PROGRESS REPORT: Innovation Workshops for Kids with Cognitive Disabilities and Autism

Objectives
The object of this research is to develop strategies for improving the quality of life for these children by offering them opportunities for creativity and socialization.

Funding Awarded $87,451

Funding Expended to Date $10,432.55

Progress to Date
A group of the following faculty, students, and staff formed to design and administer the creativity workshops: Sunghyun Kang, Graphic Design; Debra Satterfield, Graphic Design; Seda Yilmaz, Industrial Design (on Maternity Leave); Laura Smarandescu, Nora Ladjahasan, Anson Call, Melissa McDonald, and Hannah Deering.

This group meets weekly and has developed a series of survey and data collection tools, conducted a series of on-site visits to observe the respite weekends at ChildServe, and has set up appointments this week (February 4, 2013) to meet with the respite coordinators to conduct surveys and set up dates for initial design innovation intervention activities.

The survey and data collection tools were developed and implemented for ethnographic observations of the children during typical ChildServe respite weekends. Focus groups with caregivers and administrators are currently being conducted, and a parent survey is under design. The ethnographic observations were conducted on-site at respite weekends in October, November, and December 2012. A data collection tool was used to collect information on the children’s physical environment, social play, physical behavior, communication modes, emotional tones, and the level of engagement with the available activities. Multiple observer data are currently being analyzed to identify patterns in the environment. Emerging patterns relevant to the design of the innovation workshop activities will be used to design the most appropriate activities for the kids served by ChildServe.

The data are being used to inform strategies for the design and implementation of creativity and communication activities for the children with cognitive disabilities. The main objective of this preliminary research is to determine strategies that safely allow the children to explore innovation and creativity; increase their ability to communicate using sensory, tactile, and visual methods; and identify skill areas.

To test the workshop activities, a series of pilot study activities will be conducted in March and April 2013. The outcomes of these pilot studies will be used to develop content for Creativity and Innovation workshops. The final workshops are being planned in conjunction with the ChildServe Respite Camps program and with the K12 Outreach programs in the College of Design (Explore Design, Design Innovation Workshop, and Design Condensed Camp). The camps will be conducted in June and July 2013.
Next Steps
Because children with cognitive disabilities do not have the same opportunities to participate in life-enriching communication activities as their peers, this research and outreach project seeks to develop and evaluate strategies for evidence-based, self-expression activities that will enhance their quality of life by providing opportunities to gain self-expression strategies similar to their peers. Once developed, these strategies will be implemented into a turnkey system involving a website and a workshop curriculum that can be used by other communities in collaboration with disability service providers using a train-the-trainer method of implementation. By using this network, an outreach program will made available to communities in connection with other ongoing K-12 ISU Extension and Outreach community networks.