

Do They Even Need “Adult” Education? A Programming Critique of Day Habilitation

New Horizons in Adult Education and Human Resource Development
2023, Vol. 35(1) 51–55
© The Author(s) 2023
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/19394225231171576
journals.sagepub.com/home/nha



Lauren Gerken¹ and Lisa M. Baumgartner¹ 

Abstract

Day habilitation provides informal and non-formal adult education programming for individuals with disabilities, who often go unrecognized by the adult education field because of infantilization that precludes them from common perceptions of “adults,” contributing to a dearth of information about day hab access and programming in adult education literature. In this paper, we critically examine day hab access and programming issues in Texas, discussing barriers regarding costs and stigmas toward attendees from adult educators’ perspectives. We include practical recommendations for the field, such as embracing person-centered approaches and entering discussions about day habilitation programming to improve outcomes for participants.

Keywords

adult education, people with disabilities, day habilitation, programming critique

A Programming Critique of Day Habilitation

Adult education is an integral part of adult development, self-improvement, and career advancement. However, many adults with disabilities face significant barriers while pursuing traditional adult education, which deters participation. Scholars have discussed the inaccessibility of adult education (Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development, 2020), programming, and curriculum planning (Cervero & Wilson, 2001). Still, few have explored these issues within the day habilitation context (Crites & Howard, 2011). Hence, knowledge about day hab education and its learners remains on the margins.

Day habilitation programs in each state have various program styles, models, and policies. There is no baseline for programs to adhere to as the United States lacks federal rules and regulations for day hab programs. Day habilitation is a service approximately 591,000 people with disabilities use nationwide as a part of their Medicaid Home and Community-Based Waiver Services (HCBS) (Friedman, 2016). These are services people with disabilities use to remain in their community and avoid institutionalization. As scholars in Texas, we focus on day habilitation issues and programs in our state. According to a Texas Health and Human Services Commission (2020) report, approximately 19,000 people participate in day habilitation programs through Medicaid waivers, which are state programs that limit institutionalization. Unfortunately, Texas consistently ranks as one of the lowest states in access to and success of

disability services, including Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS). Due to Texas’s poor ranking and non-compliance with the HCBS Settings Rule, Texas is reviewing its programs and practices, including conversations about day habilitation improvement. This article offers insight into which programming and practice areas need attention in Texas. In addition, this may provide guidance for other states seeking to reform their day hab programs to include activities and practices that align with adult education philosophies.

Day Habilitation Programs Defined

Day habilitation, also referred to as day hab and day program, is a service designed to offer people with severe disabilities the opportunity to be active beyond their homes or residential facilities. Day programs serve individuals who are not ready to work due to their current skill level or do not have accessible higher education opportunities. The rules and expectations for daily habilitation vary from state to state. Still, facilities providing day habilitation are expected to offer informal and non-formal educational services to adults with disabilities. The programs’ purpose is to provide the disability community with recreation, therapies,

¹Texas State University, San Marcos, USA

Corresponding Author:

Lauren Gerken, Texas State University, 601 University Dr, San Marcos, TX 78666, USA.

Email: l_g128@txstate.edu

and skills training that promote the independence of adults with disabilities (Navigate Life Texas, 2022). Unfortunately, this purpose is not typically realized.

Barriers to Texas Day Habilitation

Texan day habilitation programs lack guidance when planning programs for day hab participants. Day hab falls under different, more extensive programs and is typically accessed and paid for through an associated waiver, as previously mentioned. Texas's current programs, Deaf-Blind with Multiple Disabilities (DBMD) program and Community First Choice (CFC), which supports people with disabilities who live in the community and need help with daily care, are the only waivers that have day habilitation requirements in state statute (Tex. Admin. Code, 42.626). However, there is no definitive statement about what kind of services or classes day hab programs must provide. The statute limits who the program can serve by stating services are not available with employment assistance or supported employment. By limiting the collaboration between day habilitation and Texas' employment support programs in its statute, Texas creates a barrier between day habilitation programs and increased possibilities for job training.

Costs

In addition to programming challenges, day hab programming costs can be prohibitive. For example, Day hab services at the Achievement Center of Texas cost \$200 per week for full-time and \$100 per week for part-time services, excluding taxes and fees (Achievement Center of Texas, 2021). People with disabilities often rely on government subsidies such as Social Security Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income (SSI), which is \$794 a month (Social Security Administration, 2021). When comparing funding, full-time program attendance can be cost prohibitive, limiting participants' benefits. Attendees with a Medicaid waiver that includes day habilitation as a covered service are in a better financial situation. For example, the Achievement Center of Texas accepts Home and Community-Based Services (HCBS) and Texas Home Living (TxHmL) Medicaid Waivers. An HCBS waiver will cover service costs between \$25.62 per day and \$45.72 per day, depending on the attendees' level of need. A TxHmL waiver will cover \$28.41 per day (Achievement Center of Texas, 2021). Unfortunately, Medicaid waivers vary in structure and cover different services. Additionally, the entire waiver program in Texas is severely underfunded, leaving many adults with disabilities without program options.

