

The Effects of Participating in Book Clubs for People with Intellectual Disabilities

A Senior Honors Thesis

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Abstract

The Next Chapter Book Club (NCBC) is an innovative program that allows individuals with intellectual disabilities to meet at book stores, libraries and coffee shops and read a book of the groups' choice. The study of NCBC looked at five measures including language skill, motivation, behavioral problems, quality-of-life and overall satisfaction with the book club. The study was conducted at the Ohio State Nisonger Center. The participants were individuals who were either currently active in the book club and those who were no longer active in the book club. The participants were provided by the Columbus Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (FCBMR/DD) and various programs at the Nisonger Center. Ten participants who were still active in the club were matched based on age, gender, IQ and living environment with eight participants who were no longer active in the club. The expected results included improved language skills, increased motivation to read, learn and interact socially, a decrease in social behavioral problems and an overall higher quality-of-life. The actual results suggest that the need for social contact and community connectedness was evident in both members and non-members. There were fewer behavioral problems in active members, an increase in curiosity and motivation and an overall satisfaction with their experience in the book club. The theoretical implications suggest that individuals with intellectual disabilities who are exposed to reading and social environments will want to read and interact with other individuals in a social setting as well as read better and feel better about themselves in comparison to those individuals that are not exposed to reading in social settings. The practical implications suggest that the lives of people with mental retardation will live happier, more fulfilling lives when they have a feeling of social connectedness and encounter a stimulating environment.

The Next Chapter Book Club is an innovative program founded by Dr. Tom Fish at The Ohio State University. Individuals who have intellectual disabilities (ID) meet with facilitators at local book stores, coffee shops and libraries to read a book of their choice. Facilitators are volunteers that assist the participants in reading. The mission of the book club is for the members to feel social connectedness and community inclusion. By meeting in public arenas, the members participate in their local community settings and feel the stimulation of people through friendly interaction. The book club members may experience a better overall quality of life. The community settings also allow for interaction with people in the stores. Started in Columbus, Ohio, The Next Chapter Book Club (NCBC) has attracted national interest. There is a total of 14 clubs in the Columbus metropolitan area comprised of about 100 individuals.

There have been no empirical evaluations on this book club since its founding. By studying the NCBC will provide researchers with important information on the effects of participating in a book club for people with ID. People with ID now have a place to meet in community settings and utilize their curiosity. People with ID have the right to participate and interact as equal members in their communities. This program allows people with ID to learn by repetition, learn by echo reading, make new friends and feel a sense of community inclusion.

The purpose of the thesis is to collect and analyze the initial data of people with mental retardation and their families. Ten book club members in the Columbus metropolitan area will take a battery of assessments. The measurements are comprised of six main categories including social connectedness, language, motivation, social behavior, quality-of-life and overall satisfaction with the book club experience. The

research strategy will include eight controls who are no longer members in the book club matched on age, gender, IQ and living environment. The expected results include an overall increase in the member's quality of life. A book club member's quality of life is going to be measured by their improvement in language, increased motivation to read and participate in social activities, decreased behavioral problems and their happiness with being a member in The Next Chapter Book Club. The data for the book club members and controls will be compared through a correlation matrix and an independent samples t-test.

Hypothesis I: Participation in the NCBC is expected to increase social interactions. The main goal for the Next Chapter Book Club is for the members to feel a sense of social connectedness and community inclusion. Social connectedness will be defined as a feeling of having people around in which one can interact with, talk to and/or feel included. Social inclusion and connectedness are well recognized by various psychological experts, including the 1997 Gatehouse Project Adolescent Health Survey of 8 Year Students. The findings of the 1997 project revealed that an individual with poor social connectedness will be two to three times more likely to experience depression. This study founded that a sense of community inclusion is clearly implicated in a person's mental state and personal well-being. Fish and Graff (2006) suggest that interpersonal connections, friendships and belonging play important roles in a person's emotional and physical well-being. Members' may make new friends and have new social connections. By being an active member in the book club, individuals will meet new people, interact in new social environments and have an overall positive sense of well-being and thus, lack feelings of depression.

