. Especially with regards to running programs in the creative arts, some clients may think that they cannot do something or it may not interest them on a particular day. Maintaining attentional focus on activities can also be challenging with this population. They may begin engaging in an activity, but can quickly become less focused or bored. For example, individuals may begin working on a painting, but after a short period of time may not want to finish it.

Program Level Challenges. As stated previously, motivation and focus are main challenges, especially with regards to arts programs. While the process of creating something is one of the most beneficial aspects of the arts, the final product, whether it be a performance or a finished painting, is also important. Because of motivational and focal challenges, this aspect can be difficult to attain. With regards to the creation of a thesis, the main challenge was finding literature that fit closely to the wide range of functioning levels and diagnoses of individuals at this agency. There was no book readily available for students that outlined different student’s diagnoses, which also made day-to-day behaviour redirection and providing verbal cues and instructions difficult.

Organization Level Challenges. One of the main organizational level challenges was the limited number of staff, especially in contrast to the number of students. This made it difficult to find the time to discuss information regarding the manual because the staff members were constantly busy. Another issue, which related to having too few staff members, was the high range of differing levels of functioning and diagnoses that could not be individually dealt with on a daily basis. This meant that in a typical class there were individuals who were high and low functioning, and required differing needs with regards to work provided and explanation required.

Societal Level Challenges. There is a significant amount of negative social stigma attached to this population. This creates a significant societal level challenge because it means that many people believe this population cannot do things, or may not appreciate the creative outlets that are provided at this agency. Many people believe that individuals with intellectual disabilities cannot engage in creative behaviour, such as painting, dance, theatre, and music. Because of this, the needed support from the community or those surrounding the individual is not always
apparent. More time must be spent on educating the general population on the abilities of these individuals.

**Contributions to the Behavioural Psychology Field**

This thesis contributes to the field of behavioural psychology by providing a resource, using a variety of different empirically validated sources, which addresses a subject in a manner that has not been utilized in the past. While there is literature on working with individuals who have intellectual disabilities in the classroom and in the arts, there has not been a specific resource providing easy to comprehend information that is intended to be used as a learning tool for staff, students, and volunteers working with this population. Providing individuals with this information can assist them in teaching skills to, and communicating with, those with intellectual disabilities and can result in a positive learning environment for individuals within this population.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

It is recommended that further research be conducted on basic information regarding working with individuals with a wider range of diagnoses and other forms of creative arts (e.g., theatre and creative writing). Attaining more information that addresses these topics could help increase the overall uses of the manual, and assist in generalization to other agencies and programs. It is also recommended that more information be attained regarding conducting specific classes in each of the arts. Having a section providing a detailed example, with specific instructions, on how to run a class with this population would be highly beneficial for those reading it.
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A Manual on Working with Individuals with Specific Intellectual Disabilities in a Classroom and in the Arts

Staci Pelow, January 2014
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What is this Resource?

The purpose of this manual is to integrate a variety of information, from numerous sources, on working with adults with specific intellectual disabilities in a classroom or group setting. This booklet will contain material from empirically validated sources, all pertaining to appropriate and effective ways to work with this population in both a general and art setting.

What is in this Resource?

This manual is broken down into two sections. The first section, entitled *Working with Individual’s who have Specific Intellectual Disabilities* focuses on working with individuals with intellectual disabilities in a classroom setting. It first goes into detail regarding two common types of intellectual disabilities, Down Syndrome and Autism Spectrum Disorder. Within these sections there is information regarding both teaching and communication tips and techniques. Following this subsection, there is an area entitled *Working with Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities: In General*. This area emphasizes key items that should be taught, and how to address the issues that may arise when working in a classroom, or group setting. It was chosen to specifically address Down syndrome and Autism Spectrum Disorder because of the prevalence rates at the agency that this manual was specified towards. They are also considered to be the more common intellectual disabilities, especially with regards to the creative arts.

Individuals who are *dually diagnosed* are not specifically addressed within this manual. It is important to remember that while many of these tips and techniques can be utilized with individuals who have a dual diagnoses, there are likely special considerations that must be emphasized within this population and on an individual basis.

The second section of this manual entitled *The Arts* focuses on working with individuals with intellectual disabilities in the creative arts. The arts that are described include visual art, dance, music, and media
art. Within each of these descriptions the benefits, important areas of focus, and lessons/activities are addressed.
PART I:
Working with Individuals who have Intellectual Disabilities
Introduction

In most cases, individuals with intellectual disabilities enjoy learning. Developing or improving skills can create feelings of importance, independence, and intelligence (Green, Reid, Rollyson & Passante, 2005). Learning skills and information regarding anything from independent living, to playing a musical instrument all hold relevance and importance when working with this population. There are certain things that people working within this population should be aware of in terms of teaching skills to, and communicating with, individuals with intellectual disabilities.

In addition, learning in a group environment can create a variety of interactions that are important in the development of positive social behaviour (Repp & Karsh, 1992). While working with this population in a group setting can yield positive results in both skill development and social interaction, it can be difficult to conduct such a class due to differing levels of functioning and diagnoses (Repp & Karsh, 1992). Because of these difficulties, it is important that teachers be aware of appropriate and inappropriate ways of communicating with this population and how to teach them specific skills in a way that is understood by all members of the class. The person who is providing the lesson must take into consideration the levels of functioning, diagnoses, and special needs that may affect an individual’s ability to learn and retain information (Green et al., 2005).
Some Basic Information: Different Diagnoses

Down Syndrome

What is it?

Down Syndrome occurs when an individual is born with an extra 21st chromosome. In Canada, approximately one in 800 individuals is born with Down Syndrome. It can also occur within any race or gender. Effects of Down Syndrome differ greatly on an individual basis, with a range of learning, health, and physical characteristics. Learning difficulties are a common aspect of having Down Syndrome.

Teaching Tips

Use verbal cues

- Emphasize key words
- Use repetition
- Use songs, rhymes, and mantras if possible

Use visual aids

- Use schedules
- Create charts and diagrams
- Have corresponding pictures and photos
- Use colour coordination

Make sure to take individual levels of functioning into consideration

- Reduce or increase level of difficulty or length of a task

Speak in an understandable manner

- Use fewer words
- Speak at an appropriate speed (slower, but keep in mind level of functioning)

Select appropriate materials
• Keep reading level in mind
• If appropriate materials cannot be located for a specified subject, edit existing resources or create new ones

Base lessons on “real-life” experience
• Relate material to individual interests
• Create connections between different materials and themes whenever possible

Use a **task analysis**
• Break information down into small parts, and define each step
• Provide reinforcement after each step is completed

Practice skills whenever possible
• Review learned information and skills in different settings and with different people
• Repetition is very important with regards to skill development

**Communication Tips**
Use visual aids to communicate if needed
• Pictures, signs, and symbols can all be used as a means of communication

Make sure to let the students know if something is not understood
• Ask them to slow down or repeat what they have said
• If they are still not understood it may be necessary to use another form of communication, such as pictures.

Allow appropriate time to answer questions or express ideas
• It may take a few seconds for the students to process the questions and come up with an answer
• Make sure to give enough time for them to answer the question on their own
• It may be necessary to provide a **verbal prompt** if they are having trouble formulating an answer
Down Syndrome:
To Summarize

Down Syndrome

- Occurs when an individual is born with an extra 21st chromosome
- Can affect learning, health, and physical characteristics
- Learning difficulties are common

Teaching/Communication Tips

- Use verbal cues
- Use visual aids
- Make sure to take individual levels of functioning into consideration
- Speak in an understandable manner
- Select appropriate materials
- Base lessons on “real-life” experience
- Use a task analysis
- Practice skills whenever possible
- Use visual aids to communicate if needed
- Make sure to let the student know if something is not understood
- Allow appropriate time to answer questions or express ideas
Autism Spectrum Disorder

What is it?

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a condition that is caused by atypical development of the brain. It is often characterized by difficulties regarding communication and social interactions, as well as increased engagement in repetitive behaviour patterns. Motor coordination, attentive abilities, and physical health can also be associated with ASD. Some strengths that individuals with ASD may display include excelled skills in music, art, math, memory, reading, fine-motor, and non-verbal reasoning. Problem areas can include impairments in social relationships and communication, difficulties with sleeping, eating, and toileting, and displaying frequent inappropriate behaviour.

