

CANVAS Meeting Minutes, 10-13-23

People in Attendance

- Andrea Haas (University of Massachusetts, Boston)
- Annette Kendall (University of Missouri)
- Brett Ranon Nachman (University of Arkansas | College Autism Network)
- Brian Irvine (University College London)
- Charlie Wood
- Dave Caudel (Vanderbilt University)
- Emily Wall (UNC Charlotte)
- Jacob Krehbiel (Michigan State University)
- Katie McDermott
- Ken Gobbo (Landmark College)
- Laruen Collier (UMass Amherst)
- Leslie Bross (UNC Charlotte)
- Lori Wischnewsky (Texas State University)
- Michael Canale (University of Maryland Baltimore County)
- Sonja Fritzsche (Michigan State University)
- Susan Hedges (Appalachian State University)
- Tara Bodden (Valencia College Office for Students with Disabilities)
- Tony Banning (Liberty University)
- Wes Garton (University of Delaware)

CANVAS Updates

- Join our CANVAS list-serv - Our primary means of connecting, sharing info
 - Click [here to join](#)
 - Send email to the list
<https://groups.google.com/a/collegeautismnetwork.org/forum/#!forum/can-canvas/join> by emailing can-canvas@collegeautismnetwork.org
 - [CAN Membership Details](#) We appreciate the support your membership provides to help us offer CANVAS and other opportunities.
 - We'll see you at the College Autism Summit 2023!
- **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!
 - Leslie Bross (will mention these articles in today's talk):
 - Beechey, T. (2022). On perspective taking in conversation and in research: A comment on Bambara et al. (2021). *Journal of Speech, Language, and Hearing Research*, 65, 1597-1599.
 - Mason, R. A., Gregori, E., Wills, H. P., Kamps, D., & Huffman, J. (2020). Covert audio coaching to increase question asking by female college students with autism: Proof of concept. *Journal of Developmental and*

Physical Disabilities, 32, 75-91. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10882-019-09684-2>

- Pennington, R. C., Bross, L. A., Mazzotti, V. L., Spooner, F., & Harris, R. (2020). A review of developing communication skills for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities on college campuses. *Behavior Modification*, 45, 272-296. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0145445520976650>
- Brian shared a link to an event on November 2: Brett Nachman is delivering a presentation on autistic college student identity development on Nov 2 (4pm UK time). See www.crae.ioe.ac.uk/events for more info

Presentation

- **Title:** Effects of a Peer Coaching Intervention for Young Adults with Autism on a College Campus
- **Presenter:** Dr. Leslie Ann Bross (Assistant Professor of Special Education, University of North Carolina at Charlotte)
- **Description:** This presentation shares results of an alternating treatments design study conducted on a college campus to compare the effects of a peer coaching intervention alone versus peer coaching + goal setting. Four young adults with autism (ages 22-23) participated in the study during their regular lunch sessions with peers without disabilities serving as conversational partners.
- **Presentation Notes**
- The team anticipates submitting a manuscript based on this work in the next month. This project was created in partnership with an 18-21 transition program housed on the college campus. UNC-Charlotte does not have an autism program on its campus.
 - This is a single-case intervention study. Dr. Bross always strives to be an autism advocate and ally, elevating the perspectives of autistic participants.
 - Dr. Bross illustrated work that showed the commonality of social/communication skills as a common outcome area in K-12 education autism research. Yet intervention research on college campuses to teach social/communication skills is limited.
 - Dr. Bross and colleagues only came across eight journal articles about social/communication skills intervention research conducted on college campuses, per their systematic review from 2020. Four of the included articles were dissertation studies and four were peer-reviewed articles. The authors were alarmed and surprised by the lack of work on this front. Change agents tended to be researchers and confederate peers. Most research designs followed a multiple baseline across participants. Interventions featured many components and incorporated technological tools, such as video self-modeling and self-monitoring.
 - Participants varied, in terms of their postsecondary enrollment.
 - Takeaways from prior research entail that there is a dearth of research in this space, particularly on college campuses, and that training practices from K-12 could be transferable. Yet how and by whom they are implemented matter. Peers can serve as a natural and inclusive support. These factors helped spur their current study.