Hypothesis II: Participation in the book club will improve social interaction and decrease social behavioral problems. Involvement in the book club allows members' to learn new ways of interacting that are appropriate in social and community settings. Social behavior will simply be measured in the manner in which a person acts or controls oneself. A number of studies have suggested that people with ID have significant social behavioral problems. Shessel and Reiff (1999) suggested actual differences of people with ID are related to social difficulties.

Hypothesis III: Satisfaction with the book club will be associated with the motivation for individual need for social contact (extroversion) and with individual need for cognition (curiosity). Reiss (2005) defines motivation as a true assertion of intrinsically held values. He also suggests that motivation has two characteristics; intrinsically associated goals and the intensity of desire for that goal. Reiss (2004) suggests that it is important to look at motivation because the need to think (curiosity) and social extroversion predict satisfaction more than people who do not like to think (are not curious) and introversion. If you are an introvert and you do not want to learn, then you probably are not going to learn as much.

The NCBC may attract many people with non-normative intensities of psychological needs. This study also will assess the motivational profile of participants in NCBC. Reiss and Havercamp (1998) found a validated taxonomy of 16 psychological needs that motivate much of what people do. Repeated demonstrations of his research showed validity in large diverse samples. These samples include factor validity, test-retest reliability, concurrent validity and predicted validity of behavior. Sixteen principals of psychological needs predict behavior in meaningful real life situations. By

administering the Reiss motivational profile MRDD version to people that are starting the NCBC, we will be able to assess which of the ten motives-such as the need to socialize, the need to think and the need to be accepted. They found that the method variance was only 10 out of the 16 fundamental motives that could be assessed in people with MRDD. This version has a standardized validated scale that assesses need for curiosity and social skills.

Reiss (1998) suggests that curiosity in people with ID has little to do with their IQ. Rather, the curiosity in individuals with ID can be distinguished from the individuals' actual ability to learn. Reiss' study suggests that if an individual with ID is curious enough to want to learn, they will have an overall better learning experience.

Hypothesis IV: The NCBC will increase vocabulary and language as measured by the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT) and the Weschler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS). During this research, the language variable will be defined as the ability to understand and use symbols for communication, including both oral and written forms (Hammill & McNutt, 1980). Members' in the NCBC will have improved vocabulary and language because they will be practicing reading and hearing words. By hearing and repeating while reading, it exposes them to words they might not have been exposed to outside the book club. The involvement of members in the NCBC will enhance their lives and their learning experience. I propose that by reading books monthly will increase their ability to recognize words, sounds and syllables as a form of language to communicate with those in the book club and other family members and friends.

Hypothesis V: The members' quality of life (QOL) will improve. Their QOL will improve because the individuals will be included and less excluded. While quality of life

can be measured in numerous ways, a person's quality of life will be defined by the individuals overall enjoyment of life and fulfillment derived from their social, cultural and environmental conditions.

Hypothesis VI: Participation in the NCBC is a satisfying experience. Satisfaction will be measured and assessed by ratings of satisfaction with various aspects of the NCBC. This is the first book club for people with ID. The book club will provide people with ID a way to meet new people, learn new things and interact in different community environments, thus providing an overall satisfying experience. Satisfaction will be measured in terms of the members overall sense of well being as an active participant in the book club. The satisfaction scale is comprised of five simple questions composed by Dr. Steven Reiss, 2007.

My hypotheses are as follows: Participation in the NCBC is expected to increase social interactions. Satisfaction with the book club will be associated with the motivation for individual need for social contact (extroversion) and with individual need for cognition (curiosity). The NCBC will increase vocabulary and language as measured by the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT). The members' quality of life (QOL) will improve because the individuals will be included and less excluded. Participation in the NCBC is a satisfying experience.