Teaching Tips

Make sure to take individual levels of functioning into consideration

- Reduce or increase level of difficulty or length of a task

Use visual aids

- Use pictures, diagrams, charts, and colour coordination whenever possible

Praise positive or “prosocial” behaviour whenever possible when teaching a lesson

- When appropriate classroom behaviour occurs, reinforce it immediately after it has taken place (verbal praise)

Make sure the learning environment is conducive to the individuals needs

- Examples include using lots of visual aids around the classroom, and keeping noise level to an appropriate amount

Provide enough time for explanation

- Give the individual an appropriate amount of time to explain an answer he or she has provided

- An answer that may seem unthoughtful or random could have significant meaning and relevance, they may just need time to explain themselves

Use language that is easy to understand

- Instructions should be kept clear, direct, and simple
Use literal terms, and avoid things that could potentially be taken a different way

Use structure and routine whenever possible

- Make the individual aware of class schedules by posting one where it can easily be interpreted
- If a daily activity is going to be switched out, make sure that the student is aware of this as soon as possible

Set shot term goals and targets

- Make sure that any goals are in the scope of the individuals abilities
- Break goals down into smaller steps, and reinforce whenever any part is met

**Communication Tips**

Use simple language that is clearly understood

- Speak clearly and in an appropriate volume
- Avoid idioms
- Don’t use sarcasm
- Talk directly to the individual

Give appropriate response time

- It may take some time for an individual to process a question or comment
- Make sure to provide enough time for the individual to come up with their response and articulate it in a way they feel comfortable
- Use verbal prompts only after providing enough time for individuals to try it themselves

Use familiar language

- Use words that the individual knows, and is accustomed to
- If the individual does not understand a word, teach them about it

Use visual aids to assist in understanding

- Use pictures, diagrams, charts, etc., to convey a lesson or message
- Let the individual use drawing as a means of **non-verbal communication**
Autism Spectrum Disorder:
To Summarize

ASD

- Caused by atypical development of the brain
- Characterized by difficulties in communication and social interactions, as well as increased engagement in repetitive behaviour patterns

Teaching/Communication Tips

- Make sure to take individual levels of functioning into consideration
- Use visual aids
- Praise positive or “prosocial” behaviour whenever possible when teaching a lesson
- Make sure the learning environment is conducive to the individuals needs
- Provide enough time for explanation
- Use language that is easy to understand
- Use structure and routine whenever possible
- Set shot term goals and targets
- Use simple language that is clearly understood
- Give appropriate response time
- Use familiar language
- Use visual aids to assist in understanding
Working with Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities

Important Areas of Focus

Life Skills
Life skills, which include topics such as independent living and appropriate socialization, are very important to address when working with this population. Providing lessons on basic everyday living can encourage a more independent lifestyle, as well as create an increase in positive self-perception and confidence.

This could include:
- Teaching independent living skills (for example hygiene and safety)
- Lessons on appropriate social skills (for example manners and applicable conversation)
- Providing reinforcement for appropriate behaviour, which can also increase these skills (for example, providing verbal praise for and acknowledgment for using the word “please”)

Respect
Because certain intellectual disabilities are often characterized by maladaptive social skills, teaching individuals about showing and receiving respect is important.

This could include:
- Lessons on personal space (both within themselves and others)
- Being taught about respecting oneself, others, and authority figures
- Making sure that individuals are aware that they have the right to be respected, and what to do if they feel that this is not the case

Confidence
Having confidence in oneself is an important trait and skill for everyone to achieve. Self-esteem and being positively self-aware are both items that should be taught early on in individuals with intellectual disabilities.

This could include:
- Providing examples of happy and successful individuals with disabilities (e.g., stories, videos)
• Providing reinforcement for appropriate behaviour (give verbal praise when an individual says something positive about themselves)
• Acknowledging all achievements

**Problem Solving**
Having problem solving skills is important for any individual, as unanticipated situations are often a daily occurrence. Having the knowledge and skillset to deal with such problems is highly important for intellectual disabilities, especially due to structure and schedule being of high importance within this population.

This could include:
• Playing games or engaging in activities that utilize problem solving skills (for example, puzzles)
• Discussions pertaining to steps that can be taken when a problem arises
• Reinforcing problem solving behaviour
• Formulating discussions on daily events that may require problem solving (for example, what to do if lunch is forgotten at home)

**Establishing Rules**
Having rules, especially when working in a group, is something that all individuals have experienced in their lives. It helps to make the environment positive for all those involved and can create structure and routine, both of which are important aspects when working with this population.

This could include:
• Coming up with rules as a group, and making sure that everyone that wishes to has a chance to contribute
• Reinforcing individuals when rules are followed, and using verbal reminders when rules are not followed
• Accommodating the needs of different students through the establishment of rules (for example, if there is a student in a wheelchair it may be necessary to have a rule about not leaving belongings on the floor)
• Having rules such as listening when someone else is speaking, respecting others, taking turns, and following safety procedures and regulations
Important Areas of Focus
To Summarize:

Life Skills
- Independent living skills
- Appropriate social skills
- Providing reinforcement for appropriate behaviour

Respect
- Personal space
- Respecting oneself, others, authority figures
- Having the right to be respected

Confidence
- Examples of happy and successful individuals with disabilities
- Reinforcement for appropriate behaviour
- Acknowledging achievements

Problem Solving
- Engaging in activities that utilize problem solving skills
- Discussing steps that can be taken when a problem arises
- Discussing daily events that may require problem solving

Establishing Rules
- Coming up with rules as a group
- Reinforcing individuals when rules are followed
- Accommodating the needs of different students
Accommodating Individuals in a Group

Working in a classroom or group setting can have both positive and negative aspects (Repp & Karsh, 1992). It can be difficult to engage an entire audience, especially with differing levels of functioning and diagnoses, with one main focus or lesson. Students who are lower functioning may not understand a lesson if it is addressed to those who are higher functioning, however, individuals may become bored if a lesson is too easy. This is why it is important to find a balance that meets the special needs of all individuals involved. This can be achieved by separating classes whenever possible, providing two different activities for differing levels of functioning, and remembering that each individual has a unique learning style and will commonly need individual instruction (Repp & Karsh, 1992). The main benefit in working in a group setting is an increase in prosocial behaviour and interaction (Repp & Karsh, 1992). The social skills attained from working with both teachers and fellow students should be considered high priority. Utilizing a “peer teaching” method can also be an effective way to reach all learners, as it develops skills for everyone involved.
Accommodating Different Levels of Functioning and Diagnoses

Teaching Tips

Provide a general overview and then break into small groups
- Explain the lesson in an easy to understand manner for all individuals
- Break off into groups after the lesson is begun so that students can either begin the lesson if instructions are understood, or ask for help if they require extra assistance
- When creating groups, keep in mind differing levels of functioning
- It may be appropriate to break groups up into similar levels of functioning, or different levels of functioning, depending on the activity and outcome

Emphasize “Team Learning”
- When making groups, place individuals who are higher functioning with individuals who are lower functioning
- Make sure that the individuals who are teaching are provided with instructions on how to facilitate the lesson, and are reminded not to take over the activity
- This can be useful for everyone involved, as it provides opportunity for leadership and further learning for higher functioning individuals, and a chance for information to be relayed in a manner that is different from the initial instruction

Make tasks accessible to all levels of functioning
- Tasks may need to be divided up into different categories of completion (for example, some individuals may write a project, others may draw)
- Adjust expectations for final outcomes and projects dependent on the individual completing them
- If a lesson is found that is tailored towards individuals who are higher or lower functioning, create a similar task using appropriate language for other individuals (for example, if an activity asks to draw a picture of something, it may be appropriate to add a written portion as well for some individuals)

Approach different diagnoses in a different manner
- Most different diagnoses have diverse requirements and needs
• Remember to treat each person as an individual, even if they have similar levels of functioning
• An individual may be higher functioning in one subject, and have more difficulties in another (for example, being very strong at written communication, but having difficulties with verbal communication)
Working with Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities:  
Important Things to Remember

In addition to items that have already been addressed there are other things that should be kept in mind when working within this population. Some important aspects include:

Being kind, patient, and positive
- Having a positive attitude and smile can really go a long way
- Remember that if you are acting upset, it could affect how other feel
- Remember that in order for individuals to be independent they have to do things on their own, which may take additional time and effort on their part (for example, it may be quicker for you to zip up a coat, but it is important to let them try first)

Being creative
- Learning to express an idea in many different ways
- Learning how to take a lesson and accommodate it for different individuals
- Learning how to communicate in non-verbal manners

Not overloading individuals with information
- While teaching skills is very important when working with this population, it should not be a constant process
- Take breaks from learning new things to build upon, or develop, already existing skills
- This will help with overall enjoyment and retention of skill building

