

CANVAS Meeting Minutes, 9-22-2023

People in Attendance

- Ariel Cascio (Michigan State University)
- Brett Ranon Nachman (College Autism Network | University of Arkansas)
- Denise Davidson (Loyola University Chicago)
- Ellie Grossman (The Graduate Center, CUNY)
- Felix Jensen (CUNY)
- Florencia Ardon (Cornell University)
- Gary Burdette (University of Saint Mary)
- Greta Heathcote (University of Calgary)
- Jacob Krehbiel (Michigan State University)
- J Edelstein (Berklee College of Music)
- Jennifer Williamson (University of Calgary)
- Jinx Mylo (Bowling Green State University)
- Juliette Gudknecht (Teachers College, Columbia University)
- Kathy Szechy (University of Windsor)
- Katie McDermott
- Kristen Gillespie-Lynch (CUNY)
- Lauren Collier (UMass Amherst)
- Lauren Mathews (University of North Texas)
- Lori Wischnewsky (Texas State University)
- Mark Tapia
- Matthew Zajic (Teachers College, Columbia University)
- Megan Riedl (SUNY Canton)
- Rachel Schuck (San Diego State University)
- Seri Shevchuk-Hill (College of Staten Island, CUNY)
- Summer

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 2023: Oct 18-20 at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, TN
- **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!

1. Ariel Cascio & Jacob Krehbiel - autism and employment in mid-Michigan study is now recruiting again through MSU. Flyers: <https://arielcascio.wordpress.com/call-for-participants-in-michigan/>.
2. Jinx Mylo, PhD candidate at BGSU. I have two studies that could use another 20 or so autistic participants before I close them up and move on to my dissertation experiment if anyone wants to help out. :)
 - [Experiences with Forms and Rating Scales](#) (no incentive, but takes most people 10 minutes or less and is specifically about comparing how autistic people interest scale items in comparison to how non-autistic people and people with other neurodivergences interpret them).
 - [Reactions to characters](#) (many autistic) in 20-second video clips from tv (gift card raffle if you do the whole thing of 30 clips, but just doing a handful of clips for 5 or 10 minutes still helps a lot). Thanks!
3. Matt Zajic - Just sharing a recent pub that is thematically related to today's presentation - <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s10803-023-06080-w> (Writing self-concept, text engagement, and writing practices across contexts: Comparisons between school-age children on the autism spectrum and their non-autistic peers)

Presentation Details

Title: Exploring Writing: A Key Employment Skill For Some Autistic College Students and a Participatory Process

Presenters: Seri Shevchuk-Hill (Graduate Student, College of Staten Island, CUNY), Dr. Kristen Gillespie-Lynch (Associate Professor, College of Staten Island and the Graduate Center, CUNY), Bella Kofner (Teacher, College of Staten Island, CUNY), and Ellie Grossman (PhD Candidate, The Graduate Center, CUNY)

Presentation Notes

- The first presentation, led by Seri, focused on “Comparing Narrative Writing of Autistic and Non-Autistic College Students.”
- Whereas past research has focused on prioritized narratives spoken by autistic children, much work has been deficit-based. It suggests autistic students struggle with their narrative abilities.
- Meta-analyses show how autistic people may develop shorter writing samples, but these can actually be positives due to conciseness.
- Other work illustrates how autistic college students are more perfectionistic with their writing.
- This study moved away from the theory of mind in examining writing of autistic college students and instead focused on narrative writing, determining to what extent they would center on sensory details. The team also examined associations with writing affect.