Medicaid Waiver Support Access

Texas has one of the longest Medicaid waiver interest lists (waiting lists) in the country at 171,281 (Texas Health and

Human Services, 2022) who wait up to 16 years. Waivers that cover day habilitation have the two most extended waiting lists. HCS's interest list is 110,437 people long, and TxHmL's has 97,594 people (Texas Health and Human Services, 2022). Although waiting lists include children, every adult on this list will be required to pay for day hab out of their pocket while they wait for their waiver. If they forgo paying out-of-pocket, they will not get day hab until they have their waiver.

Programming for People with Disabilities

While funding policies limit access to day hab programs which contradict the idea that adult education should be available for all (Elias & Merriam, 2005), even those who have access to day programs are not guaranteed quality adult learning. There are habilitation models that limit choice and are directed by the staff, perpetuating an imbalanced power dynamic.

In the models with limited or no choice, participants do not have a say in programming and instead engage in banking education rather than problem-posing education (Freire, 2018). Programs set participants' schedules and establish checklists for clients' activities, including therapy and social and leisure activities (Johnson & Bagatell, 2017). Although activities and schedules are typical in adult learning programs, micro-managing participants means adulthood is not adequately acknowledged in programs where participants have little-to-no input in the activities and programming. Additionally, individuals who participate in programs that strictly dictate their schedules and activities do not fall under Kasworm et al.'s (2010) general definition of an adult learner. While some scholars may argue that learners begin at a level where they are more dependent and have less self-direction (Grow, 1991), adult educators may stigmatize people with disabilities experience a detrimental stigma and assume they begin adult education without any adult knowledge or skills. Suppose adults with disabilities learn within a system that does not embrace their knowledge and expertise. In that case, participants are not undergoing significant change, which Kasworm et al. (2010) identify as a critical contributor to one's development. If participants depend on their day hab program's staff to guide them through their day, they are not developing decision-making skills and will therefore continue to rely on others.

Infantilization of People with Disabilities

The perpetuation of disabled adults' reliance on others is a critical contributor to the infantilization of the adult disability community. Infantilization refers to the behavior of treating an adolescent or adult as a child by speaking down to them or taking away their power of choice (Tesar et al., 2021). These are everyday experiences for people with

disabilities, who often face benevolent yet impactful ableism through infantilization and familial over-protection (Nario et al., 2019). Infantilization manifests itself in individual interactions and systematic procedures of day habilitation programs. In doing so, programs continue to fall short of Freirean program models that suggest adults should be empowered to challenge current power structures (Elias & Merriam, 2005).

While some programs may also explicitly focus on providing vocational activities and community engagement opportunities for their clients (Down Home Ranch, 2020), day hab programming and activities can resemble programming in daycare facilities for children. Activities can include playing on swings, arts and crafts, show and tell, and making new friends (The Backyard, 2021). Providing a structured environment and having clients engage in teamwork is a top priority (The Backyard, 2021), while there may be less focus on adult developmental needs or education for employment. The focus on day hab's primary programming around the goal of socialization instead of education may stem from the historically ingrained perspective that people with disabilities are unworthy of an education, unable to choose where they could live, and should not be members of the greater community (Heumann, 2020). The views are embedded in society and embodied by people's well-meaning and loving desire to protect people with disabilities from harm. However, if providers do not fully consider attendees as adults, then the providers cannot structure the programs in an adult learning context.

Another example of the infantilization of clients is when they are not seen as stakeholders in the program and instead, the agency and parents' voices are heard. While successful programs integrate participant voices through person-centered plans, which help program outcomes align with individuals' goals, many programs defer to parent and guardians' goals for their loved ones. By neglecting participant voices, programs risk paternal tendencies that do not align with andragogical principles. For example, parents may view a day hab program as successful when their adult child enjoys a social outing, despite the individual's goal of developing financial literacy skills (MHMR Tarrant County, 2021). Day hubs may struggle with focusing more on parental satisfaction than client satisfaction and the client having a voice in programming because, historically, parent voices have been the ones systems have listened to more.