Listening to what they have to say
- Even if something may seem irrelevant or thoughtless, it is likely important and relevant to the individual
- Listening to what an individual is saying can create a more positive and trusting environment
- If they are being taught something and have a comment that may not relate directly to the subject, try and find a way to create a connection
Remembering that these individuals are capable of much more than they are often credited for

- Individuals with intellectual disabilities are often underestimated, resulting in missed opportunities
- If they want to try something they should be given the opportunity to try it in a safe and positive environment
- They need to be challenged within the realm of their functioning
Conclusion

Teaching skills and new information to individuals with intellectual disabilities is very important. There are many benefits that can arise from engaging in skill development, and it can increase an individual’s overall quality of life. There are special considerations that must be taken into account when teaching within this population, and these should be reviewed and addressed prior to beginning lessons. Once appropriate instructional and communicative approaches to working with this population are established, work within this population can effectively and appropriately take place, which can be a very rewarding experience.
PART II:
The Arts
Introduction

Art, be it visual art, dance, music, or other forms, is highly prevalent in today’s society. Art is utilized by many as an area of study, career path, form of therapy, recreational activity, and means of self-expression in individuals from many different backgrounds and abilities. It is important that all individuals be provided with the opportunity to engage in different types of art if it is something in which they show interest. Individuals with intellectual disabilities, regardless of their diagnoses or level of functioning, can engage very effectively in all of the different forms of art. This population should be provided with the resources to explore the different mediums that fall under this creative outlet, just as any other individual should.

When teaching individuals with intellectual disabilities the arts, emphasis is often placed on the recreational aspect of creating. While this can be an important part in the creation of art for this population, it is often accentuated to a degree where more important aspects are overlooked. For example, when teaching creative arts, individuals with intellectual disabilities are often instructed to paint or draw whatever they feel like. While there is a place for this when conducting visual arts, more emphasis needs to be placed on learning new skills and information around the subject matter (e.g., terminology, techniques). Quite often, the abilities of those with intellectual disabilities are overlooked. It is assumed that because an individual has had difficulties with academic learning and development, that his or her abilities to engage in creative and expressive forms of skill building and learning will also be limited. Because of this, individuals in this population may not receive the same level of learning, materials, and opportunities offered to those without intellectual disabilities. This is why it is very important that individuals in this population to be treated as artists in the same sense as any other person.

The following sections address four different facets of the arts. Included in each section will be information on benefits of including art, important areas of focus, and an example of lessons or activities that could be taught.
Teaching Visual Art

Benefits
Visual art places emphasis on creating a visual expression or representation. This can include a variety of mediums, such as painting, drawing, and sculpting. Engaging in visual art can yield positive results in a variety of individuals with differing levels of functioning and diagnoses. Some of these benefits include a non-verbal way of self-expression, an increase in fine motor skills, and increased confidence as a result of learning a new skill and having a tangible item that can be produced and displayed.

Many individuals who have intellectual disabilities can have difficulty expressing themselves verbally. Visual art, even when assigned a specific direction or theme, manifests itself in different manners for every individual. Because of this, each piece created will contain personal expression from the person who fashioned it.

Visual art is highly accessible and can be utilized by individuals with a variety of different physical difficulties. It uses movement and motor skills, regardless of how an individual is engaging in the activity, which may not be utilized with other actions.

Confidence can be increased as a result of skill development. Learning a new skill or evolving an already existing one can result in amplified feelings of self-worth and a heightened perception of an individual’s overall abilities. On top of this, having a final product that can be viewed and shared with others can also yield positive results regarding confidence, and an individual’s perception of their abilities.

Important Areas of focus
It is very important that individuals with intellectual disabilities are not underestimated in their overall abilities and capability of learning new skills. Therefore, it is important that individuals interested in the subject are taught the basic foundations.

Some of the basic foundations of art that should be addressed when working with this population include colour, line, shape, and pattern. Each of these elements of art should be taught in a manner that is easily understood, and should be tailored to meet any special needs and requirements when working with this population. Another aspect of art that should be taken into consideration is how art can be interpreted and viewed. Showing students art by a variety of different people, and asking about what is liked and disliked, can allow for a better understanding of different styles, and the types of art they like the most. Showing
student’s a variety of well-known art pieces (e.g., Starry Night), and relating them to lessons they have been taught, can also aid in retention and motivation when learning this basic skills.

**Lessons/Activities**

When engaging in any lesson or project in the creative arts, it is important to know the instructional needs of the population. Therefore, praise, repetition, and relevance are important aspects to focus on when working with individuals with intellectual disabilities. According to Eckhoff (2008), having students view different art forms by a variety of artists, and relating back to the foundations they have learned, can aid in overall interest levels and retention. See Appendix A for an example of a basic activity sheet on types of lines.
Visual Art
To Summarize

Benefits

- Non-verbal way of self-expression
- Increase in fine motor skills
- Increase in confidence

Some Important Areas of focus

- Individuals should be taught the basic foundations that all artists should be equipped with
- Colour, line, shape, and pattern are all examples of aspects of art that can be taught
- Show different art pieces and allow them to discuss their opinions and feelings towards them
- Relate what is learned to pieces of art by different artists
Teaching Dance

Benefits

Dance places emphasis on different ways in which a body can move. Dance is very personal, and manifests itself differently with each individual. Learning about music, rhythm, and how the body moves are all important aspects of dance.

According to Cluphf, O'Connor and Vanin (2001), the use of dance with adults with intellectual disabilities can be a form of self-expression, a way to increase levels of socialization, and can improve physical health as a form of enjoyable exercise. Increased balance, gross motor skill, flexibility, and agility are all positive aspects that can result from dance. Many individuals who engage in dance state that this particular form of art is great for expressing oneself in a non-verbal manner. By using style of dance, music, and body language, an individual can express him or herself to others through their performance. Dance can also be a source of social interaction for many, which is important in those who have intellectual disabilities. Finally, dance can improve physical health by providing individuals with a fun and effective way to exercise.

Dance can be engaged in by many different individuals, with a variety of physical and intellectual disabilities. Because of the subjective nature of this art form, dance can be enjoyed in many different manners, as long as the focus is on movement.

Important Areas of Focus

Two of the most important aspects to consider when teaching dance to this population is that all individuals can engage in dance in some form, and that encouragement and modelling are large parts of participating and motivation with this art form. If individuals have very limited mobility, focus on what they can move, not what they cannot move. For example, if an individual’s legs are the primary area affected by their disability, help them move their arms to the music. Giving breaks is necessary as dance is a physical activity, but it is also important to make sure individuals are participating and not sitting out because they simply are not motivated.

One of the main focuses of dance should be promoting physical activity. By getting people up, stretching, and moving their bodies, overall physical health is being considered and improved. Once this basis is met more advanced dance practices can begin to take shape. Teaching individuals about how their bodies stretch and move, keeping rhythm with one another, and engaging in many different styles of dance are all examples of things to emphasize in a dance class.
Lessons/Activities

When teaching, or assisting with, a lesson in dance, it is very important that levels of functioning and overall physical abilities are taken into consideration. Activities must promote physical activity and skill development, but must also be an enjoyable and fun experience for those involved. A class that consists of stretching different parts of the body in a rhythmic manner, and ends with a related game or unstructured dance time, can address these obstacles and leave an appropriate amount of room for lessons and skill building in between. When teaching a dance, it is important to break a piece down into smaller sections, and build upon each part by adding a new series of moves slowly.

Choosing dances that consist of movements with different parts of the body is important. This provides opportunity for all individuals involved to participate in the dance steps. Keeping rhythm can be taught by counting out loud when a dance is taking place, and asking students to join in as well. Learning to dance individually and with a group of people, with and without music, and using different styles and tempo of movement are all aspects that can be focused on in a dance class with individuals with intellectual disabilities.

It is important to remember to assess physical abilities and limitations on an individual level. For example, individuals with Down Syndrome may have flexible and unstable joints, therefore certain movements could be dangerous.
Dance
To Summarize

Benefits

- Self-expression
- A way to increase levels of socialization
- Increased physical health as a form of enjoyable exercise

Important Areas of focus

- *All* individuals can engage in dance in some form
- Encouragement and *modelling* is a large part of participation and motivation
- Accommodate different physical and intellectual disabilities by focusing on what an individual *can* move
- Teach about how their bodies stretch and move, keeping rhythm with one another, and engaging in different styles of dance
Teaching Music

Benefits

Music can be beneficial to individuals with intellectual disabilities in a variety of ways. Similar to the other creative arts, it can offer a means of self-expression for those who are unable, or find it difficult, to share emotions, feelings, or ideas (Carr et al., 2012). Writing lyrics, learning instruments, or engaging in singing exercises can provide individuals with an opportunity to learn a new skill, which is highly important when working with adults with intellectual disabilities (Carr et al., 2012). Because music is such a prevalent and important part of society, it is beneficial for those within this population to be taught about the subject, as it is something that they are likely to encounter frequently in their daily lives. By attaining new knowledge and skills, and by being taught about music in relation to society and culture, individuals with intellectual disabilities can experience increased self-esteem and confidence.