- The authors realize that high levels of self-determination often influence having higher adult outcomes related to employment and independent living. Consequently, goal setting, choice-making, problem solving skills, and other self-determination skills are absolutely essential. They did not want to rely on researchers or university staff, but rather typically developing peers as the mentors. Lunch was determined as a common time to socialize with other people.
- Students in the 18-21 program had their classes aligned with the high school format, so they tended to arrive around 7am, take classes, have job internship assistance, and would head home shortly after lunchtime.
- Inclusion criteria included young adults with ADD who were 18 or older, had an IDD diagnosis, and included a desire to improve their conversation skills during lunch with same-age peers.
- Peer coaches identified as 18 or older, had no documented disability that would negatively impact their interactions with young adults with IDD, and showed a desire to practice conversation skills with young adults with IDD during lunch.
- Dr. Bross saw that individuals in the 18-21 program often only interacted with one another.
- The team explicitly stated in their recruitment that coaches' conversations with students had to be recorded, which could seem to be intrusive.
- The sample included four participants, including those with an intellectual disability and/or autism. Three identified as Black.
- All students had competitive employment goals, albeit not working at the time. They all sought to work across within their communities.
- Nine peer coaches were all traditionally-college aged female students; six were in related fields like education and psychology. Most were white.
- Peer coach training involved engaging in a one-hour training with the team and to learn coaching strategies. The researchers described and modeled conversational strategies. Peer coaches practiced strategies.
- The team worked to provide few materials to coaches, so as to not overwhelm them with strategies. Primary strategies on a worksheet given to coaches focused on: looking, listening, and waiting; gaining partner's attention; keeping the conversation going; helping their partner respond; and moving on.
- Goal setting interventions did not have much in the way of materials; participants filled out some reflections, including what the peer indicated as the goal of the conversation. They also rated the conversation using a simple 4-point Likert-style scale.
- UNC-Charlotte's student union served as the setting.
- Conversations were audio recorded for 10 mins.
- Peer coaches were matched to sit with students. Typically two 10-min sessions unfolded for each time.
- The research team measured the percentage of positive conversational engagement among the 10-minute audio recordings by dividing the 10 minutes into 10-second intervals. They indicated if the young adult with IDD exhibited a positive or negative conversational act in each 10-second . Positive conversational acts were based on what the literature indicates as initiation statements, question-asking, and verbal

comments. Negative acts were viewed as those involving no responses or no engagement, or off topic responses.

- They anticipated an alternating treatments design to evaluate the effects of peer coaching alone versus peer coaching and goal setting. They featured two adjacent baseline conditions (one with no peer coaches, the other with untrained peer coaches).
- The team chose a student choice condition at the end, in which students picked which intervention was most helpful, to enhance the social validity of the intervention.
- At the end the team members distributed social validity questionnaires and conducted exit interviews with participants.
- Unexpectedly, there were high levels of conversational engagement among untrained peers for participants Lola and Nathan. Consequently, they changed the research design for these participants. These students just alternated in talking with disabled peers versus untrained peers.
- As for participants Jackson and Tony, the common alternating treatments design unfolded as planned.
- Peer coaches expressed having a favorable experience.
- The team found value in the single-case research for flexible design decisions based on participant responses.
- They view peer coaching strategies as viable with group activities during academic instruction and having “natural supports” through student life and activities.
- Opportunities for future research include using other tools, such as self-monitoring and video modeling, further using peers as intervention agents, matching students based on similar interests, and figuring out ways to engage in teaching social/communication skills in non-stigmatizing, strengths-based ways.
- Limitations include the closely related interventions in the alternating treatments design, that peer coaches were primarily studying education and psychology, and operational definitions of positive and negative conversation acts have varying conceptualizations.

Q&A:

- Tony: Do you know if students sought communication assistance or if therapies were recommended by counsellors or other support services?
 - Students were not receiving services from the campus’ disability services.
- Brian: Brian referenced how some autistic college student participants in other work lament the frequency of social skills training.
 - Leslie recognizes that it’s not always about training for the autistic college students, but rather educating typically-developing peers.
 - Leslie’s colleague Emily also acknowledged how gathering data on peers’ conversations would be helpful. “It’s not just one side of the coin.”
- Lori: How did you account for mirroring and masking with neurotypical peers?
- Annette: Would you encourage students to be upfront in social interactions by stating that they are working on practicing their social/communication skills? I feel like addressing this upfront would help alleviate any pressure they might be feeling in terms of remembering all the things they need to do and "getting it right".
 - Defer to what the student wants

Upcoming Meeting

Date: Fri, Nov 10 at 3pm ET

Title: Is Academia a Good Career for Autistics?

Presenter: Sandra Thom-Jones (Consultant, Autistic Professor)

Description: In a first of its kind study, this project collected detailed reflections from autistic people working in academia on their thoughts, experiences, triumphs and challenges. A total of 37 autistic academics from around the globe participated in the study over a 12-month period.

This presentation provides an overview of their reflections on the positives and negatives of academia as a career choice for autistic people. It also shares their recommendations for autistic people considering a career in academia.