- The team drew on the same sample as that from Gillespie-Lynch et al. (2020). 42 participants were all in the U.S. and pursuing college degrees. Some were autistic, others non-autistic, and they varied in their racial identity and major.
 - Participants engaged in a writing task to write a short story. They also filled out surveys and standardized assessments. They also filled out surveys and standardized assessments.
 - Automated coding via Grammarly and Corpus of Contemporary American English allowed for determining various errors and word usage.
 - Qualitative coding entailed content analysis. The first draft was developed by two coders and masked participant characteristics. Further drafts entailed revised feedback from other team members.
 - Qualitative coding entailed holistic codes that examined the overall writing sample, including the fictionality of the piece and aspects of story arc.
 - Frequency coding allowed for seeing the commonality of emotional language and sensory details.
 - Simple (level 1) emotional language, social (level 4) emotional language, smell, and taste had low incidence across all samples.
 - Autistic and non-autistic students possessed more similarities, though a few differences occurred, including autistic students tending to not write with as much of a climax.
 - Autistic students had higher writing affect, nonverbal intelligence, and reading comprehension. They also produced fewer syntactic errors.
 - Whereas the authors expected that autistic students would produce fewer grammatical errors than non-autistic students, which proved true, they did not necessarily use more adjectives or specific emotional language.
 - The team found difficulty in defining imagery across coders, but it was comparably easier to make sense of other senses, such as taste and smell.
 - The study limitations entailed its small sample size, predominantly male and one institutional sample, and that participants could not revise their work.
 - The team suggests that people should pursue fictional writing, as it could be useful in building writing skills and serve as an enjoyable activity.
 - They recommend that educators and administrators provide viable typing technologies for students.
 - Future scholarship could look at the writing process more holistically and efficacy of fiction-based typed writing supports.
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- The second presentation, led by Ellie, focused on “Art Making as a Tool for Understanding Neurodivergent Experiences of Creativity and Work.”
 - This served as a participatory project that involved a large team.
 - This project was aimed at addressing issues around autistic people lacking employment in many fields, including the arts. They sought to build creativity skills among autistic young adults.
 - Since much autism research is not participatory, that prompted Ellie and team to employ more of a participatory focus. This project followed a neurodiversity framework and used photovoice, which involves focus groups and photography

to mitigate researcher-participant power dynamics. Ellie wanted to find out how other photovoice methodologists have engaged in participatory efforts, though a recent systematic review found its general absence. Sometimes there is an overemphasis on photography as a means of self-expression.

- Research questions were threefold: 1) “how can photovoice be implemented in a more participatory way than it has been in prior autism work?”; 2) “according to autistic college students, what skills are important for creativity at work and why?”; and 3) “what strategies do autistic young adults recommend to teach other neurodivergent people skills important for creativity at work?”
- This study took place last semester with eight young adults in the Project REACH program at CUNY. Over a nine-week period, the researchers met to discuss potential themes.
- The revised photovoice methodology entailed the following: voting on a research question; independently creating artwork about experiences that address the questions; assembling as a team to discuss the artwork and iterate a method to identify themes; decide how to present the artwork; and share out the findings.
- The team found that an iterative approach helped in supporting the participatory process.
- During the first two meetings, the team identified skills needed to be creative at work. One of them was in interpreting emotions and intentions. Then the group made art that related to questions about learning how to interpret emotions and intentions and thinking how that process could support them in the work world. Originally they were thinking of following the SHOWeD process in photovoice, but they decided to employ a new method that related to their research questions. They identified helpful strategies and obstacles associated with the process.
- The group found similar skills as helpful in the workplace, such as perspective taking and collaboration. They pinpointed strategies that could help other neurodivergent people gain skills in the workforce, including providing opportunities for iteration, communication, collaboration, and context-based learning. Additionally, they figured out strategies that could help employers in supporting neurodivergent employees, including setting expectations and accommodations. They hope to develop a worksheet that can be used by neurodivergent individuals in other settings.
- The group welcomes feedback on how to best share out the work with various stakeholders.

Q&A:

- Matthew Z: The team is sharing about the value of writing, though the limitation of existent scholarship is that it focuses on a lot on school-based writing. Can they share more about the writing component?
 - Answer: Felix shared how it’s valuable to examine non-traditional forms of writing, including Discord and chat spaces. Seri shared originally they were interested in fictional writing, and ultimately they obtained a mix of writing types. Ellie said to consider if and how writing is accessible to a wide variety of people. It’s important to make sure all can understand the content.

- Mark: “What have you considered first with this process?”
 - Ellie: “Good question! I think right now we are considering the balance between providing structure/guidance on how to contribute vs. having that process be guided by collaborators. That’s what I’m chewing on at the moment!”
- Ariel shared it’s been helpful to have collaborative worksheets during the writing process in their work. In sharing out a document with a team, they can contribute feedback that way. Sometimes it’s helpful to state what should be added, removed, and changed. This process helps make it explicit for various individuals.
- Ariel: How has the team addressed the notion of creativity as work?
 - Ellie: Much stigma remains with pursuing the arts as opposed to academia, especially from a job insecurity standpoint.
- Lauren: “Question- In the first study’s recommendations, can you expand on wanting to look at the analysis of the parts of the story more
 - Seri: When coding the data, there was no context on the processes that participants engaged in while writing the prompt. What approaches had they used? What future edits would they make? Consequently these represented limitations.

Upcoming CANVAS Meetings

Date: Fri, Oct 13 at 2pm ET

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.

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.