Important Areas of Focus

Music, like all areas of creative art, is a highly accessible medium, and can be produced and enjoyed by individuals with a wide range of physical and intellectual disabilities. Accommodations can be addressed by the types of activities used, utilizing a variety of instruments, and creating a way that those who are hearing impaired can contribute to the piece being created.

It is important to remember that individuals in this population are very capable of creating many different types of music and have the ability to learn the basics of music just as any other person would. Rhythm, tempo, pitch, melody, the sound of different instruments, and how music can be represented (verbally, bodily, and visually) are all aspects of music that individuals with intellectual disabilities can be taught. There are a variety of lessons that emphasize all these different skills, such as using different instruments, singing, and simply listening to music.

Lessons/Activities

When teaching music, it is important to be aware of the needs of those who are being taught. Any physical or intellectual disabilities should be addressed, and accommodation should be provided by instrument use, pacing, etc. Lessons should revolve around different aspects of music, and should be interactive and fun. Anything from playing drums to learn rhythm, or singing to learn pitch, are ways that individuals can be educated on the development of music.

An example of one activity that could be used with this population is to write a song. This provides a lesson on many of the different technical aspects of
music, including rhythm, tempo, melody, and how music is represented. Students can come up with a topic for a song, followed by finding words that rhyme that fit the theme. From there a song can be created by adding a melody on a variety of different instruments. Not only does an activity like this address many of the technical aspects of musical development in a practical manner, but it also can be attributed to increased confidence and self-esteem when an individual is able to perform a song that they have composed.
Music
To Summarize

Benefits

- Offers a means of self-expression for those who are unable, or find it difficult, to share emotions, feelings, or ideas
- Provides individuals with an opportunity to learn a new skill
- Music is something that they are likely to encounter frequently in their daily lives, as it is highly prevalent in society
- Increased self-esteem and confidence associated with knowledge, skill development, and awareness of popular culture

Important Areas of focus

- Accommodations can be addressed by the types of activities used (for example, finding ways for those who are hearing impaired to participate)
- People with intellectual disabilities are very capable of creating many different types of music and have the ability to learn the basics of music just as any other person would
- Rhythm, tempo, pitch, melody, the sound of different instruments, and how music can be represented (verbally, bodily, and visually) are all aspects that can be taught
- Using different instruments, singing, and simply listening to music are all ways that individuals can be taught about music
Teaching Technology Use and Media Art

Benefits
For many adults, the use of technology and media are major aspects of their everyday lives. Therefore, it is important that individuals with intellectual disabilities be taught how to effectively and appropriately use different forms of technology. A study by Cromby, Standen and Brown (1996) examined the effectiveness of technology-based learning on individuals with learning disabilities. It was found that the use of computers and other virtual environments were an effective, accessible, and affordable option when teaching these individuals. Teaching skills regarding proper technology use can increase self-confidence and create an added environment where social interaction can occur. There are also iPad and computer applications that can aid in communication for individuals that are unable to express themselves verbally. Media arts, such as photography and graphic design, can also be a means of self-expression.

Important Areas of Focus
Some basic areas of focus when conducting a lesson on using media include a variety of computer and iPad functions (typing, clicking, and touching), opening and using the internet, and learning about different uses of the internet. Some example of more advanced areas of focus can include how to take and edit pictures, and how to film and edit movies.

One aspect of media art is learning about technology use, such as how to work on iPads and computers. This provides a basis for other activities in which this subject can be engaged. Learning about how to use a keyboard, how to search on the internet, and how to use the touch-screen features on an iPad are all things that can be utilized in an individual’s daily life. Once these basic skills are taught, they can be utilized in a variety of activities such as looking up information on a subject of interest, creating online Blogs, editing pictures, and creating videos. Other aspects of media arts can include photography and videography.

It is also very important to address health and safety topics with regards to technology use. Making sure individuals know to practice good hygiene (e.g., washing their hands before use, coughing and sneezing into sleeve) and be gentle with any equipment (e.g., closing screen slowly, putting equipment away after use) can create a safe and positive learning environment, while providing a lesson that can be utilized in their daily lives. It is important that student be taught, whenever possible, skills that can be utilized outside of the classroom.
Lessons/Activities

There are a large variety of lessons available in this area of the arts due to the significant number of subjects that can be covered. Any topic regarding media art can be engaged in as long as an appropriate amount of support, time, and instruction are provided. There are also many different internet tutorials on basic computer skills that can be used when teaching this population. Many of these resources incorporate these basic skills into fun games and activities that are highly skill developing.

An example of teaching basic computer skills would be instructing students to locate a picture of their choice using the internet, then copying and pasting it into a Word Document. This exercise allows individuals to become accustomed with internet browsers, using search engines, utilizing the keyboard, and copy and pasting. As long as this is broken down into simple step-by-step instructions, individuals with varying physical and intellectual disabilities can participate and learn from it. This is the case with many other activities regarding media arts.
Media Arts
To Summarize

Benefits

- For many adults, the use of technology and media are huge aspects of their everyday lives. This should be an option for everyone.

- Computers and other virtual environments can be an effective, accessible, and affordable option when teaching individuals with intellectual disabilities.

- Teaching skills regarding proper technology use can increase self-confidence and create an added environment where social interaction can occur.

- There are also iPad and computer applications that can aid in communication for individuals that are unable to express themselves verbally.

Important Areas of focus

- Basic areas of focus include a variety of computer and iPad functions (e.g., typing, clicking, touching), opening and using the internet, and learning about different uses of the internet.

- Some more advanced areas of focus can include how to take and edit pictures, how to create blog posts, and how to film and edit movies.

- Make sure individuals know to practice good hygiene (e.g., washing their hands before use, coughing and sneezing into sleeve) and be gentle with any equipment (e.g., closing screen slowly, putting equipment away after use).
Conclusion

Because art is such a large part of many different cultures and individuals, it is important that everyone be provided with the opportunity to engage in it at some point in their lives. Individuals with intellectual disabilities should also be given the same opportunities to engage in these activities, especially because of the possible benefits that can occur from participating in them. If they want to learn more about art, and explore different mediums and themes within the subject, they should be provided with the appropriate means and materials to do so.
Final Word

Skill building can be a very important aspect in the lives of adults with intellectual disabilities. It can increase confidence, create feelings of independence, and increase overall level of intelligence (Green et al., 2005). If done correctly, learning these skills in a group setting can increase social skills, and create a sense of community among those involved in the class (Repp & Karsh, 1992). Simple items such as repeating instructions, and giving individuals as much time as they need to answer questions and make comments, can be the difference between a positive learning experience and a negative learning experience when working with adults with intellectual disabilities (Green et al., 2005).

In addition to attaining life and academic skills, the arts are something that can greatly benefit individuals with intellectual disabilities. From providing a means of self-expressions and communication, to increasing confidence by actively participating in an activity that is so prevalent in society, the arts can promote a number of healthy and appropriate activities and be an enjoyable and therapeutic experience.

In order to create an environment that is appropriate for learning, those who are working directly with this population should be equipped with information on how to effectively teach and communicate with individuals with intellectual disabilities. This manual provides information from a variety of sources on techniques and information regarding working with this population.
Definitions

**Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD):** A term referring to a wide range of intellectual disorders. It is generally characterized by difficulties in communication, social interaction, and repetitive behaviours. Autism mostly appears in early brain development, with symptoms commonly occurring between the ages of two and three.

**Intellectual Disabilities:** Also referred to as “developmental disability”. It is a disability that an individual is born with, or develops before the age of 18, and is characterized by inhibiting an individual’s ability to learn. There is a wide range of intellectual disabilities, more common ones being ASD, Down Syndrome, and Cerebral Palsy, and it can be mild or severe.

**Dual Diagnoses:** An individual who has two different diagnoses. Most commonly used to describe having an intellectual disability and mental health diagnosis.

**Down Syndrome:** Occurs when an individual is born with an extra 21st chromosome. Effects can range from mild to severe, and include a wide range of learning, health, and physical characteristics.

**Level of Functioning:** Used to describe an individual’s overall level of ability. It can assist in how lessons, activities, testing, etc., are formulated specifically for an individual.

**Maladaptive** (maladaptive behaviour): Behaviour that inhibits an individual’s ability to perform well at, and adjust too, certain situations.

