

CANVAS Meeting Minutes, 3.11.21

Thurs, March 11, 2021 | 6pm Eastern time

Participants in Attendance

- Annette Bade (Nova Southeastern University, College of Optometry)
- Auston Stamm (Saint Mary's College CA)
- Aylin Ulker (MUSC)
- Beth Felsen (Spectrum Transition Coaching)
- Brett Ranon Nachman (College Autism Network | UW-Madison)
- Brianne Tomaszewski (UNC-Chapel Hill, TEACCH Autism Program)
- Denise Davidson (Loyola University Chicago)
- Eric Endlich (Top College Consultants)
- Jennifer Williamson (University of Calgary)
- Kathryn Szechy (Wayne State University)
- Katie McDermott
- Ken Gobbo (Landmark College)
- Kim Bergeron (Southeastern Louisiana University)
- Kim Johnson (Lesley University)
- Kristen Gillespie-Lynch (CUNY)
- Lee B Williams (College Autism Network)
- Leigh Ann Tipton-Fisler (Cal State LA)
- Lyndel Kennedy
- Maria
- Melissa Black (Curtin University)
- Nick Top (Utah Valley University)
- TC Waisman (Autism Training Academy)
- Valeria Armendariz (SAARC)

Meeting Plan

CANVAS Updates

1. Join our CANVAS list-serv - Our primary means of connecting, sharing info
 - Click [here to join](#)
 - Send email to the list by emailing can-canvas@collegeautismnetwork.org
 - [Updated college autism programs list](#) (as of Jan 2021)
2. **Share a Resource!** Are you conducting any research studies that you'd like the community to know about? Read an interesting article recently? Discovered a cool resource? This is your chance to briefly share that news with the CANVAS group! List your name and any relevant links below so others may access it at their convenience!
 - [CUNY Project Reach article](#) (Nachman)
 - [Frist Webinar series](#) (Williams; including most recent on Autism and Romantic Relationships).
 - Email Lee at lee@collegeautismnetwork.org if you're not yet on our CAN newsletter and would like to be added!

- TC congratulated Brett on recently passing his dissertation.
- [Attend the *Is Universal Design Enough?*](#) free webinar featuring Judy Singer, Kristen Gillespie-Lynch, and TC Waisman on March 26!

Research Presentation

- **Autistic Adults' Success Factors for Employment and Beyond**
- Presented by Dr. Craig Thompson (Curtin University) & Dr. Melissa Black (Curtin University)

NOTES

- Melissa and Craig covered a variety of studies they have been involved in over recent years related to autism and employment.
- Having work represents a basic human right that everyone should attain, though is often not as easy for autistic people to attain.
- Previous studies illustrate how employment rates amongst autistic individuals is often lower than other individuals from other disabled groups.
- A recent study by Kirby and McDonald on autism in adulthood illustrates only a recent emergence of many thousands of publications debuting each year on this topic.
- The International Classification of Functioning (ICF) Disability and Health helped guide some of their analysis. It's a bio-psychosocial framework that emphasizes health and functioning, featuring many components including body structures and functions, environmental factors, personal factors, and participation. The ICF helps understand what influences employment among autistic people.
- Melissa shared a visual of a case study of a 25-year-old autistic participant to illustrate how they situated his data on the ICF framework. Each of the pieces of information summarizes how it fits with the data.
- A qualitative study on case stakeholders regarding successful employment for autistic people (conducted in Australia, US, Sweden) illustrates the significant impact of activities and participation and environment on employment opportunities.
- The first main paper Craig discussed was recently published in the *Journal of Autism and Developmental Disorders*: "Success Factors Enabling Employment for Adults on the Autism Spectrum from Employers' Perspective." Initially the team aimed to explore case studies, though they later expanded it to examine employers that have experienced success in working with autistic people. Only 42% of autistic adults are engaged in the labor force in Australia, lower than people with disabilities (53%) and people without disabilities (83%).
- The team interviewed 16 line managers and four directors of companies who had hired at least one autistic person. One organization featured in the study from Sweden was specifically focused on enabling employment opportunities for disabled individuals. Other companies included an Australian university, an Australian science company, and a horticulture organization, just to name a handful.
- They spent many hours making sense of the data and positioning it against the concepts in the ICF framework. This process enabled them to figure out the role of policies versus individuals and relationships influencing employment opportunities. The scholars also engaged in a thematic analysis.

- Employers recognized the role of social supports as important, and in particular, how vital it was to have open and honest conversations. Sometimes employers revised descriptions behind tasks, developed adaptive strategies, or established mentorship spaces.
- Craig emphasized how these strategies and supports help just about anybody.
- Some main themes entailed the following. First, it is pivotal that there is knowledge and understanding in the workplace regarding autism. Second, the work environment must offer supports for autistic employees, line managers, and co-workers. Third, effective job matching using a strengths-based approach is crucial.
- One prominent theme across their research is the notion of modifying the workplace, or workplaces having been adapted, to better meet the strengths and needs of autistic people.
- Under one-quarter of comments related to the person themselves; a major focus, though, is on the role of the environment.
- Melissa then discussed another study, centered on perspectives of key stakeholders on autistic adults in the U.S., Australia, and Sweden. They examined all stages of employment in this effort, in terms of successes and barriers. This qualitative endeavor entailed many focus groups and interviews with family members, service providers, people with ASD, employers, and other groups.
- Strengths in the workplace (related to function) entailed disposition (e.g., persistence), temperament and personality, problem-solving skills, sustained attention, and strong visual perception.
- Difficulties regarding functions entailed sensory processing, certain cognitive functions (e.g., time management) and emotion functions. Melissa emphasized the uniqueness across each individual.
- Activities and participant encompassed strengths (focusing attention, solving problems, undertaking single tasks) and difficulties (including using transportation and handling multiple tasks).
- Environmental factors could be both beneficial and difficult; for example, the attitudes of people in authority positions, acquaintances and colleagues varied greatly.
- Now the question is how to translate the findings to a place where autistic people can have better employment prospects.
- Another study, a scoping review, entailed a scoping review (134 studies) exploring factors impacting employment for autistic people. Many studies focused on addressing challenges associated with the person, whereas no intervention targeted the environment.
- Craig highlighted his colleague Megan Hatfield's BOOST-A online transition planning program to help in addressing employment opportunities.
- Melissa mentioned a weekend program for autistic youth in engaging in STEM-based tasks; this outlet is helpful in leveraging strengths and building confidence. Having autistic mentors allows autistic students see their own capabilities.
- In one study they were involved in, employers mentioned the benefits of having autistic interns regarding their distinct contributions.
- The Curtin University Specialist Mentoring Program has existed since 2013/2014, according to Craig, and much work investigating the program has been embedded in his doctoral studies. He and his colleagues have explored how autistic people navigate university. One main finding is that generic findings are not necessarily enough; instead,

they must be better individualized and contextualized to meet their needs. Social supports, such as specialist peer mentoring, are also necessary. This entails graduate-level students serving as peer mentors for autistic students, assisting them in addressing communication skills, building on strengths, engaging in problem-solving, and empowering them. Concurrently the program addresses transitioning from familial supports.

- On the final slide, Craig noted many opportunities for growth, such as employers engaging in person-centered approaches, having environmental supports in the workplace, and enhancing greater autism understanding in the workplace, to name a few.

Q&A

- Lee: Is there any evidence that being part of a neurodiverse cohort impacts the employee's experience?^[SEP]
 - This is a good question that has not been explored in these particular projects. However, other research suggests that employee understandings make a big difference in promoting autism acceptance.
- Brianne: Given the vast variety of supports in various countries (and in the US, state-specific vocational rehabilitation funding), how might you recommend evaluating the Autism-Specific WorkPlace Tool in other countries? What is the cost/sustainability of this tool for employers?^[SEP]
 - These are freely available
 - They aimed to find people and organizations already connected to the autism community
 - The cost for employers is relatively low.
- Kristen: Wonderful talk! What work-related skills do you think universities should focus on teaching autistic university students and how do you think universities can be transformed to more effectively support autistic faculty/staff?
 - Organizations like universities need greater training to begin with. Universities may need to work on emphasizing problem-solving skills for all students, as well as specifically focus more on communication strategies.

Upcoming CANVAS Meetings

- Thurs, April 22 at 12pm ET
 - **Social Skills Interventions for Young Adults: Fitting into a Neurotypical World?**
 - Presented by Dr. Jess Monahan (Research Manager, Spectrum Scholars; University of Delaware) and Dr. Brian Freedman (Associate Director, Center for Students with Disabilities & Director, Spectrum Scholars; University of Delaware)
- Thurs, May 20 at 2pm ET
 - **Getting Ready for College: The Intersections of Neurodiversity and Other Sites of Differences**
 - Presented by Dr. Hyejung Kim (Assistant Professor, Teaching, Learning and Educational Leadership; Binghamton University)