Abstract: The purpose of this study was to compare effects of Multisensory Therapy (MST) and Progressive Relaxation Training (PRT) on time on task of participants with behavior disorders in an out-of-school recreational therapy (RT) program. Studies similar to this one have focused on effects of MST and PRT on individuals with various disorders; however, research has not been conducted that compares these interventions on time on task of participants with behavior disorders or who exhibit severe behavior problems. Using sensory integration theory as the theoretical foundation for the study, a single-subject alternating-treatments design with a control treatment was used to compare the two treatment strategies before administering a timed-task assessment. Findings demonstrate that, although limited positive results were found, MST in particular, holds promise when compared to PRT. With the findings considered, suggestions for future research and RT practice are discussed.

MST & PRT: Multisensory Therapy (MST), sometimes known as Snoezelen™, is a sensory stimulation treatment method designed to help improve the lives of people with disabilities (Lindsay et al., 1997). MST includes prompts & equipment designed to engage participants in sensorial and emotional exploration, and is used to bring leisure, enjoyment, and relaxation to individuals with disabilities. MST involves simultaneously stimulating several of the five human senses (visual, tactile, auditory, and olfactory). Progressive Relaxation Training (PRT) is used to reduce stress-related problems such as anxiety and muscle tension and includes a series of tensing and releasing each of the major muscle groups.

A single-subject alternating-treatments design was used to determine the effectiveness of MST and PRT on participants’ observed time on task.

* Participants engaged in 5, 20-minute sessions of each treatment and control and 15, 20-minute sessions of the time on task activities. Each week, 3x per week, the MST activity was implemented first, followed by the PRT, and then the control activity.

* Participants (F=5, M=3; ages 7-14) were recruited from an out-of-school RT program located in an urban setting in the southeast United States & diagnosed with a behavior disorder or identified as frequently exhibiting severe behavior problems.

Individual Mean Scores Across MST, PRT, & Ctrl Sessions

Mean differences between MST, PRT, & Ctrl Sessions

Results

MST: Participants responded initially by remaining on task for a longer period of time than the subsequent 4 sessions with a decelerating trend. Nevertheless, because the first session resulted in a higher mean time on task average than any points recorded for PRT or control sessions, the overall average indicates that participants responded slightly better to the initial intervention than was seen during the PRT or control sessions.

PRT: Participants initially responded to the intervention; however, a decelerating trend was again demonstrated as participants spent less time on task in all four subsequent sessions.

Control: Slight initial decelerating trend followed by an increase to the highest time on task during the control sessions. Similar to the two treatment sessions, participants initially responded positively before remaining on task for shorter periods of time. Although participants had lower mean time on task scores when compared to the MST treatment sessions, participants demonstrated a more stable and level trend when analyzed via a visual analysis.

Discussion: Results were mixed with high initial mean time and overall lower mean time on task scores, thus suggesting that MST and PRT may not assist in increasing time on task. Effectiveness of these techniques as demonstrated through the literature, though, suggests that with alterations, the potential for improved outcomes exist.

Limitations:

*Only 8 participants = generalizations limited without replication.
*Limited pool of participants from which to draw.
*Potential testing effect (all in room together).
*Tendency of participants to treat time on task as a competition.

Suggestions:

*Create an environment free from distractions.
*Increase number and variety of sensory stimulation items.
*Utilize items deemed fun for participants to alleviate problems with boredom.
*Conduct research on MST and PRT independently.