**Modelling:** Demonstration of desired behaviour.
**Non-verbal Communication:** Refers to communicating with someone by not using word. Examples of this include facial expression, physical gesture, body language, and visual representations.

**Prosocial Behaviour:** Refers to positive social behaviour, mostly surrounding helping others (for example, having empathy).

**Reinforcement:** Anything that increases the chance that a behaviour, or response, will occur. An example of this would be providing verbal praise after a positive targeted behaviour has occurred.

**Repetitive Behaviour Patterns:** Common in individual with ASD, it refers to a behaviour that occurs frequently and consecutively in a short amount of time.

**Task Analysis:** Breaking a lesson or skill into smaller, more manageable steps.

**Verbal Prompt:** Using oral communication to help an individual engage in a specified behaviour or task. For example, if someone is having trouble answering a question, saying the first part of the answer so they can complete it would be a verbal prompt.
References


Appendix B: Staff Feedback Form

Staff Reviews of Manual

Please answer the following questions regarding A Manual on Working with Adults with Intellectual Disabilities in a Classroom Setting

Answer the questions where:

- 1 = Strongly disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3 = Neither agree or disagree
- 4 = Agree
- 5 = Strongly Agree

This manual is simple to follow and understand.

1 2 3 4 5

Information is relevant with regards to client population.

1 2 3 4 5

Information in this manual is up-to-date.

1 2 3 4 5

Information in this manual is useful, and provides a variety of subjects regarding adults with intellectual disabilities.

1 2 3 4 5

This manual has a professional and easy to read appearance.

1 2 3 4 5

Provided the opportunity, I would be comfortable using this manual as a tool for future staff, students, and volunteers.

1 2 3 4 5

This manual could be generalized to other agencies similar to this one.

1 2 3 4 5

Date: _________________________  Signature: _____________________
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## PART I: WORKING IN THE CLASSROOM

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## PART II: THE ARTS

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WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE?

The purpose of this manual is to integrate a variety of information, from numerous sources, on working with adults with intellectual disabilities in a classroom or group setting. This book will contain material from empirically validated sources, all pertaining to appropriate and effective ways to work with this population in both a general and art setting.

WHAT IS IN THIS RESOURCE?

This manual is broken down into two sections. The first section, entitled Working with Individual’s who have Intellectual Disabilities focuses on working with individuals with intellectual disabilities in a classroom setting. It first goes into detail regarding two common types of intellectual disabilities, Down Syndrome and Autism Spectrum Disorder. Within these sections there is information regarding both teaching and communication tips and techniques. Following this subsection, there is an area entitled Working with Individual’s with Intellectual Disabilities: In General. This area emphasizes key items that should be taught, and how to address the issues that may arise when working in a classroom, or group, setting. It was chosen to specifically address Down Syndrome and Autism Spectrum Disorder because of their prevalence at the agency that this manual was specified towards. They are also considered to be the more common intellectual disabilities, especially with regards to the creative arts.

Individuals who are dually diagnosed are not specifically addressed within this manual. It is important to remember that while many of these tips and techniques can be utilized with individuals who have a dual diagnoses, there are likely special considerations that must be emphasized within this population and on an individual basis.

The second section of this manual entitled The Arts focuses on working with individuals with intellectual disabilities in the creative arts. The arts that are described include visual art, dance, music, and media art. Within each of these descriptions the benefits, important areas of focus, and lessons/activities are addressed.

Within each section of this manual there is a summary of the material. These summaries can be used if there is limited time available to read the entire text.
Part I: Working in the Classroom
In most cases, individuals with developmental disabilities enjoy learning. Developing or improving skills can create feelings of importance, independence, and intelligence (Green, Reid, Rollyson & Passante, 2005). Learning skills and information regarding anything from independent living, to playing a musical instrument, all hold relevance and importance when working with this population. There are certain things that people working within this population should be aware of in terms of teaching skills to, and communicating with, individuals with intellectual disabilities.

In addition, learning in a group environment can create a variety of interactions that are important in the development of positive social behaviour (Repp & Karsh, 1992). While working with this population in a group setting can yield positive results in both skill development and social interaction, it can be difficult to conduct such a class due to differing levels of functioning and diagnoses (Repp & Karsh, 1992). Because of these difficulties, it is important that teachers be aware of appropriate and inappropriate ways of communicating with this population and how to teach them specific skills in a way that is understood by all members of the class. The person who is providing the lesson must take into consideration the levels of functioning, diagnoses, and special needs that may affect an individual’s ability to learn and retain information (Green et al., 2005).
DOWN SYNDROME

What is it?
Down Syndrome occurs when an individual is born with an extra 21st chromosome. In Canada, approximately one in 800 individuals is born with Down Syndrome. It can also occur within any race or gender. Effects of Down Syndrome differ greatly on an individual basis, with a range of learning, health, and physical characteristics. Learning difficulties are a common aspect of having Down Syndrome.

Teaching Tips
Use verbal cues
• Emphasize key words
• Use repetition
• Use songs, rhymes, and mantras if possible

Use visual aids
• Use schedules
• Create charts and diagrams
• Have corresponding pictures and photos
• Use colour coordination

Make sure to take individual levels of functioning into consideration
• Reduce or increase level of difficulty or length of a task

Speak in an understandable manner
• Use fewer words
• Speak at an appropriate speed (slower, but keep in mind level of functioning)

Select appropriate materials
• Keep reading level in mind
• If appropriate materials cannot be located for a specified subject, edit existing resources or create new ones

Base lessons on “real-life” experience
• Relate material to individual interests
• Create connections between different materials and themes whenever possible

Use a task analysis
• Break information down into small parts, and define each step
• Provide reinforcement after each step is completed
Teaching Tips (continued)

Practice skills whenever possible
- Go over learned information and skills in different settings and with different people
- Repetition is very important with regards to skill development

Communication Tips

Use visual aids to communicate if needed
- Pictures, signs, and symbols can all be used as a means of communication

Make sure to let the student know if something is not understood
- Ask them to slow down or repeat what they have said
- If they are still not understood it may be necessary to use another form of communication, such as pictures.

Allow appropriate time to answer questions or express ideas
- It may take a few seconds for the students to process the questions and come up with an answer
- Make sure to give enough time for them to answer the question on their own
- It may be necessary to provide a verbal prompt if they are having trouble formulating an answer

DOWN SYNDROME: TO SUMMARIZE

Down Syndrome
- Occurs when an individual is born with an extra 21st chromosome
- Can affect learning, health, and physical characteristics
- Learning difficulties are common

Teaching/Communication Tips
- Use verbal cues
- Use visual aids
- Make sure to take individual levels of functioning into consideration
- Speak in an understandable manner
- Select appropriate materials
- Base lessons on “real-life” experience
- Use a task analysis
- Practice skills whenever possible
- Use visual aids to communicate if needed
- Make sure to let the student know if something is not understood
- Allow appropriate time to answer questions or express ideas
AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

What is it?

Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) is a condition that is caused by atypical development of the brain. It is often characterized by difficulties regarding communication and social interactions, as well as increased engagement in repetitive behaviour patterns. Motor coordination, attentive abilities, and physical health can also be associated with ASD. Some strengths that individuals with ASD may display include excelled skills in music, art, math, memory, reading, fine-motor, and non-verbal reasoning. Problem areas can include impairments in social relationships and communication, difficulties with sleeping, eating, and toileting, and displaying frequent inappropriate behaviour.