The purpose of this study is to present practical and theoretical implications on the involvement of the Next Chapter Book Club and the reasons for focusing on the variables of motivation, language and learning, social behavior, social connectedness and community inclusion, quality- of- life and satisfaction with member involvement. The

experimental design suggests that these variables (dependent) will be altered because of participation (independent) in the club.

Method

Participants

Participants in the NCBC are recruited from their local county MRDD and by word of mouth from family and friends. They voluntarily register in a book club that meets proximal to where they live. The NCBC member population is comprised of adult aged (18+) individuals of sub-average intelligence. The book clubs include a similar amount of males and females. The club is also very ethnically and racially diverse. Letters and permission forms were sent to about 200 members and nonmembers along with their respective parents and/or guardians. A total of 18 participants responded to the mailing. The subjects in the study include ten individuals with intellectual disabilities that are currently enrolled in the Next Chapter Book Club. They will be administered a battery of assessments. They will serve as the experimental group. Eight matched controls will be used as the control group who used to be active in the NCBC, but are no longer active members. There were a total of six females and four males in the member group. There were a total of three females and five males in the non-member group. The Ss will be matched based on IQ, social environment, gender and age. There will be a random selection of the matched controls as well as the experimental group.

Materials

The materials include using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT), the Weschler Adult Intelligence Scale- Third Edition (WAIS III), the Reiss Motivational Screen and Profile MRDD Version and a satisfaction survey.

The Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test is a measurement tool used to determine the individual's receptive vocabulary attainment for standard English as well as verbal ability. This version is an individually administered, untimed, norm-referenced, wide-range test. The PicturePlate is arranged with 204 test items grouped in 17 sets of 12 items each. The items are arranged in order of increasing difficulty. Each PicturePlate consists of four black- and -white illustrations. The task for the test-taker is to correctly identify the picture that best describes the meaning of a stimulus of a word presented orally by the examiner.

The PPVT-III was standardized nationally on a stratified sample of 2,725 persons. Raw scores can be converted to the following age-referenced normative scores. The PPVT-III has been useful in establishing and restoring rapport because of its highly appealing task requires little or no oral response and does not expose the test-taking to extensive failure. The reliability of this measurement tool is rather satisfactory. The characteristics of the items are consistent as well as parallel in the alternate forms. The scores remain stable for about one month. The median split-half reliability coefficient is .81. Validity measures show that the mean correlations of this achievement test ranges from .33 to .80.

The Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale Third Edition- Verbal Comprehension Index is a measure of general verbal skills, such as verbal fluency, ability to understand and use verbal reasoning, and verbal knowledge. The vocabulary index provides a series of orally and visually presented words that the examinee orally defines. It is based on both formal and informal educational opportunities, and requires understanding words. The WAIS III has been used for assessing learning disabilities and for determining

exceptionality and giftedness. It is also used for intellectual assessment as part of development programs as well as for clinical research purposes. This is the first and most reliable index.

The administrator will point to a word in the booklet and simply ask, "Tell me the meaning of this word." The administrator will assign a point value to the answer given based on the norm of answers provided in the testing handbook. The scores allocated will either be of a 0, 1, or 2 value. When the answer given is the most appropriate, a 2 value will be given. If the answer is a simple, but still correct answer, a 1 value will be given. In the event that it is too vague and simple (again, based on the norms of the results; including validity and reliability) a 0 will be allocated. If the answer given is in need of a *query*, the examiner will simply say, "Please tell me more about that." The examiner must be careful as to not word the statement as a question in caution that the participant does not want to answer the question. The examiner sets a basal set rule which states that the lowest set of items administered contain one or no errors. The ceiling set rule is established as the highest set of items administered containing eight or more errors. Test-retest reliability shows that the reliability (.95) of this index is very good with a small standard error of measurement (3.0).