Lack of Self-Direction According to Disability Advocates

Although day hab participants are not often considered program stakeholders, advocacy groups for people with disabilities such as the Promoting Independence Advisory Committee and Intellectual and the Developmental Disability System Redesign Advisory Committee (IDD

SRAC) cited areas of focus in day habilitation improvement regarding community integration concerns, namely: "off-site and on-site time, provider staffing ratios, and implementation date" (Texas Health and Human Services, 2021, p. 20). Off-site and on-site time refers to how much of an individual's day is spent at the day hab facility, rather than participating in the community through activities like volunteering. Stakeholders noted that day habilitation attendees should develop person-centered plans to decide how much time they spend on and off-site (Texas Health and Human Services, 2021). The suggested model emulates Herman's (1977 as cited by Elias & Merriam, 2005) behaviorist instructional design by identifying the attendee's goal, developing, and implementing a plan for off-site time, and reevaluating to see if the person wants more off-site time.

The authors of the stakeholder feedback that directed the IDD SRAC report also advocate for more support people for day hab attendees, which would allow for more individualized services. Stakeholders expressed interest in a 1:5 staff ratio for most attendees and a 2:1 ratio for attendees with more significant support needs (Texas Health and Human Services, 2021). While most people with disabilities can participate in learning activities, some require more support. Understaffed programs may be forced to have one facilitator lead a class of ten. Staff may resort to passive programming such as watching movies for 8 hours because they cannot support the attendees in more complex activities. Stakeholders want the plan implemented by September 1, 2022 (Texas Health and Human Services, 2021).

Conclusions and Recommendations

While many day habilitation programs successfully offer meaningful adult education opportunities, there is a severe lack of consistency. Some programs provide robust vocational development training. Others leave adults with disabilities to color or play with toys (Whinnery & Whinnery, 2011). However, these programs are popular and offer people with disabilities opportunities to avoid isolation. Given the popularity of the programs, we recommend the federal government establish regulations that hold day hubs to the following standards: (a) implement adult education methods for diverse participants, (b) use and follow person-centered plans, (c) only offer activities that promote learning and skill development, (d) report on program activities to their intellectual and developmental agency/authority, and (e) implement accountability measures that focus on participants' skill development. Program planners should operate with the understanding that adult education should be individualized, meaningful and that skill development will vary (Moussa, 2015). Federal regulations should act as a foundation for day habilitation, leaving room for individual program creativity and encouraging programs to exceed minimum requirements.

Program planners for day hab programming may have taken a more classic view of program planning that puts the power in the hands of the programmers rather than the critical viewpoint that looks at the “political and ethical nature of program planning” (Cervero & Wilson, 1994, p. 24). We urge program planners to consider the interests of their clients. Their clients need seats at the planning table. Planners also need to critically analyze how larger social, cultural, and institutional forces may be affecting their program planning activities and their views of their clients.

People with disabilities will benefit from implementing evidence-based adult education practices beyond the few minimum standards in place. Program planners can start by developing robust partnerships between university Adult Education, Social Work, Disability Studies programs, and state Development Disability Councils to replicate studies such as the Self-Determined Career Design Model (Dean et al., 2018). Another opportunity for potential program planning partnerships is through the Highlander Research and Education Center or similar progressive agencies, which would support the development of robust literacy and civic engagement learning opportunities in day habilitation. The research opportunities for adult education experts regarding day hab and subsequent program planning opportunities are endless. The adult education field must make room for the disability community to research, explore, and expand on adult learning within the day hab infrastructure.

Day habilitation is a controversial topic in the disability community because it many models are segregated and serve only those with disabilities, and it often fails to treat participants with dignity. However, day habs serve as a bridge from segregated services to community integration, competitive employment, and independent living when done well. The programs also provide an opportunity for people with disabilities to network and support each other. When day habs are successful, it is because they are providing adult education. Adults with disabilities, regardless of disability severity, deserve to be treated like adults. Adults with disabilities deserve and benefit from educational opportunities that promote adult development, self-improvement, and career advancement, same as their non-disabled peers. They are valuable members of the population the adult education field serves, as such, day habilitation needs to be recognized as adult education and requires the attention of field experts to ensure the people in day habs are receiving the opportunities they deserve.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Lisa M. Baumgartner  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4258-8362>