Teaching Tips

Make sure to take individual levels of functioning into consideration

- Reduce or increase level of difficulty or length of a task

Use visual aids

- Use pictures, diagrams, charts, and colour coordination whenever possible

Praise positive or “prosocial” behaviour whenever possible when teaching a lesson

- When appropriate classroom behaviour occurs, reinforce it immediately after it has taken place (verbal praise)

Make sure the learning environment is conducive to the individuals needs

- Examples include using lots of visual aids around the classroom, and keeping noise level to an appropriate amount

Provide enough time for explanation

- Give the individual an appropriate amount of time to explain an answer he or she has provided
- An answer that may seem unthoughtful or random could have significant meaning and relevance, they may just need time to explain themselves

Use language that is easy to understand

- Instructions should be kept clear, direct, and simple
- Use literal terms, and avoid things that could potentially be taken a different way

Use structure and routine whenever possible

- Make the individual aware of class schedules by posting one where it can easily be interpreted
- If a daily activity is going to be switched out, make sure that the student is aware of this as soon as possible

Set short term goals and targets

- Make sure that any goals are in the scope of the individuals abilities
- Break goals down into smaller steps, and reinforce whenever any part is met
Communication Tips

*Use simple language that is clearly understood*
- Speak clearly and in an appropriate volume
- Avoid idioms
- Don’t use sarcasm
- Talk directly to the individual

*Give appropriate response time*
- It may take some time for an individual to process a question or comment
- Make sure to provide enough time for the individual to come up with their response and articulate it in a way they feel comfortable
- Use verbal prompts only after providing enough time for individuals to try it themselves

*Use familiar language*
- Use words that the individual knows, and is accustomed too
- If the individual does not understand a word, teach them about it

*Use visual aids to assist in understanding*
- Use pictures, diagrams, charts, etc., to convey a lesson or message
- Let the individual use drawing as a means of non-verbal communication

**AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER: TO SUMMARIZE**

**ASD**
- Caused by atypical development of the brain
- Characterized by difficulties in communication and social interactions, as well as increased engagement in repetitive behaviour patterns

**Teaching/Communication Tips**
- Make sure to take individual levels of functioning into consideration
- Use visual aids
- Praise positive or “prosocial” behaviour whenever possible when teaching a lesson
- Make sure the learning environment is conducive to the individuals needs
- Provide enough time for explanation
- Use language that is easy to understand
- Use structure and routine whenever possible
- Set shot term goals and targets
- Use simple language that is clearly understood
- Give appropriate response time
- Use familiar language
- Use visual aids to assist in understanding

Part I: Working in the Classroom Basic Information: Different Diagnoses
WORKING WITH INDIVIDUALS WITH INTELLECTUAL DISABILITIES

IMPORTANT AREAS OF FOCUS

Life Skills
Life skills, which include topics such as independent living and appropriate socialization, are very important to address when working with this population. Providing lessons on basic, everyday living, can encourage a more independent lifestyle, as well as create an increase in positive self-perception and confidence.

This could include:
• Teaching independent living skills (for example hygiene and safety)
• Lessons on appropriate social skills (for example manners and applicable conversation)
• Providing reinforcement for appropriate behaviour, which can also increase these skills (for example, providing verbal praise for and acknowledgment for using the word “please”)

Respect
Because certain intellectual disabilities are often characterized by maladaptive social skills, teaching individuals about showing and receiving respect is important.

This could include:
• Lessons on personal space (both within themselves and others)
• Being taught about respecting oneself, others, authority figures, etc.
• Making sure that individuals are aware that they have the right to be respected, and what to do if they feel that this is not the case

Confidence
Having confidence in oneself is an important trait and skill for everyone to achieve. Self-esteem and being positively self-aware are both items that should be taught early on in individuals with intellectual disabilities.

This could include:
• Providing examples of happy and successful individuals with disabilities (e.g., stories, videos)
• Providing reinforcement for appropriate behaviour (give verbal praise when an individual says something positive about themselves)
• Acknowledging all achievements

Part I: Working in the Classroom Working with Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities
Problem Solving
Having problem solving skills is important for any individual, as unanticipated situations are often a daily occurrence. Having the knowledge and skillset to deal with such problems is highly important for intellectual disabilities, especially due to structure and schedule being of high importance within this population.

This could include:
- Playing games or engaging in activities that utilize problem solving skills (for example, puzzles)
- Discussions pertaining to steps that can be taken when a problem arises
- Reinforcing problem solving behaviour
- Formulating discussions on daily events that may require problem solving (for example, what to do if lunch is forgotten at home)

Establishing Rules
Having rules, especially when working in a group, is something that all individuals have experienced in their lives. It helps to make the environment positive for all those involved and can create structure and routine, both of which are important aspects when working with this population.

This could include:
- Coming up with rules as a group, and making sure that everyone that wishes to has a chance to contribute
- Reinforcing individuals when rules are followed, and using verbal reminders when rules are not followed
- Accommodating the needs of different students through the establishment of rules (for example, if there is a student in a wheelchair it may be necessary to have a rule about not leaving belongings on the floor)
- Having rules such as listening when someone else is speaking, respecting others, taking turns, and following safety procedures and regulations

IMPORTANT AREAS OF FOCUS: TO SUMMARIZE

Life Skills
- Independent living skills
- Appropriate social skills
- Providing reinforcement for appropriate behaviour

Respect
- Personal space
- Respecting oneself, others, authority figures
- Having the right to be respected

Confidence
- Examples of happy and successful individuals with disabilities
- Reinforcement for appropriate behaviour
- Acknowledging achievements
Problem Solving
- Engaging in activities that utilize problem solving skills
- Discussing steps that can be taken when a problem arises
- Discussing daily events that may require problem solving

Establishing Rules
- Coming up with rules as a group
- Reinforcing individuals when rules are followed
- Accommodating the needs of different students

ACCOMMODATING INDIVIDUALS IN A GROUP

Working in a classroom or group setting can have both positive and negative aspects (Repp & Karsh, 1992). It can be difficult to engage an entire audience, especially with differing levels of functioning and diagnoses, with one main focus or lesson. Students who are lower functioning may not understand a lesson if it is addressed to those who are higher functioning, however, individuals may become bored if a lesson is too easy. This is why it is important to find a balance that meets the special needs of all individuals involved. This can be achieved by separating classes whenever possible, providing two different activities for differing levels of functioning, and remembering that each individual has a unique learning style and will commonly need individual instruction (Repp & Karsh, 1992). The main benefit in working in a group setting is an increase in prosocial behaviour and interaction (Repp & Karsh, 1992). The social skills attained from working with both teachers and fellow students should be considered high priority.

ACCOMMODATING DIFFERENT LEVELS OF FUNCTIONING AND DIAGNOSES

Teaching Tips
Provide a general overview and then break into small groups
- Explain the lesson in an easy to understand manner for all individuals
- Break off into groups after the lesson is begun so that students can either begin the lesson if instructions are understood, or ask for help if they require extra assistance
- When creating groups, keep in mind differing levels of functioning
- It may be appropriate to break groups up into similar levels of functioning, or different levels of functioning, depending on the activity and outcome

Emphasize “Team Learning”
- When making groups, place individuals who are higher functioning with individuals who are lower functioning
- This can be useful for everyone involved, as it provides opportunity for leadership and further learning for higher functioning individuals, and a chance for information to be relayed in a manner that is different from the initial instruction

Part I: Working in the Classroom Accommodating Individuals in a Group
Teaching Tips (continued)

Make tasks accessible to all levels of functioning
- Tasks may need to be divided up into different categories of completion (for example, some individuals may write a project, others may draw)
- Adjust expectations for final outcomes and projects dependent on the individual completing them
- If a lesson is found that is tailored towards individuals who are higher or lower functioning, create a similar task using appropriate language for other individuals (for example, if an activity asks to draw a picture of something, it may be appropriate to add a written portion as well for some individuals)

Approach different diagnoses in a different manner
- All different diagnoses have different requirements and needs
- Remember to treat each person as an individual, even if they have similar levels of functioning
- An individual may be higher functioning in one subject, and have more difficulties in another (for example, being very strong at written communication, but having difficulties with verbal communication)

**IMPORTANT THINGS TO REMEMBER**

In addition to items that have already been addressed there are other things that should be kept in mind when working within this population. Some important aspects include:

Being kind, patient, and positive
- Having a positive attitude and smile can really go a long way
- Remember that if you are acting upset, it could affect how other feel
- Remember that in order for individuals to be independent they have to do things on their own, which may take additional time and effort on their part (for example, it may be quicker for you to zip up a coat, but it is important to let them try first)

Being creative
- Learning to express an idea in many different ways
- Learning how to take a lesson and accommodate it for different individuals
- Learning how to communicate in non-verbal manners

Not overloading individuals with information
- While teaching skills is very important when working with this population, it should not be a constant process
- Take breaks from learning new things to build upon, or develop, already existing skills
- This will help with overall enjoyment and retention of skill building
Listening to what they have to say
- Even if something may seem irrelevant or thoughtless, it is likely important and relevant to the individual
- Listening to what an individual is saying can create a more positive and trusting environment
- If they are being taught something and have a comment that may not relate directly to the subject, try and find a way to create a connection

Remembering that these individuals are capable of much more than they are often credited for
- Individuals with intellectual disabilities are often underestimated, resulting in missed opportunities
- If they want to try something they should be given the opportunity to try it in a safe and positive environment
- They need to be challenged within the realm of their functioning

CONCLUSION

Teaching skills and new information to individuals with intellectual disabilities is very important. There are many benefits that can arise from engaging in skill development, and it can increase an individual’s overall quality of life. There are special considerations that must be taken into account when teaching within this population, and these should be reviewed and addressed prior to beginning lessons. Once appropriate instructional and communicative approaches to working with this population are established, work within this population can effectively and appropriately take place, which can be a very rewarding experience.
PART II: THE ARTS
Art, be it visual art, dance, music, etc., is highly prevalent in today's society. Art is utilized by many as an area of study, career path, form of therapy, recreational activity, and means of self-expression in individuals from many different backgrounds and abilities. It is important that all individuals be provided with the opportunity to engage in different types of art if it something in which they show interest in. Individuals with intellectual disabilities, regardless of their diagnoses or level of functioning, can engage very effectively in all of the different forms of art. This population should be provided with the resources to explore the different mediums that fall under this creative outlet, just as any other individual should.

