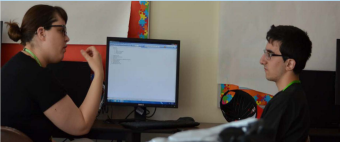


Engagement in goal-setting and review: The experiences of youth with physical disabilities attending life-skills or transition programs

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Why study youth engagement?

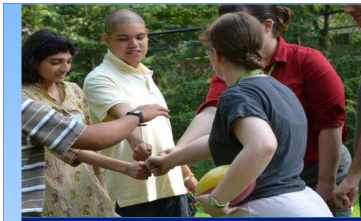
- Objective:** To generate strategies that create and sustain youth engagement in the goal-setting and review process of life-skills or transition programs.
- Background**
 - The rehabilitation services literature suggests that client engagement, considered the active involvement and investment in the therapeutic process, is a key facilitator of change and treatment success.¹
 - Goal-setting and review is integral to the Canadian Practice Process Framework² for occupational therapy. The presence of explicit goals is linked to enhanced commitment, self-awareness, and outcomes.³
 - Optimizing the engagement of youth with physical disabilities towards goals in life-skills or transition programs supports their preparation for new adult roles.⁴
- The gap:** Lack of research on youth experiences of engagement in the goal-setting and review process limits service providers' understanding of how to promote the active involvement and investment of youth in life-skills or transition programs.
- Research question:** What are the experiences of engagement in the rehabilitation goal-setting and review process for youth (ages 14-21) with physical disabilities attending outpatient life-skills or transition programs at Holland Bloorview?



How did we study youth engagement?

- Paradigm:** A qualitative descriptive approach was used to investigate and describe youth experiences.
- Participants:** Two service providers and four youth involved in life-skills or transition programs at Holland Bloorview.
- Data collection**
 - A goal-setting or review session between youth and their service provider was observed by a researcher. An observation checklist was used to record observable signs of youth engagement, which informed interview discussions.
 - Youth discussed their experiences of engagement in a subsequent semi-structured interview with the researcher.
 - Youth participated in a second interview later in the program to discuss how their engagement in the goal-setting and review process changed.
- Data analysis:** Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were analyzed using content analysis and NVivo software. The researchers independently coded transcripts and discussed findings to generate themes.

Interviews were piloted with Youth Mentors at Holland Bloorview.



Youth engagement involved 4 themes

Theme 1: Feeling supported by the service provider contributed to experiencing high levels of engagement.

Youth reported that a therapeutic relationship based on respect, trust and shared investment enhanced their engagement. One youth described the moments he felt respected as:

"[service provider] treated me like a peer... she didn't treat us like kids, um, she didn't act like she was telling us a bunch of rules. She trusted us... she gave us opportunities to demonstrate our own skills."

Trust was created in a therapeutic relationship when there was a history of positive interactions between the youth and service provider. Youth felt more motivated to achieve their goals when they saw service providers actively investing themselves in the role of facilitating goal attainment.

Theme 2: Believing in personal abilities and the effectiveness of the program lead to experiencing high levels of engagement.

Youth described how confidence in their abilities determined the range of potential goals they could choose. One youth stated:

... [service provider] motivated me... Kind of gave me some confidence like, ok, you could do this and like there's no such thing as impossible, like you could do this, you could do this, make some minor adjustments, we can still do it."

Youths' perceptions of program supports influenced their readiness to pursue their goals, for example, one youth reported:

"I feel like I can reach a goal because I have the resources... and I have the mentoring so then I know I have everything in place, I just got to pursue it."

Theme 3: Doing activities that created a sense of ownership and success with goals resulted in experiencing high levels of engagement.

Youth talked about how opportunities to collaboratively monitor and evaluate progress made towards goals sustained their engagement. Additionally, youth identified that applying their growing skill set to hands-on situations and challenges with other youth was highly engaging. One youth reported that his engagement increased when he saw his work come to "fruition" and stated that:

"I felt like I took a more active role once we got into March Break and that was really great for me... so I definitely think that played a role in making me more engaged."

Theme 4: A client-centred and collaborative goal-setting and review process sustained high levels of engagement.

Youth indicated that client-centred goals are interesting, personally meaningful, have immediate benefits (i.e. building resumes), and are linked to youths' long-term goals (i.e. employment, self-reliance).

Youth described how collaborative goal-setting and review includes opportunities to problem solve with their service provider through difficult aspects of goals and to self-reflect on current progress. A youth described the gradual goal-setting and review process that facilitated his engagement as:

"... it's not like one big decision that leads you to, like, make a goal, it's not like one big epiphany moment, it's like the small things that add up towards your goal."

Discussion

- Learning about how youth experience engagement in the goal-setting and review process of life-skills or transition programs can inform strategies used to facilitate the active involvement and investment of youth towards their goals.
- Youths' experiences of engagement consisted of affective, cognitive and behavioural aspects that changed over time, as consistent with an existing model of client engagement.¹
- Observations of youth made during sessions can be used to monitor their level of engagement (see Table 1), and in conjunction with engagement promoting strategies, may be used to optimize the fit between youth and their goals.

Key messages

- A therapeutic relationship based off a partnership between youth and service provider is a key factor in creating and sustaining engagement. If challenges to goal attainment are encountered, the youth-service provider relationship and program factors should be considered in addition to client factors.
- Positive expectations of self and the program determine what goals youth consider to be achievable. Discussing beliefs throughout the goal-setting and review process should provide insight into how youth perceive their capabilities and the capability of the program to support goal attainment and engagement.
- Creating opportunities for youth to become more responsible in determining goal attainment by doing necessary pre-requisite activities more independently sustains engagement over time and creates a sense of direction towards new adult roles.

Limitations

- Youth were recruited from the same program so applicability of themes to other programs with a different goal focus is uncertain. Future work can investigate the experiences and observable signs of engagement in more diverse programs and client populations.

Acknowledgements

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Signs of high engagement	Signs of low engagement
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Learning forward Smiling Contributing to discussion Sitting attentively Responsive to questions Using humour 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Yawning Staring into space/daydreaming Sitting reclined in chair with arms crossed

Table 1. Observable signs of youth engagement in goal-setting or review sessions based on data from observation checklists. Data were confirmed by youth during interviews.



Barriers of engagement

- Finding time to work towards goals outside the program
- Fatigue limits participation during long sessions
- Client identifies as having a habit of "procrastinating"
- Challenges with attending program (i.e. scheduling personal support worker, Wheel-trans)
- Frequent use of question-answer style interviews
- Prioritizing other responsibilities (i.e. school)

Facilitators of engagement

- Using humour and informal discussions during sessions
- Linking current activities to future hopes
- Creating opportunities to self-reflect on progress
- Facilitating leadership roles among peers
- Highlighting multiple benefits of goals
- Hands-on activities and seeing efforts pay-off
- Ending sessions on a positive note