The Reiss Motivational Profile MRDD version has standard validated scales that assess the need for curiosity and need for social skills. This version consists of 15 scaled scores that evaluate 10 different psychological needs (scales and needs noted in appendix A). When items are administered and then a factor analysis is done, a factor validity scale is provided. The test-retest reliability is found by testing the administered items and then retesting them again in order to make sure the scale found is reliable and can be

consistently found in various studies. Concurrent validity are scores that predict similar scores in other validated measures. The predictive validity of behavior gives a score that predict behaviors in real life situations.

A satisfaction survey will be given to the participants as well as their parents in order to qualitatively determine the effects the NCBC had on the participants. The utilization of the satisfaction survey allows the investigators to recognize the conscious contentment of participation in the book club. While the other diagnostic tools are grading the participants based on their unconscious effort at interpreting pictures and words, this will be a survey either filled out by a family member or the book club member themselves.

Procedure

Individuals that are active in a book club will be given a battery of the assessments that were just discussed. This will determine their levels on the aforementioned variables by being in the club. Individuals who are no longer active in the book club will be given the same battery of assessments. This will help determine their levels on the different variables based on their inactivity in the book club. An independent samples t-test will assess whether the means of the two groups (member/nonmember) are statistically significant on 22 variables (appendix B). A correlation matrix will provide us with a degree of relationship of the two variables of being active or inactive in the club.

Results

The results from the independent samples t-test suggests that the need for social contact and interaction is not statistically significant at the 0.05 level (p-value is 0.40).

Book club membership showed a mean score of 0.69 and non-membership showed a mean score of 0.4. These results suggest that members as well as non-members both have a need for social contact and social interactions.

The t-test shows that there is not a statistically significant difference in social behavioral problems in members and non-members as tested by the Reiss Screen. Also, one of the 15 variables on the Reiss Motivational profile was statistically significant: curiosity. For instance, independence and romance are not significantly different in both members and non-members in the book club. The only variable that showed a significant difference on the RMP was curiosity (curiosity significant at .075 with equal variances assumed).

There is not a difference between membership and non-membership in terms of language and vocabulary based on the PPVT and WAIS. Therefore, language and vocabulary is not dependent on membership in the book club. The groups are equal.

The quality of life based on Reiss' fundamental motives shows that there is not a statistically significant difference in the member's life in comparison to the non-members life. All of the fundamental motives (goals and sensitivities) are not significant with numeric values larger than .10.

Additionally, the satisfaction in the book club was slightly different for non-members when compared to members. The difference was not statistically significant with a p-value of 0.209, but the mean shows a slight difference. Out of a possible score of 25, members reported a mean of 23.6 satisfaction with the club and non-members reported a mean of 21.3.

Discussion

The need for social contact and community inclusion is evident in both groups, therefore, hypothesis I is refuted. The majority of individuals with ID want to feel a sense of community inclusion and social connectedness. Those individuals that are in the book club could possibly want more interactions, but they are still interacting with peers and workers in public settings. The individuals no longer in the book clubs could potentially be getting their social contact from other therapeutic or developmental programs. At the Nisonger Center alone, there are several programs that are appropriated towards individuals with ID (e.g. Best Buddies International, Speed Dating Services). A simple questionnaire could investigate why individuals dropped out of the book club and are no longer active. Some participants stated that they are no longer involved because of a conflict of other programs such as The Special Olympics.

The results from the RMP refute hypothesis II in terms of social behavioral problems. Membership in the book club decreased social behavioral problems in individuals with ID, but it was not a significant difference. It was anticipated that membership in the book club would improve social interaction, but the hypothesis was refuted. Based on undocumented reasons why participants are no longer active in the book clubs were because of other extra-curricular activities for individuals with ID such as bowling league and other Nisonger Center programs. Individuals no longer in the book club could be fulfilling their need for social interaction through other activities.

Hypothesis III is supported because the NCBC members showed a significant increase in curiosity. This can be interpreted as an indication that individuals with curious or sociable personalities are attracted to NCBC. This would make sense because the NCBC promises participants an intellectual and social experience. The result could

mean that the NCBC book clubs as currently constituted may be helping to fulfill needs of curious or sociable people with MR/DD, but not of people with opposite personality traits who may be staying away from participation. This would be important information for understanding the impact of this club and for guiding future development. Would the founders, for example, want to take steps to reach a broader range of personalities?