When teaching individuals with intellectual disabilities the arts, emphasis is often placed on the recreational aspect of creating. While this can be an important part in the creation of art for this population, it is often accentuated to a degree where more important aspects are overlooked. For example, when teaching creative arts, individuals with intellectual disabilities are often instructed to paint or draw whatever they feel like. While there is a place for this when conducting visual arts, more emphasis needs to be placed on learning new skills and information around the subject matter (terminology, techniques, etc). Quite often, the abilities of those with intellectual disabilities are overlooked. It is assumed that because an individual has had difficulties with academic learning and development, that their abilities to engage in creative and expressive forms of skill building and learning will also be limited. Because of this, individuals in this population may not receive the same level of learning, materials, and opportunities offered to those without intellectual disabilities. This is why it is very important that individuals in this population to be treated as artists in the same sense as any other person.

The following sections will address four different facets of the arts. Included in each section will be information on benefits that may occur, important areas of focus, and an example of lessons or activities that could be taught.
VISUAL ART

TEACHING VISUAL ART

Benefits
Visual art places emphasis on creating a visual expression or representation. This can include a variety of mediums, such as painting, drawing, and sculpting. Engaging in visual art can yield positive results in a variety of individuals with differing levels of functioning and diagnoses. Some of these benefits include a non-verbal way of self-expression, an increase in fine motor skills, and increased confidence as a result of learning a new skill and having a tangible item that can be produced and displayed.

Many individuals who have intellectual disabilities can have difficulty expressing themselves verbally. Visual art, even when assigned a specific direction or theme, manifests itself in different manners for every individual. Because of this, each piece created will contain personal expression from the person who fashioned it.

Visual art is highly accessible, and can be engaged in by individuals with many different physical difficulties. It uses movement and motor skills, regardless of how an individual is engaging in the activity, which may not be utilized with other actions.

Confidence can be increased as a result of skill development. Learning a new skill or evolving an already existing one can result in amplified feelings of self-worth and a heightened perception of an individual’s overall abilities. On top of this, having a final product that can be viewed and shared with others can also yield positive results regarding confidence, and an individual’s perception of their abilities.

Important Areas of focus
It is very important that individuals with intellectual disabilities are not underestimated in their overall abilities and capability of learning new skills. Therefore, it is important that individuals interested in the subject are taught the basic foundations.

Some of the basic foundations of art that should be addressed when working with this population include colour, line, shape, and pattern. Each of these elements of art should be taught in a manner that is easily understood, and should be tailored to meet any special needs and requirements when working with this population. Another aspect of art that should be taken into consideration is how art can be interpreted and viewed. Showing student’s art by a variety of different people, and asking about what is liked and disliked, can allow for a better understanding of different styles, and the types of art they like the most. Showing student’s famous art pieces, and relating them to lessons they have been taught, can also aid in retention and motivation when learning this basic skills.
Lessons/Activities
When engaging in any lesson or project in the creative arts, it is important to know the instructional needs of the population. Therefore, praise, repetition, and relevance are important aspects to focus on when working with individuals with intellectual disabilities. According to Eckhoff (2008), having students view different art forms by a variety of artists, and relating back to the foundations they have learned, can aid in overall interest levels and retention.

See Appendix A for an example of a basic activity sheet on types of lines.

TEACHING VISUAL ART: TO SUMMARIZE

Benefits
- Non-verbal way of self-expression
- Increase in fine motor skills
- Increase in confidence

Important Areas of focus
- Individuals should be taught the basic foundations that all artists should be equipped with
- Colour, line, shape, and pattern are all examples of aspects of art that can be taught
- Show different art pieces and allow them to discuss their opinions and feelings towards them
- Relate what is learned to pieces of art by different artists

DANCE

TEACHING DANCE

Benefits
Dance places emphasis on different ways in which a body can move. Dance is very personal, and will manifest itself differently with each individual. Learning about music, rhythm, and how the body moves are all important aspects of dance.

According to Cluphf, O’Connor and Vanin (2001), the use of dance with adults with intellectual disabilities can be a form of self-expression, a way to increase levels of socialization, and can improve physical health as a form of enjoyable exercise. Many individuals who engage in dance state that this particular form of art is great for expressing oneself in a non-verbal manner. By using style of dance, music, and body language, an individual can express themselves to others through their performance. Dance can also be a source of social interaction for many, which is important in those who have intellectual disabilities. Finally, dance can improve physical health by providing individuals with a fun and effective way to exercise.
Dance can be engaged in by many different individuals, with a variety of physical and intellectual disabilities. Because of the subjective nature of this art form, dance can be enjoyed in many different manners, as long as the focus is on movement.

**Important Areas of Focus**
Two of the most important aspects to consider when teaching dance to this population is that all individuals can engage in dance in some form, and that encouragement and modelling are large parts of participating and motivation with this art form. If individuals have very limited mobility, focus on what they can move, not what they cannot move. For example, if an individual's legs are the primary area affected by their disability, help them move their arms to the music. Giving breaks is necessary as dance is a physical activity, but it is also important to make sure individuals are participating and not sitting out because they simply are not motivated.

The main focus of dance should be promoting physical activity. By getting people up, stretching, and moving their bodies, overall physical health is being considered and improved. Once this basis is met more advanced dance practices can begin to take shape. Teaching individuals about how their bodies stretch and move, keeping rhythm with one another, and engaging in many different styles of dance are all examples of things to emphasize in a dance class.

**Lessons/Activities**
When teaching, or assisting with, a lesson in dance, it is very important that levels of functioning and overall physical abilities are taken into consideration. Activities must promote physical activity and skill development, but must also be an enjoyable and fun experience for those involved. A class that consists of stretching different parts of the body in a rhythmic manner, and ends with a related game or unstructured dance time, can address these obstacles and leave an appropriate amount of room for lessons and skill building in between. When teaching a dance, it is important to break a piece down into smaller sections, and build upon each part by adding a new series of moves slowly.

Choosing dances that consist of movements with different parts of the body is important. This provides opportunity for all individuals involved to participate in the dance steps. Keeping rhythm can be taught by counting out loud when a dance is taking place, and asking students to join in as well. Learning to dance individually and with a group of people, with and without music, and using different styles and tempo of movement are all aspects that can be focused on in a dance class with individuals with intellectual disabilities.

**TEACHING DANCE: TO SUMMARIZE**

**Benefits**
- Self-expression
- A way to increase levels of socialization
- Increased physical health as a form of enjoyable exercise
Important Areas of focus
- All individuals can engage in dance in some form
- Encouragement and modelling is a large part of participation and motivation
- Accommodate different physical and intellectual disabilities by focusing on what an individual can move
- Teach about how their bodies stretch and move, keeping rhythm with one another, and engaging in different styles of dance

MUSIC

TEACHING MUSIC

Benefits
Music can be beneficial to individuals with intellectual disabilities in a variety of ways. Similar to the other creative arts, it can offer a means of self-expression for those who are unable, or find it difficult, to share emotions, feelings, or ideas (Carr et al., 2012). Writing lyrics, learning instruments, or engaging in singing exercises can provide individuals with an opportunity to learn a new skill, which is highly important when working with adults with intellectual disabilities (Carr et al., 2012). Because music is such a prevalent and important part of society, it is beneficial for those within this population to be taught about the subject, as it is something that they are likely to encounter frequently in their daily lives. By attaining new knowledge and skills, and by being taught about music in relation to society and culture, individuals with intellectual disabilities can experience increased self-esteem and confidence.

Important Areas of Focus
Music, like all areas of creative art, is a highly accessible medium, and can be produced and enjoyed by individuals with a wide range of physical and intellectual disabilities. Accommodations can be addressed by the types of activities used, utilizing a variety of instruments, and creating a way that those who are hearing impaired can contribute to the piece being created.

It is important to remember that individuals in this population are very capable of creating many different types of music and have the ability to learn the basics of music just as any other person would. Rhythm, tempo, pitch, melody, the sound of different instruments, and how music can be represented (verbally, bodily, and visually) are all aspects of music that individuals with intellectual disabilities can be provided lessons and activities on. There are a variety of lessons that emphasize all these different skills, such as using different instruments, singing, and simply listening to music.

