pARTicipate: Art as Self-Expression for Persons with Aphasia

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What do you get when you combine: 4 artists, 1 woodshop, 9 weeks, and a dash of salt?

Purpose:
- pARTicipate was a student-initiated, student-led art group.
- The aim was to explore art as self-expression in an aphasia-friendly setting.

Background:
- Many people living with chronic aphasia (PWA) face barriers in accessing community-based leisure programs.
- Art groups using various media have been used as an intervention for acute stroke survivors and PWA.\(^1,2\)
- pARTicipate was the first art group offered specifically to PWA at the Association for the Rehabilitation of the Brain Injured.

Methods:

Participants:
- 4 PWA in an outpatient program.
- Participants were required to commit to attending all nine sessions.

Sessions:
- Nine weekly sessions, 1.5 hours each session.
- Sessions 1-8: PWA completed 6 art projects.
- Session 9: Share Day.
- Participants completed a satisfaction survey after session 9.

Share Day:
- Family, friends, and ARBI staff members were invited to Share Day.
- Participants showcased their projects and taught their skills to family and community members.

Projects:

Final group project: Our Passions

Participant Feedback:
- Qualitative and quantitative data was gathered from satisfaction surveys.
- All participants indicated that they:
  - Enjoyed sharing their art with the community during Share Day.
  - Would join the group again if it was offered.
  - Are now comfortable, or very comfortable with art.
  - Two participants continued to make art independently.

Conclusions:
- It is expected that skills learned may increase PWA confidence about participating in community-based art classes and foster a sense of belonging to the artistic community.
- Having learned to incorporate personal symbols, PWA can be deliberate in their use of art for self-expression in the future.

Share Day:
- PWA were empowered to assume a leadership role.
- Teaching newly acquired artistic skills to family and community members, promoted positive feelings about the self, and revealed their competencies.

Limitations:
- Surveys could be more comprehensive in order to gain more information about participant experience.

Future Directions:
- Three of four participants are in long term care, therefore the pARTicipate curriculum could be shared with the staff at nursing homes.
- Participants were given the opportunity to practice teaching art in their regular aphasia conversation group in preparation for Share Day. Future art groups should incorporate a practice session.
- Evaluate the barriers in place for PWA to do art at home.

Acknowledgments: This project would not have been possible without the generous support of Jay Golumbia. Thank you to the wonderful team at ARBI for your part in making pARTicipate a reality! Special thanks to Teren King and Milena Petrovic for their help with pARTicipate.

References: