

CANVAS Meeting Minutes, 10-5-22

Participants in Attendance

- Brett Ranon Nachman (College Autism Network | University of Arkansas)
- Brian Irvine (UCL | University of Birmingham)
- Bella Kofner (College of Staten Island)
- Eric Endlich (Top College Consultants)
- Jill Underhill (Marshall University)
- Kathryn Szechy (Wayne State University)
- Katie McDermott
- Ken Gobbo (Landmark College)
- Kristen Gillespie-Lynch (CUNY)
- Lee Williams (College Autism Network)
- Mai Wah Cheung (City College of New York | College of Staten Island)
- Mary Baker Ericzen (San Diego State University)
- Sara Sanders Gardner (Bellevue College)
- Sharon Liu (College of Staten Island)
- Stace
- Thomas Chen
- Trayle Kulshan (City University of Seattle)

CANVAS Updates

- Join our CANVAS list-serv - Our primary means of connecting, sharing info
 1. Click [here to join](#)
 2. Send email to the list
<https://groups.google.com/a/collegeautismnetwork.org/forum/#!forum/can-canvas/join> by emailing can-canvas@collegeautismnetwork.org
 3. [CAN Membership Details](#) We appreciate the support your membership provides to help us offer CANVAS and other opportunities.
 4. [College Autism Summit](#) details

Research Presentation

- Brian Irvine (Research Fellow, IoE UCL | Doctoral Researcher in Specialist (Autism) Mentoring, University of Birmingham)
- Presentation Title: Framing and Reframing: Specialist (Autism) Mentoring in UK HEIs
- Description: Universities in the UK have seen a remarkable increase in the number of autistic students. These students receive funded Specialist (Autism) Mentoring to “remove barriers to learning”. Questions posed by mentees as autistic hypothesisers inspired diaries kept by 28 mentors, of whom 8 themselves were autistic. A process of framing and reframing emerged as a key pillar of mentoring autistic students akin to the frame alignment of social movements. Through the nurturing of advocacy autistic students are not simply inducted into university culture, they are equipped to change it.
@BigBadBee

Presentation Notes:

- Specialist autism mentoring may be based in the UK, though has transferable elements. For the last three years he has been a researcher for the Autism Centre for Education and Research at the University of Birmingham. Now he is at University College London, focused on exploring the superior perceptual capacity found in autism.
- His life has entailed working in primary and secondary education as a teacher, and for the past decade he has served as a specialist autism mentor for dozens of students.
- There are about 800 autism specialists across 60+ UK universities.
- Brian shared how many autistic college students feel they are failing, and how important it is to engage in reframing.
- In 2003 – when there was a first record of autistic college students in the UK – there were 60. Last year, there were more than 16,000 enrolled. More autistic college students in the UK exist than those who attend Cambridge. There are also around 2,000 postgraduate autistic students in the UK. Many of these postgraduate students are more comfortable with being openly autistic, as Brian shared .
- 85% of autistic college students complete their studies in the UK; comparable with their neurotypical peers
- Specialist autism mentoring has emerged in the UK and is relatively emergent in the research.
- In the UK, autistic people have the opportunity to meet with a “needs assessor” who helps in identifying appropriate supports. The “disabled students allowance” appears to be working effectively, Brian mentioned.
- Only half of autistic college students take up the offer to use the mentoring provision; many do not access it until hitting a point of crisis.
- Brian consulted autistic students to find out questions they wanted to ask their mentors, including “do you understand or do you just listen?”
- Brian talked about three bubbles in his visual: successes, challenges (can be overcome more easily), and barriers (must be removed).
- For the first several years of their roles, specialist autism mentoring was specifically focused on removing barriers.
- Commonly, participants noted a lack of understanding from staff, thus illustrating the double empathy problem. Being on the students’ side is very important, especially since mentors command such influence on their campuses.
- Students discussed much about thriving remotely and the benefits of creating their own sensory spaces associated with working from home. When students have returned to campuses after several years, they have entered more neurodivergent-friendly campuses.
- Social challenges remain prevalent, especially by virtue of ableist norms. Being able to meet with a mentor each week is quite helpful.
- Students diagnose situations across a variety of contexts. With their mentors, they come up with strategies to fix common issues (prognostic. The mentor then works to motivate students.
- “Autistic students overturn the challenge,” Brian said. The diagnostic phase entails giving control to mentees so they can make sense of the world from their distinct perspectives. In this process they can understand widespread campus issues, including those that

autistic students themselves can help address. Brian referenced how adopting practices like open book exams are beneficial to all.

- Another component under the diagnostic phase is the neurodiverse frame alignment. When communicating with mentors and mentees, they would see their experiences within the broader neurodiversity of campus. It's about finding one's position within the larger landscape.
- The next phase is prognostic and coming up with strategies. Mentors see around 5-27 mentees each week, and thus have discussed almost everything with students. Brian: "Students have a wonderfully varied life, and because of that mentoring itself becomes wonderfully varied; we become deeply holistic." Students and mentoring are engaging in collaborative strategies. What students seek is an understanding of why certain norms exist, to develop social understanding.
- Brian discussed the joy in listening to autistic students' passions. Mentees are empowered through cultivating trust, knowing they have people supporting them.
- Brian urges people to view mentoring as social actions; everyone can make everyone better.

Q&A:

- Lee: "Prosthetic environment': can you talk more about that?"
 - Brian added this term to reflect items and experiences that help life go more smoothly for individuals, such as glasses. Campuses can serve as prosthetics; for instance, the cafeteria represents a space where people gather, allowing individuals to
- Kristen: "What kind of training are mentors and mentees provided with to help them change their institutions in lasting ways?"
 - To be a mentor, you only have to attend a day-long course with the National Autistic Society. More are hopefully attaining postgraduate certificates, too. Each year, mentors must prove they have engaged in continued professional development. This model of mentoring "is more emergent than planned."
- Jill: What potential similarities/comparisons do you see between mentoring students w/ ADHD vs. autistic students? Also, what are mentors' backgrounds?
 - Many mentors were teachers, psychotherapists, graduate students in psychology, etc. Mentors are good in working interference among various stakeholders. Regarding mentoring ADHD vs. autistic students, he finds the utility of establishing schedules for taking medications so that students with ADHD do not forget them. Having "planning understanding" is more important than skills. Specialist mental health mentoring also exists, though there is sometimes friction in their mentality.

Upcoming CANVAS Meeting

Fri, November 11, 2022, 3 p.m. ET

- Aylin Ulker, OTD, OTR/L & Tom Beeson, EdS (Clemson University)
- Presentation Title: Sensory Inclusion in Higher Education: Neurodiverse and Neurotypical Experiences and Perspectives

- **Presentation Description:** This study was conducted as part of an occupational therapy student's capstone project at Clemson University to address the missing gap of sensory inclusion in higher education. Sensory processing differences are a common characteristic of Autism Spectrum Disorder and can negatively impact autistic students' college experience. A focus group was held among 6 neurodiverse students enrolled in the Spectrum Program, and a campus-wide survey was sent to neurodiverse and neurotypical students, faculty, and staff. Results indicate that sensory inclusive designs and support have the potential to benefit neurodiverse students and the greater campus population as a whole.