Lessons/Activities
When teaching music, it is important to be aware of the needs of those who are being taught. Any physical or intellectual disabilities should be addressed, and accommodation should be provided by instrument use, speed of activity, etc.
Lessons should revolve around different aspects of music, and should be interactive and fun. Anything from playing drums to learn rhythm, or singing to learn pitch, are ways that individuals can be educated on the development of music.

An example of one activity that could be used with this population is to write a song. This provides a lesson on many of the different technical aspects of music, including rhythm, tempo, melody, and how music is represented. Students can come up with a topic for a song, followed by finding words that rhyme that fit the theme. From there a song can be created by adding a melody on a variety of different instruments. Not only does an activity like this address many of the technical aspects of musical development in a practical manner, but it also can be attributed to increased confidence and self-esteem when an individual is able to perform a song that they have composed.

TEACHING MUSIC: TO SUMMARIZE

Benefits
- Offers a means of self-expression for those who are unable, or find it difficult, to share emotions, feelings, or ideas
- Provides individuals with an opportunity to learn a new skill
- Music is something that they are likely to encounter frequently in their daily lives, as it is highly prevalent in society
- Increased self-esteem and confidence associated with knowledge, skill development, and awareness of popular culture

Important Areas of focus
- Accommodations can be addressed by the types of activities used (for example, finding ways for those who are hearing impaired to participate)
- People with intellectual disabilities are very capable of creating many different types of music and have the ability to learn the basics of music just as any other person would
- Rhythm, tempo, pitch, melody, the sound of different instruments, and how music can be represented (verbally, bodily, and visually) are all aspects that can be taught
- Using different instruments, singing, and simply listening to music are all ways that individuals can be taught about music

MEDIA ART

TEACHING MEDIA ART

Benefits
For many adults, the use of technology and media are huge aspects of their everyday lives. Therefore, it is important that individuals with intellectual disabilities be
taught how to effectively and appropriately use different forms of technology. A study by Cromby, Standen and Brown (1996) examined the effectiveness of technology-based learning on individuals with learning disabilities. It was found that the use of computers and other virtual environments were an effective, accessible, and affordable option when teaching these individuals. Teaching skills regarding proper technology use can increase self-confidence and create an added environment where social interaction can occur. There are also iPad and computer applications that can aid in communication for individuals that are unable to express themselves verbally.

**Important Areas of Focus**

Some basic areas of focus when conducting a lesson on using media include a variety of computer and iPad functions (typing, clicking, touching, etc.), opening and using the internet, and learning about different uses of the internet. Some more advanced areas of focus can include how to take and edit pictures, and how to film and edit movies.

One aspect of media art is learning about technology use, such as how to work on iPads and computers. This provides a basis for other activities in which this subject can be engaged. Learning about how to use a keyboard, how to search on the internet, and how to use the touch-screen features on an iPad are all things that can be utilized in an individual’s daily life. Once these basic skills are taught, they can be utilized in a variety of activities such as looking up information on a subject of interest, creating online Blogs, editing pictures, and creating videos. Other aspects of media arts can include photography and videography.

It is also very important to address health and safety topics with regards to technology use. Making sure individuals know to practice good hygiene (e.g., washing their hands before use, coughing and sneezing into sleeve) and be gentle with any equipment (e.g., closing screen slowly, putting equipment away after use) can create a safe and positive learning environment, while providing a lesson that can be utilized in their daily lives.

**Lessons/Activities**

There are a large variety of lessons available in this area of the arts due to the significant number of subjects that can be covered. Any topic regarding media art can be engaged in as long as an appropriate amount of support, time, and instruction are provided. There are also many different internet tutorials on basic computer skills that can be used when teaching this population. Many of these resources incorporate these basic skills into fun games and activities that are highly skill developing.

An example of teaching basic computer skills would be instructing students to locate a picture of their choice using the internet, then copying and pasting it into a Word Document. This exercise allows individuals to become accustomed with internet browsers, using search engines, utilizing the keyboard, and copy and pasting. As long as this is broken down into simple step-by-step instructions, individuals with varying physical and intellectual disabilities can participate and learn from it. This is the case with many other activities regarding media arts.
TEACHING MEDIA ART: TO SUMMARIZE

Benefits
- For many adults, the use of technology and media are huge aspects of their everyday lives. This should be an option for everyone.
- Computers and other virtual environments can be an effective, accessible, and affordable option when teaching individuals with intellectual disabilities.
- Teaching skills regarding proper technology use can increase self-confidence and create an added environment where social interaction can occur.
- There are also iPad and computer applications that can aid in communication for individuals that are unable to express themselves verbally.

Important Areas of focus
- Basic areas of focus include a variety of computer and iPad functions (e.g., typing, clicking, touching), opening and using the internet, and learning about different uses of the internet.
- Some more advanced areas of focus can include how to take and edit pictures, how to create blog posts, and how to film and edit movies.
- Make sure individuals know to practice good hygiene (e.g., washing their hands before use, coughing and sneezing into sleeve) and be gentle with any equipment (e.g., closing screen slowly, putting equipment away after use).

CONCLUSION

Because art is such a large part of many different cultures and individuals, it is important that everyone be provided with the opportunity to engage in it at some point in their lives. Individuals with intellectual disabilities should also be given the same opportunities to engage in these activities, especially because of the possible benefits that can occur from participating in them. If they want to learn more about art, and explore different mediums and themes within the subject, they should be provided with the appropriate means and materials to do so.
Skill building can be a very important aspect in the lives of adults with intellectual disabilities. It can increase confidence, create feelings of independence, and increase overall level of intelligence (Green et al., 2005). If done correctly, learning these skills in a group setting can increase social skills, and create a sense of community among those involved in the class (Repp & Karsh, 1992). Simple items such as repeating instructions, and giving individuals as much time as they need to answer questions and make comments, can be the difference between a positive learning experience and a negative learning experience when working with adults with intellectual disabilities (Green et al., 2005).

In addition to attaining life and academic skills, the arts are something that can greatly benefit individuals with intellectual disabilities. From providing a means of self-expressions and communication, to increasing confidence by actively participating in an activity that is so prevalent in society, the arts can promote a number of healthy and appropriate activities and be an enjoyable and therapeutic experience.

In order to create an environment that is appropriate for learning, those who are working directly with this population should be equipped with information on how to effectively teach and communicate with individuals with intellectual disabilities. This manual provides information from a variety of sources on techniques and information regarding working with this population.
**Definitions**

**Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD):** A term referring to a wide range of developmental disorders. It is generally characterized by difficulties in communication, social interaction, and repetitive behaviours. Autism mostly appears in early brain development, with symptoms commonly occurring between the ages of two and three.

**Developmental Disabilities:** Also referred to as “intellectual disability”. It is a disability that an individual is born with, or develops before the age of 18, and is characterized by inhibiting an individual’s ability to learn. There is a wide range of developmental disabilities, more common ones being ASD, Down Syndrome, and Cerebral Palsy, and it can be mild or severe.

**Dual Diagnoses:** An individual who has two different diagnoses. Most commonly used to describe having an intellectual disability and mental health diagnosis.

**Down Syndrome:** Occurs when an individual is born with an extra 21st chromosome. Effects can range from mild to severe, and include a wide range of learning, health, and physical characteristics.

**Level of Functioning:** Used to describe an individual’s overall level of ability. It can assist in how lessons, activities, testing, etc., are formulated specifically for an individual.

**Maladaptive (maladaptive behaviour):** Behaviour that inhibits an individual’s ability to perform well at, and adjust too, certain situations.

**Modelling:** Demonstration of desired behaviour.

**Non-verbal Communication:** Refers to communicating with someone by not using word. Examples of this include facial expression, physical gesture, body language, and visual representations.

**Prosocial Behaviour:** Refers to positive social behaviour, mostly surrounding helping others (for example, having empathy).

**Reinforcement:** Anything that increases the chance that a behaviour, or response, will occur. An example of this would be providing verbal praise after a positive targeted behaviour has occurred.

**Repetitive Behaviour Patterns:** Common in individual with ASD, it refers to a behaviour that occurs frequently and consecutively in a short amount of time.

**Task Analysis:** Breaking a lesson or skill into smaller, more manageable steps.

**Verbal Prompt:** Using oral communication to help an individual engage in a specified behaviour or task. For example, if someone is having trouble answering a question, saying the first part of the answer so they can complete it would be a verbal prompt.
REFERENCES