Based on the results, members are more curious than non-members, but both groups have a need for social contact. This would mean that the NCBC attracts people who are motivated by their curiosity (in learning) but both groups are motivated by their interest in socializing. This also suggests that introverts come to the book club to find a means for social interaction. Extroverts are the members that drop out because they can find their social interactions in other activities.

The results show a weak correlation between curiosity and satisfaction with the book clubs (p value at .101). This would have implications for demonstrating intellectual needs of people with MR/DD. Most people have assumed that people with MR/DD are not smart enough to need intellectual stimulation. Capacioppo et al., however, have shown only moderate correlations between intelligence and curiosity. Reiss and Reiss (2004), moreover, have demonstrated curiosity in the context of mental retardation. If curiosity is correlated to satisfaction with NCBC, this would be further evidence for the possible importance of gratifying intellectual needs of people with subaverage intelligence. It would mean that just because somebody is not smart, does not mean that they cannot enjoy learning new words and literature. People with ID are not thought to have curiosity, but this NCBC provides these individuals with a need for curiosity.

The results show that the Next Chapter Book Club members do not have an increase in language skill, thus hypothesis IV is refuted. Such a result may have implications for teaching language to people with MR/DD. Learning is insufficient to impact standardized scores (IQ is stable across time), but this could mean that non-verbal people are more likely to be attracted to the NCBC than verbal people.

While satisfaction in the book club was fairly consistent across member and non-member responses, it is important to note that the majority of non-member participants were no longer in the book club because of conflicting activities. Although a lot of non-members had a satisfying experience, they had other activities and events to tend to. The majority of them had planned on re-entering a book club once bowling was finished, for example.

There are several limitations to this study that is necessary for future research and examination of the book club. The number of participants was very low and makes it hard to generalize the findings to a larger population. While there were only eight members who are no longer active in the book club, it is important to look at why they are no longer active. It is simple to state whether one is active or not active in a program, but the reason behind, or the motive might vary for each individual. The reason might not be because of a lack of motivation, but rather no form of transportation or a conflict with another fundamental program. Although eight non-members were interviewed, the majority of them had mentioned that they had intentions of attending and becoming active members in the book club. This may have had a strong impact on the reasons why a lot of the variables were not statistically significant between the two groups. Another limitation would be that this research is investigating too many variables for the small

population. Ideally, the research was expected to interview 50 plus participants and their parents and/or guardians, but with the low response rate, the research was unable to complete this task. The demographic was not as stratified as it could have been. Instead of recruiting members from only the Columbus area, further research would benefit from recruiting members and non-members from different cities and states around the country.

One theoretical implication is that the present study further demonstrates the curiosity of people with ID. Being motivated and having the desire to think and learn is not the same as having the ability to do so. Normative experiments such as the present study will have a profound impact of people with ID. The practical implications include raising public awareness of people with ID as well as giving the book club members an opportunity to experience “café culture.” The practical implications also include a favorable evaluation of the NCBC. This study may provide empirical evidence of the benefits of the NCBC. The significance of this is to encourage the spread of such clubs throughout the nation and beyond.

People with MRDD encounter social barriers that exclude them from the community. The NCBC represents an effort to overcome such barriers by providing a slice of ordinary life everyone can understand and making that available to people with disabilities.

Appendix A:
Reiss Motivational Variables

Independence	Attention
Order	Vengeance
Help Others	Acceptance
Morality	Social Contact
Curiosity	Anxiety
Physical Activity	Frustration
Eating	Pain
Romance	

Appendix B:
Variables

Independence	Social contact
order	Anxiety
Help other	Frustration
morality	Pain
Curiosity	Raw score on PPVT-III
Physical activity	Raw WAIS
Eating	Satisfaction
Romance	Raw score on Reiss Screen
Attention	
Vengeance	
acceptance	

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