References

- Achievement Center of Texas. (2021). *Enroll now in achievement center of Texas: Day care, day Hab, classes*. <https://achievementcentertexas.org/enroll-now/>
- The Backyard. (2021). *The BackYard - homepage*. <http://the-backyard.org/>
- Cervero, R. M., & Wilson, A. L. (1994). *Planning responsibly for adult education: A guide to negotiating power and interests*. Jossey-Bass.
- Cervero, R. M., & Wilson, A. L. (2001). *Power in practice: Adult education and the struggle for knowledge and power in society*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Crites, S. A., & Howard, B. H. (2011). Implementation of systematic instruction to increase client engagement in a day habilitation program. *Journal of Intellectual & Developmental Disability*, 36(1), 2–10. <https://doi-org.libproxy.txstate.edu/10.3109/13668250.2010.541428>
- Dean, E. E., Shogren, K. A., Wehmeyer, M. L., Almiré, B., & Mellenbruch, R. (2018). Career design and development for adults with intellectual disability: A program evaluation. *Advances in Neurodevelopmental Disorders*, 3(2), 111–118. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s41252-018-0080-6>
- Down Home Ranch. (2020). *Day program*. <https://www.downhomeranch.org/our-programs/day-program/>
- Elias, J. L., & Merriam, S. B. (2005). *Philosophical foundations of adult education*. Krieger
- Freire, P. (2018). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Bloomsbury
- Friedman, C. (2016). Day habilitation services for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities in Medicaid Home and Community-Based Services waivers. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 41(4), 244–255. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1540796916664337>
- Grow, G. O. (1991). Teaching learners to be self-directed. *Adult Education Quarterly*, 41(3), 125–149.
- Heumann, J. (2020). *Being Heumann: An unrepentant memoir of a disability rights activist*. Beacon.
- Johnson, K. R., & Bagatell, N. (2017). Beyond custodial care: Mediating choice and participation for adults with intellectual disabilities. *Journal of Occupational Science*, 24(4), 546–560. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14427591.2017.1363078>
- Kasworm, C. E., Rose, A. D., & Ross-Gordon, J. M. (2010). *Handbook of adult and continuing education*. Jossey-Bass.
- MHMR Tarrant County. (2021). *Success stories*. <https://www.mhmrtarrant.org/>
- Moussa, L. M. (2015). The base of the iceberg: Informal learning and its impact on formal and non-formal learning. *International Review of Education*, 61(5), 717–720. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11159-015-9508-7>
- Nario, R. M. R., Kemerling, A. A., & Silverman, A. (2019). Hostile, benevolent, and ambivalent ableism: Contemporary

- manifestations. *Journal of Social Issues*, 75(3), 726–756. <https://doi-org.libproxy.txstate.edu/10.1111/josi.12337>
- Navigate Life Texas. (2022). *Day habilitation programs for young adults with disabilities and special health care needs*. <https://www.navigatelifetexas.org/en/transition-to-adulthood/day-habilitation-programs-for-young-adults-with-disabilities-and-special-health-care-needs>
- Organization for Economic Cooperation & Development. (2020). *Increasing adult learning participation: Learning from successful reforms, getting skills right*. OECD Publishing. <https://doi.org/10.1787/cf5d9c21-en>
- Social Security Administration. (2021). *Understanding SSI - SSI benefits*. <https://www.ssa.gov/ssi/text-benefits-ussi.htm#:~:text=Effective%20January%201%2C%202021%20the>
- Tesar, M., Peters, M. A., White, J., Charteris, J., Delaune, A., Thraves, G., Westbrook, F., Devine, N., & Stewart, G. T. (2021). Infantilisations. *Educational Philosophy & Theory*, 1–11. <https://doi-org.libproxy.txstate.edu/10.1080/00131857.2021.1933432>
- Tex. Admin. Code, 42.626, (B)(ii). (2021). Day habilitation, residential habilitation, and CFC PAS/HAB.
- Texas Health and Human Services. (2022). *Interest list reduction*. <https://www.hhs.texas.gov/about-hhs/records-statistics/interest-list-reduction>
- Texas Health and Human Services Commission. (2020). *Transition of day habilitation services*. <https://www.hhs.texas.gov/sites/>

<default/files/documents/laws-regulations/reports-presentations/2021/rider-21-transition-day-habilitation-services-jan-2021.pdf>

- Whinnery, S. B., & Whinnery, K. W. (2011). Effects of functional mobility skills training for adults with severe multiple disabilities. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, 46(3), 436–453.

Author Biographies

Lauren Gerken, MA in Disability Studies, is a proud person with cerebral palsy and a doctoral student in the Adult, Professional, and Community Education program at Texas State University. Her research interests include gaps in adult education access for people with disabilities. She works as a policy professional, advocating for the community integration and self-determination of people with disabilities and guest lecturing on disability across disciplines at Texas universities in her spare time.

Lisa M. Baumgartner, EdD, is a professor in the Adult, Professional, and Community Education program at Texas State University. Her research interests include investigating learning and development in marginalized populations. She received the Cyril O. Houle Award for Outstanding Literature in Adult Education from the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE) in 2007 and 2021 for her co-authored text *Learning in Adulthood: A Comprehensive Guide* (3rd and 4th eds) in Jossey-Bass.